VLADIMIR PUTIN'S BIFURCATED APPROACH TO RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY: A case study on the Annexation of Crimea and the Syrian Civil War

Jellema, Henk

VLADIMIR PUTIN'S BIFURCATED APPROACH TO RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY

A case study on the Annexation of Crimea and the Syrian Civil War

VLADIMIR PUTIN'S BIFURCATED APPROACH TO RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY

A case study on the Annexation of Crimea and the Syrian Civil War

Master's Thesis

International Relations: Global Conflict in the Modern Era

Faculty of Humanities

Leiden University

15 ECTS

H.W. (Henk) Jellema

Student number: 1968572

h.w.jellema@umail.leidenuniv.nl

Thesis supervisor: Dr. A.J. Gawthorpe

Second reader: Dr. L. Milevski

Word count: 14756

Date: December 30, 2022

Contents

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
EaP	Eastern Partnership
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
IS	Islamic State
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
RFP	Russian foreign policy
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States

1. Introduction

In 2014, Russia returned to the stage of international conflict as it commenced the Russo-Ukrainian war.[1] Russia felt discontent with the unfolding chain of events in its sphere of influence and was not about to stand by idle. In order to alter Ukraine's direction away from Western integration, Vladimir Putin decided to interfere. By annexing the Crimean peninsula, Russia had made its intentions abundantly clear. In the following years, the level of intensity of the war varied but ultimately exploded when President Putin decided to invade Ukraine in 2022. Russia became the political focal point and left many confused by the almost imperialistic act of aggression. Both the annexation of Crimea and the ensuing war should not have come as a total surprise, but they were not anticipated.[2] This inability to understand or anticipate Russian foreign policy (RFP) is not novel and perhaps lies in its complexity and alternating level of consistency. As RFP has been through a lot of changes over the last three decades, Russia's current position in the international arena has not been a consistent factor. Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia has adapted its foreign policy according to its varying levels of state capacity. In RFP, the West is the most 'significant Other' which means the policies revolve around Western states, primarily the United States (US).[3] This West has tried to keep an eye on their eastern neighbour but has stereotypically pigeonholed the nature and driving forces behind RFP. Russian diplomacy has always been shrouded by a mixture of discretion and complexity, especially during Putin's reign. The incumbent president is in charge of forming and executing international relations, therefore this research uses RFP interchangeably with Putin's foreign policy. His third presidential term, from 2012 until 2018, included resolute foreign policies that affected the global state of affairs. Russia plays an important role in international politics that needs to be taken into account. However, Russia is often misunderstood by the West, in part because of the insufficient amount of scholarship to better understand how RFP works.[4] Specifically, the relationship between RFP conducted in the vicinity versus faraway

[1] Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy* (London, New York: Routledge, 2018), 70 – 72.
[2] John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin," *Foreign Affairs (New York, N.Y.)* 93, no. 5 (2014): 77 – 80.
[3] Magda Leichtova, *Misunderstanding Russia: Russian Foreign Policy and the West* (Taylor and Francis, 2016), 68 – 93.
[4] Leichtova, *Misunderstanding Russia*, 1 – 17.

countries has been understudied. To fill this gap in the literature, this thesis will study the following question: how can Russian foreign policy in Putin's third term be explained in the Near Abroad versus the global stage? The 'Near Abroad' in the research question refers to states that were part of the Soviet Union and the global stage encompasses the countries outside of the Russian sphere of influence. To answer the research question, I will start by assessing three theories based on the essential themes that are prominent throughout the existing RFP literature; threats to domestic security, Russian great power status, and upholding international norms. From these theories, I developed three hypotheses that encapsulate the prominent themes which will be tested in two case studies. The two case studies that represent Putin's foreign policy in both regions are the annexation of Crimea and the Russian involvement in the Syrian Civil War. By comparing the results from the hypotheses this thesis aims to find a satisfying answer to the posed research question.

2. Theory

2.1 – RFP is founded on perceived threats to the domestic security

Warmonger or pacifist, part of an alliance or isolationist, security concerns are one of the core principles of foreign policymaking for every nation. Throughout Russian history concerns for their national security have been predominantly at the forefront of politics.

An example that underpins Russian security concerns is their tumultuous bilateral relationship with the US. After the Second World War, both countries were engaged in an ideological struggle that saw them threaten each other's security and compete for hegemony through global power.[5] Foreign policymaking during the Cold War era was fairly simple as there was a clear opponent and a relatively definite goal. Security of the state was vital and both countries fought wars to fend off perceived and direct security threats. The US – Russia relations in the post-Cold War period have been less clear-cut. Even though preserving Russian security remained important, its prioritisation went through phases. This variation is linked to shifting levels of state capacity of both countries in the international arena.

A brief historical account of the Russian approach to the US after the fall of the Soviet Union commences with initial hope for liberal cooperation while threats to security were low. Russian strength was diminished and the US acted as a unipolar global power. However, the optimistic start was corrected in 1993 as the Russian parties that represented liberal reforms saw defeat.[6] The Russian Federation was weak and could not implement strong foreign policies, but that did not make them obedient to their rival. Later on, President Yeltsin's foreign minister Primakov spearheaded a pragmatic approach to the US and other Western nations, aiming to balance world order.[7] A strong US did not allow for a lot of RFP leeway, nevertheless, the quest for a multipolar balance of power continued when Putin became president in 2000. The principle that Russians take their state security very seriously never dwindled, the capacity to act on it just varied.

[5] Andrew C. Kuchins and Igor A. Zevelev, "Russian Foreign Policy: Continuity in Change," *The Washington Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (2012): 152.
[6] Kuchins and Zevelev, "Continuity in Change," 153.
[7] Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy : Change and Continuity in National Identity* (Fourth edition., 2016), 128 ; Kuchins and Zevelev, "Continuity in Change," 153 – 154.

Throughout Putin's presidency, there was an increase in revenue from energy resources, and this economic boost was paired with a renewed sense of confidence in capability. Furthermore, while Russia grew, its perception of American prowess weakened after unfortunate events in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. This combination of economic growth and the waning US allowed Russia to start restoring its international position and emboldening its foreign policy.[8] They slowly got hold of the means to pursue and execute their security interests, a feat they had been less capable off for over a decade. As a result Russia, which had been critical of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) expansion, became increasingly vocal in expressing its opposition to the increase in membership.[9] The enlargement of NATO is not merely a political security threat as the military alliance encroaches closer to Russia. The increase of NATO territory means an increase in missile defence systems and American military presence, closer to Russian borders. While Russia is content with selling its arms and technology to non-Western states like China and India, any increase in Western military activity through NATO is seen as endangering security.[10]

The US is being blamed for its pressing role in NATO and its involvement in the Colour Revolutions in the early 2000s. The Rose Revolution in Georgia and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine brought pro-Western governments to power and Russia condemns US involvement.[11] These security threats, perceived or real, influence how Russia shapes its foreign policy.

An interesting example of this is the political aftermath of the Russo-Georgian War in 2008, where Russia invaded Georgia to help defend and later on recognise Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The consequences were minimal as Russia was barely reprimanded for taking part in the first war on European soil since 2000. One of the reasons European hands were tied, was their dependency on Russian oil and gas which limited them in coming down hard on Russia.[12] There were additional factors at play, but this lack of response set a dangerous precedent that Russia would later use for its annexation of Crimea. Russia had successfully tested if they could use perceived security threats to execute hard foreign policy. It did not

[8] Tsygankov, *Change and Continuity*, 155.
[9] Anatol Lieven, "Russian Opposition to NATO Expansion," *World Today* 51, no. 10 (1995): 196.
[10] Leichtova, *Misunderstanding Russia*, 93.
[11] Andrej Krickovic, "Catalyzing Conflict: The Internal Dimension of the Security Dilemma," *Journal of Global Security Studies* 1, no. 2 (2016): 118 – 119.
[12] Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: the Return of Great Power Politics* (Lanham, MD [etc.]: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009) 176.

matter whether it was a ploy or a sincere act. They continued and applied their test to the annexation of Crimea, starting the Russo-Ukrainian War.

2.2 – The cornerstone of RFP: Russian identity as a great power

Maintaining or regaining the status of great power has been a cornerstone issue for Russian identity. These aspirations are not far-fetched when considering the country's rich history. In modern times, this boils down to the participation in the Second World War and the Cold War, where Russia operated in a bipolar global order alongside the US. The initial post-Cold War years saw Russian attempts at Western integration or at least cooperation. However, this trend changed when Primakov became the Russian foreign minister in 1996. He introduced the Primakov Doctrine, where Russia disengaged from following the Western example and became its own centre of power while aiming for a multipolar world order.[13] It became important to increase Russian influence and interests that were acknowledged by other great powers. The traditional Western great powers needed to make room for new great powers. This Primakov Doctrine was difficult to execute because Russia was still rebuilding, however, when Putin first became president he immediately vouched to make it a key national interest to strengthen Russia's position as a great power.[14] This objective has remained a key focus throughout Putin's presidencies. When studying the role that great power aspirations, now paired with multipolarity, have played in RFP it is important to acknowledge the multitude of perspectives and lack of objective definition.

There are two generally agreed-upon principles in Russian great power identity: refusing Western hegemony by supporting a multipolar world order and Russia's desire to be an equal partner who has a say in global governance.[15] This further implies the duality of great power identity, where it is the Russian self-perception versus possible Western acceptance. The Russian approach to regaining great power consisted of exerting hard power on neighbouring states as its soft power proved less effective. The consequence was

[13] Julia Gurganus and Eugene Rumer, "Russia's global ambitions in perspective," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, accessed 8 November, 2022, https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/02/20/russia-s-global-ambitions-in-perspective-pub-78067
[14] Anna Nadibaidze, "Great Power Identity in Russia's Position on Autonomous Weapons Systems," *Contemporary Security Policy* 43, no. 3 (2022): 413.
[15] Nadibaidze, "Great Power Identity," 413.

that Russia alienated itself from Europe, by being an aggressive and unpredictable foreign power.[16] This alienation can also be noticed in the troubled relationship that Russia has with NATO, a prominent feature in RFP. Initially, the Russian Federation showed a willingness to integrate and join Western institutions. However, due to the expressed intention to expand NATO eastward, this did not last long and the acceleration of this process damaged Russia's cooperation.[17] The initiative to push for NATO membership enlargement against Russia's wishes came from the US. President Clinton's Secretary of State argued that the 'prospect of membership' would motivate Central and Eastern European states to democratise and therefore prove beneficial for European security.[18] NATO expanded by inviting Visegrad countries and Baltic states and it became more clear that NATO was not aiming to involve Russia; not as a member or in having a voice about inviting members. [19]

The disapproval of NATO enlargement continued in 2000 when official RFP documents stated that the expansion represented a security threat as foreign military presence would inch closer and closer.[20] This objection was met with the same disregard as before; the West simply did not acknowledge Russia's input on the matter. In the 2000s, while the US was entangled in the Middle East, Russian state capacity started to grow and Putin's assertiveness started to rise similarly. This became most apparent during his watershed speech at the Munich Conference in 2007, where Putin condemned the West, specifically the US, for their unilateral politics while arguing for increased Russian influence on global governance.[21] Eminent Western political figures were surprised by this turn but continued to underestimate and misjudge Russia's earnestness and strength. The Western disregard for Russia continued as Kosovo's independence was acknowledged. NATO went even further and expressed willingness to allow Georgia and Ukraine to become members. Moscow had opposed almost all rounds of NATO expansion, however, the intention to invite states that bordered Russia greatly upset them. The continued Western misjudgement did

[16] Mark Urnov, "'Greatpowerness' as the Key Element of Russian Self-Consciousness Under Erosion," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47, no. 3-4 (2014): 320.
[17] Fenghua Liu, "Russia's Foreign Policy Over the Past Three Decades: Change and Continuity," *Chinese Journal of Slavic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2022): 88.
[18] Michael MccGwire, "NATO Expansion: 'a Policy Error of Historic Importance'," *Review of International Studies* 24, no. 1 (1998): 24.
[19] MccGwire, "NATO Expansion," 26.
[20] David Cadier and Margot Light, *Russia's Foreign Policy : Ideas, Domestic Politics and External Relations* (New York, NY : Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) 16.
[21] Seva Gunitsky and Andrei P. Tsygankov, "The Wilsonian Bias in the Study of Russian Foreign Policy," *Problems of Post-Communism* 65, no. 6 (2018): 389.

not anticipate the consequent Russo-Georgian War of 2008 and the recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent regions.[22] The display of hard power as a result of disregarded opposition to NATO expansionism demonstrates how Russian great power aspiration can dictate its foreign policy.

2.3 – RFP guided by its high regard for international norms

The aforementioned theories have seen the use of terms like the global stage and what international position Russia holds here. Understanding how Russia functions in the international arena is vital for studying RFP. One of the longest-standing global institutions that represent the political field is the United Nations (UN). Russia has a high regard for the UN, in particular the Security Council (UNSC), where it is a permanent member. There is debate on whether Russia truly believes in the UN and its values or whether it merely uses and abuses its powers to curtail Western initiatives and push its own agenda.[23] Scholars who frown upon Russian involvement in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) also oppose its use of veto power. These critics argue that Russia is purposively stymying UNSC resolutions by issuing vetoes. Some even go as far as stating that this privileged right should be revoked as Russia only serves its own interests and makes its own rules in the UN.[24]

Moscow disagrees and claims that they seek to "strengthen international peace and ensure global security and stability" and that the UN is the key organisation in achieving this.[25] Furthermore, the Kremlin supports the UN, especially the UNSC because it provides Russia with the ability to partake in global politics through diplomacy based on international law. The UNSC is deemed effective by Russia because it provides a platform to uphold international norms on peacekeeping and managing conflicts, like the principle of sovereignty.[26] The UNSC represents the international arena and needs to be respected.

[22] Gunitsky and Tsygankov, "Wilsonian Bias," 389.
[23] Tsygankov, *Routledge Handbook,* 355 – 356.
[24] Inna Shevchenko, "Giving Russia the top job at the UN is an Orwellian nightmare and a betrayal of global peace efforts," *International Business Times*, September 4, 2015, https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/giving-russia-top-job-un-orwellian-nightmare-betrayal-global-peace-efforts-1518495
[25] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, published 1 December, 2016, https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1538901/?lang=en
[26] Tsygankov, *Routledge Handbook,* 360.

The 1990s had seen multiple civil atrocities with the most relevant ones happening in Bosnia and Kosovo. These poignant events functioned as an international wake-up call and brought forward the need to modernise the concept of sovereignty and protection of civilians. The commission that renewed the lacking humanitarian intervention was the International Commission of Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) and in 2001 they laid the foundation for the Responsibility to Protect (R2P).[27] When it was formalised, the R2P was met with some resistance; some states were sceptical while others opposed the content. The opposition mainly consisted of states with relatively weak state capacity that did not want to increase foreign influence on their domestic policies.[28] Whereas the sceptical countries were afraid that the R2P arguments could be abused under the false banner of unilateral humanitarian intervention, especially in light of the US and their pretext to invade Iraq.[29] These concerns pertain particularly to the third and most contentious pillar of the R2P: that the international community is responsible to protect populations through peaceful or, if necessary, coercive means.[30]

This pillar redefined the meaning of sovereignty and that is what clashed with Russia, one of the sceptical states. They interpret the R2P as still too ambiguous and by redefining sovereignty it could provide states with an excuse to unilaterally apply NATO instead of the UNSC. Russia has often expressed concerns and also raised important questions on who is the judge, jury and executioner when it comes to the R2P.[31] The limitations and boundaries of the R2P are unclear to Russia and while they are not against the international norm holistically, they can envision the "responsibility to protect" being abused into the "right to punish."[32] Furthermore, Russia prefers the Westphalian definition of sovereignty and argues for equal sovereignty, instead of Western states prioritizing their own. One of the consequences of the Western interpretation of the R2P that Russia hates the most is the regime change. The use of R2P to defend a foreign intervention imposed by foreign states that bypasses legitimate elections clearly violates the sovereignty of a state. According to

[27] Charles E. Ziegler, "Contesting the Responsibility to Protect," *International Studies Perspectives* 17, no. 1 (2016): 77.
[28] Alex J. Bellamy, "Realizing the Responsibility to Protect," *International Studies Perspectives* 10, no. 2 (2009): 113.
[29] Bellamy, "Realizing," 113.
[30] Ziegler, "Contesting," 79.
[31] Ibid., 81.
[32] Tsygankov, *Routledge Handbook,* 361.

Russia, this imposed change allows for destabilisation which occurred in the Iraq War in 2003 and the intervention in Libya in 2011.[33]

International norms such as sovereignty, the R2P and the importance of international law have been perceived with variation by Russia and the West, which has caused many debates in the UN and the UNSC. Ultimately, this illustrates that the Russian perspective on these norms in these institutions shapes RFP.

3. Methods

The chapters on how RFP in Putin's third term can be explained in the Near Abroad versus the global stage will be based on three hypotheses. These hypotheses follow the structure of the theories, the three pillars which form the basis of RFP. This explains the decision to go with three distinct hypotheses, derived from three distinct theories. The chapters themselves will be about the annexation of Crimea and the Russian involvement in the Syrian civil war. Both of these chapters are structured like a case study, with Crimea representing the Near Abroad and Syria the global stage. The case studies and the hypotheses have been chosen by using the inductive approach and the source material that helped greatly in this observing process is the 2018 handbook on RFP.[34] This assiduous handbook provided me with an immense comprehensive background on the process of making RFP.

The quality and relevance of the case studies to the research question will be underpinned by applying the three hypotheses to both of them. This research is of qualitative nature because applying three hypotheses to two case studies allows me to research the cases in-depth and gain a deeper understanding.[35] In particular, comparing the two cases helps to gain a deeper understanding of Putin's foreign policy by examining the validity and possible relationships of the hypotheses. More specifically, this research method falls under Tilly's individualizing comparison that utilises 'a small number of cases to

[33] Phil Orchard and Heather Rae, "Russia and the R2P: Norm entrepreneur, anti-preneur, or violator?," in *Constructing the Responsibility to Protect* (Routledge, 2020), 177.
[34] John Dudovskiy, "Inductive Approach (Inductive Reasoning)," Business Research Methodology, accessed 28 November, 2022, **https://research-methodology.net/research-methodology/research-approach/inductive-approach-2/** ; Tsygankov, *Routledge Handbook*.
[35] Mildred L. Patten, *Understanding Research Methods: An Overview of the Essentials,* 5th ed. (Routledge, 2005), 19.

grasp the peculiarities of each case.'[36] The small sample size allows me to take a deep dive into analysing what happened and how that might differ from the other case. The debate on whether Tilly's individualizing comparison actually qualifies as a true comparative analysis is not hindering relevance to this thesis.[37]

By analysing how RFP is applied to the post-Soviet states in the Near Abroad versus how it operates beyond this geographical vicinity, on the global stage, this thesis aims to demonstrate the differences between them. To answer the research question, the results will be synthesised after the case studies. The hypotheses that will assist in this process consist of the following.

3.1 Assessing the validity of the hypotheses

The first hypothesis states that RFP is based on perceived threats to its domestic security. It is derived from the first theory that succinctly discusses the role of perceived security concerns in the history of US-Russian relations. Security is a core principle in studying foreign policy and the case studies will engage with the role that it has played in both regions. The word 'perceived' is important in the hypothesis and signifies that if Russia has publicly stated that it perceives policies as threatening to its security, the hypothesis will be deemed to be true. It matters less whether the perpetrator, often Western countries or institutions, also interprets the action as threatening. The chapters will assess the role of Russian naval bases in Sevastopol and Tartus respectively and if a threat to these naval bases would translate into a threat to domestic security. The link between the possible threats to domestic security and the RFP needs to be significant to prove that the hypothesis is true. If it is insignificant, the hypothesis will prove to be false. Evidence that can prove or disprove these potential claims can be found in primary sources, for instance, official Russian statements from Putin himself or another important member who represents Russia in the international sphere. The case of Crimea will examine the effect of threats to the naval base in Sevastopol and threats posed by the expansion of NATO and the EU. Furthermore, the case of Syria will assess the role played by Russian jihadis and if threats to the naval base in Tartus prove a significant link.

[36] Christopher G. Pickvance, "Four Varieties of Comparative Analysis," *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 16, no. 1 (2001): 16.
[37] Pickvance, "Four Varieties," 16.; Michael Adiyia and William Ashton, *Comparative Research* (Brandon University, Rural Development Initiative, 2017), 2.

The second theory that this hypothesis is based on discusses the Russian aspiration to strive for a multipolar world order. The Russian regime wants there to be more global powers that determine global governance to counter the American hegemony in international politics. Going against the current state of unipolarity would balance the global system. However, what exactly constitutes a multipolar world order, or multipolarity, is quite complicated. The scope of the hypothesis determines that striving for a multipolar world order refers to Moscow's aspiration to increase its clout to 'have a say' in global politics and to diminish Western influence. These two aspects of multipolarity can be linked to each other, but do not need to be, to validate the hypothesis. The Kremlin supports regional organisations and states that fall outside of the West to push for a multipolar world order, however, that falls outside of this hypothesis' scope. Evidence that can prove a significant link to either diminishing Western influence or expanding the Russian right to have a say, will validate the hypothesis. The UNSC is a great example that can argue for multipolarity, specifically if Russian voting behaviour is aimed to diminish Western influence while expanding Russia's impact. In the case of Crimea, the UNSC is less relevant. If the annexation shows a significant link to be triggered as a response to resist Western unipolar decision-making, the hypothesis will be true. The validity of the hypothesis for Syria will be based on the motivation for Russian involvement in the Syrian civil war, which has been clearly expressed in the UNSC. The Russian voting behaviour in the UNSC could argue in favor of the hypothesis if it vetoes resolutions that align with the Western hegemony.

The third and final hypothesis will examine the role that the Westphalian principle of sovereignty plays in process of foreign policymaking. In RFP there is great respect for international norms like sovereignty. The most relevant political arena to either support or violate sovereignty is the UNSC. The Westphalian model of sovereignty will function as the standard interpretation in international law and the UNSC. This means that breaches of territorial integrity, illegal interference in the affairs of a sovereign state and policies to change a regime constitute violations and disprove the thesis. The case of Crimea will assess the legal defence provided by Putin to test the hypothesis. The evidence is found in primary sources like the official Russian Foreign Policy Concepts and Putin's speeches. The case of Syria will assess the voting behaviour in the UNSC and the issued vetoes here. Evidence that suggests that the RFP acted in compliance with Westphalian sovereignty proves the hypothesis true.

4. Results

4.1 The annexation of Crimea 4183

The following section will apply the three hypotheses, derived from the theories on the pillars of RFP, to the first case study: the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Since Ukraine seceded from the Soviet Union it has been torn between being pro-Russian or pro-Western. This tension rose while Yanukovych was president, specifically when he failed to sign an Association Agreement (AA) with the EU, which would align Ukraine closer to the 'West'.[38] This sparked outrage throughout Ukraine and the Euromaidan protests followed, which eventually resulted in Yanukovych being ousted and an interim government being elected. Russia looked on with disdain as they lost influence over the strategically, economically, and societally important neighbour Ukraine.[39] Furthermore, Moscow had taken notice of Western expansion through NATO, the EU, and democracy promotion and was unwilling to give up their buffer state. To counter this 'triple expansion' and secure other national interests pro-Russian forces arrived in Crimea and were later supported by the Russian Armed Forces.[40] Putin claimed that Russia was not violating international law and that they were merely there to help maintain order until the rowdy political crisis settled down. However, the Russian intention became clear when Crimea was going to vote on seceding from Ukraine. The majority of states have condemned the referendum as illegitimate, nevertheless, Russia has ratified Crimea's incorporation.[41] This chapter will analyse the political context and Russian motives to annex Crimea by testing the three hypotheses.

4.1.1. Hypothesis 1: RFP is based on perceived threats to its domestic security

An important element to test the first hypothesis is to understand how the threats to security are perceived. It is about how the Russian regime in power interprets international

[38] Russell Buchan and Nicholas Tsagourias, "The Crisis in Crimea and the Principle of Non-Intervention," *International Community Law Review* 19, no. 2-3 (2017): 166.
[39] Amedeo Gasparini, "Do Not Forget the Crimean Crisis: Why Russia "Annexed" the Peninsula? A (pro-) Western-European Perception," *Global Affairs (Abingdon, Oxfordshire, UK)* 7, no. 3 (2021): 405.
[40] Hall Gardner, "NATO, the EU, Ukraine, Russia and Crimea: The Reset that was Never Reset," *NATO Watch Briefing Paper* 49, no.3 (April 3, 2014): 2; Buchan and Tsagourias, "The Crisis," 166 – 167.
[41] Flemming Splidsboel Hansen, "Framing Yourself into a Corner: Russia, Crimea, and the Minimal Action Space," *European Security (London, England)* 24, no. 1 (2015): 142.

policies, it is not decided by the initiator. The range of what can be perceived as security threats varies widely from democracy promotion to worries about missile defence systems.

The primary example of a perceived security threat by Russia is the eastward expansion of NATO. Russia has been a very vocal critic since NATO members expressed their intention to expand. The Americans were already aware of Russian disquiet about NATO since the beginning of 1993 when the US Secretary of State was briefed on their "neuralgic" attitude toward NATO.[42] Despite Russian continued disapproval, NATO expansion came in waves. Before NATO had officially invited Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic in 1997, Russia had communicated clearly that it perceived this as a threat to Russian security, but to no avail.[43] This trend of Russia publicly expressing its perception of being threatened by NATO and the conscious Western effort to ignore the disagreement continued during Putin's presidency. In his watershed speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, Putin made it overtly clear that Russia opposed the expansion of NATO.[44]

> *"NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernisation of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust."*[45]

The quote refers to the plan of inviting Georgia and Ukraine to become members of NATO, which Putin later dubbed a 'direct threat'.[46] This clear, antipathetic rhetoric contextualises the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008, as a foreign policy responding to NATO expansionism. Furthermore, it functioned as a prelude to the annexation of Crimea. The Russo-Georgian War should have functioned as a crystal clear reminder of the severity of Russian objections to NATO. However, it did not achieve the intended effect, and neither did comparable remarks by President Medvedev and Putin respectively. This neglect was one of

[42] Svetlana Savranskaya and Tom Blanton, "NATO Expansion: What Yeltsin Heard," National Security Archive, edited March 16, 2018, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2018-03-16/nato-expansion-what-yeltsin-heard#_edn6
[43] Savranskaya and Blanton, "What Yeltsin Heard."
[44] Neil MacFarlane, "Kto Vinovat? Why Is There a Crisis in Russia's Relations with the West?" *Contemporary Politics* 22, no. 3 (2016): 350.
[45] Vladimir Putin, "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy," transcript of speech delivered at Munich, February 10, 2007, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/copy/24034
[46] Scott Bevan, "Ukraine, Georgia NATO membership a 'direct threat to Russia,'" ABC News, published April 4, 2008, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2008-04-05/ukraine-georgia-nato-membership-a-direct-threat-to/2393800

the causes of the annexation of Crimea. A day after the referendum in Crimea, Putin talked to journalists and explained how the annexation was partly a response to the expansion of NATO.[47]

Another aspect of the perceived security threat that forms RFP, deals with the presence of the Russian Black Sea fleet in the Ukrainian harbour of Sevastopol. When Ukraine destabilised after the ousting of President Yanukovych during the Euromaidan protests, Putin feared for the safety of the Russian personnel on the naval base.[48] A threat to these contingent forces was seen as a direct threat to Russian security. Not only was there the threat against military personnel but also against the actual presence of the Russian Black Sea fleet. There was an agreement created in 1997 called the Partition Treaty, where Ukraine allowed for Russian military presence in the Sevastopol naval base.[49] The extension of the treaty signed by Yanukovych in 2010 was controversial and unpopular.[50] The Ukrainian discontent with the treaty combined with the ousting of the signer worried Russians. This concern predates the annexation of Crimea as the Russian commander stated:

> *"they were definitely worried that the Ukrainians would cancel the [Russian] lease on [the naval base in] Sevastopol and kick out the Black Sea Fleet."*[51]

Putin shared these doubts and went to the Russian Federation Council to authorise the use of the Russian military in Sevastopol to 'normalise' the situation.[52] This clearly constitutes shaping RFP based on the perceived threat to security. Putin wanted national support and permission to employ Russian forces even though there were already unmarked pro-Russian forces in Crimea. These men were armed with Russian weapons and had Russian accents but did not wear any identifying insignias, therefore they were not legally tied to Russia.[53] Putin used the threat against the Russian citizens and army personnel in Crimea as grounds

---

[47] "Putin says annexation of Crimea partly a response to NATO enlargement," Reuters, published April 17, 2014, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-putin-nato-idUSBREA3G22A20140417
[48] Kari Roberts, "Understanding Putin," *International Journal (Toronto)* 72, no. 1 (2017): 52.
[49] Peter M. Olson, "The Lawfulness of Russian Use of Force in Crimea," *Military Law and the Law of War Review,* 53 (2014): 28.
[50] Daniel Treisman, "Why Putin Took Crimea: The Gambler in the Kremlin." *Foreign Affairs (New York, N.Y.)* 95, no. 3 (2016): 53.
[51] Treisman, "Why Putin," 50.
[52] "Vladimir Putin submitted appeal to the Federation Council," President of Russia, published March 1, 2014, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20353
[53] Mike Eckel, "A Cry from Crimea," *World Policy Journal* 31, no. 4 (2014): 85 – 88.

for a self-defence claim. This narrative was aimed to provide legal justification according to international law. Creating the self-defence claim would make it fall under article 51 of the UN Charter through 'collective self-defence', however, this was disproven by the Security Council.[54] The perceived threat to security was not seen as justified by the international community. Nevertheless, Putin stated in his speech after the referendum in Crimea:

> *"What would this have meant for Crimea and Sevastopol in the future? It would have meant that NATO's navy would be right there in this city of Russia's military glory, and this would create not an illusory but a perfectly real threat to the whole of southern Russia."*[55]

In the speech, Putin makes it clear that the threat to Sevastopol was part of the reason for the annexation of Crimea.

Russia is not part of the European Union (EU) but they do have an interesting relationship with each other. The EU is focused on upholding relations with countries outside its member states. An example of this is the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), where they financially support and cooperate with eastern and southern neighbours from the EU. Russia was not granted a special relationship so they joined the ENP later on through the Black Sea Synergy in 2008.[56] Even though Russia became part of a multilateral ENP initiative, they felt threatened by a similar initiative for countries like Ukraine and Georgia called the Eastern Partnership (EaP). Interpretation around the EaP varies, as it is unclear if the EaP is a substitute for full EU membership or a luring initial step towards it.[57] Either way, Russia perceived it as a threat to alienate them and reduce the Russian sphere of influence.

> "We are accused of having spheres of influence. But what is the Eastern Partnership, if not an attempt to extend the EU's sphere of influence, including to Belarus."[58]

---

[54] "Charter of the United Nations," Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs, updated August 23, 2016, https://legal.un.org/repertory/art51.shtml ; Roy Allison, "Russian 'deniable' Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules," *International Affairs (London)* 90, no. 6 (2014): 1263.
[55] Vladimir Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation," transcript of speech delivered at the Kremlin, Moscow, March 18, 2014. http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603
[56] Niklas Granholm, Johannes Malminen and Gudrun Persson, eds, *A rude awakening: Ramifications of Russian aggression towards Ukraine* (Försvarsanalys, Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut (FOI), 2014), 35.
[57] Granholm, Malminen and Persson, *A rude awakening,* 39.
[58] "Sergei Lavrov's accusations against the Eastern Partnership," Parliamentary question, European Parliament, published January 21, 2011, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-7-2011-000572_EN.html?redirect

The statement came from Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and made it clear that Russia saw EU expansion as a softer version of NATO. Neither was welcome. Nevertheless, the EaP continued swimmingly and Ukraine started to communicate a possible Association Agreement (AA) with the EU. Russia disliked this idea for a multitude of economic reasons, but also the geopolitical dimension that was paired with joining the EU and their security policies.[59] The general distrust towards the EU meddling with post-Soviet states was exacerbated when Ukraine was about to sign the AA with the EU. Russia started a trade war and offered an alternative to discourage Ukraine from signing the AA, making their intentions apparent. However, when Yanukovych complied by refusing to sign the AA at an EaP summit it triggered protests that aggravated into the Euromaidan protests.[60] The consequence of these protests was the ousting of Yanukovych and the destabilising of Ukraine, which are both prominent reasons why Putin decided to annex Crimea.[61] It is true that Russia was threatened by losing Ukraine to the EU and formed its foreign policy accordingly. However, there is no clear link that transfers the economic threat into a perceived security threat. Besides, if annexing Crimea was based on preventing the AA it worked counterproductive as it was ratified a couple of months after.

The hypothesis that RFP is based on perceived threats to its domestic security is true in the case of the annexation of Crimea. The lack of an explicit connection between the EU 'poaching' Ukraine and its effect on annexing Crimea does not outweigh the evidence found for NATO expansion and security threats to Sevastopol.

4.1.2. Hypothesis 2: RFP is based on the aspiration to strive for a multipolar world order

The Russian aspiration to strive for a multipolar world order, championed by Russian foreign minister Primakov, is in part to constrain US dominance and unipolarity in the international arena while trying to boost Russian influence in a plural and more equal order.[62] In 2007, Putin gave a watershed speech at the Security Conference in Munich, foreshadowing the

[59] Elias Götz, "It's Geopolitics, Stupid: Explaining Russia's Ukraine Policy," *Global Affairs (Abingdon, Oxfordshire, UK)* 1, no. 1 (2015): 4.
[60] Götz, "It's Geopolitics," 5.
[61] David Cadier and Margot Light, *Russia's Foreign Policy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015) 42 – 43.
[62] McFarlane, "Kto Vinovat, 350.

future of Russian foreign policies. He expressed Russian discontent with the state of global affairs caused by the West, specifically the US:

> "One state and, of course, first and foremost the United States, has overstepped its national borders in every way. This is visible in the economic, political, cultural and educational policies it imposes on other nations."[63]

Here Putin directly mentioned the US as the primary culprit who has overstepped its national boundaries through a multifaceted way of being too controlling and overbearing. It is generally regarded as a watershed speech because it is the first time Putin criticised the US so bluntly.[64] Russia was not alone in chastising the US for its unilateral, far-reaching foreign policies. Other actors in the international community had also condemned the US for their poorly executed and 'illegitimate' Iraq War in 2003.[65]

The disapproval of a policy that either oversteps its boundaries or is part of its unilateral approach is not only reserved for the US. In the past, NATO has also played a similar role where they denied Russian interests in the case of Kosovo.[66] The case refers to the dire situation in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia, wrecked by ethnic conflicts. The UNSC condemned the situation and adopted three resolutions that decried the threats to peace and security, however, they did not call for the authorisation of the use of force.[67] Contrary to these resolutions, NATO started a relentless bombing campaign in Yugoslavia. Russia did not take lightly to this unauthorised violation that had bypassed the UNSC. Furthermore, Russia rightfully argued that NATO's airstrikes were a violation of the UN Charter and order NATO to cease its use of force, however, this resolution was beaten 12 to 3.[68] Therefore, Russian interests were wilfully disregarded.

To assess the validity of this hypothesis there are two speeches that best encapsulate the Russian perspective on this case. The speech by Putin on the 18th of March 2014 when he announced the annexation of Crimea and on the 4th of December when he

[63] Putin, "Speech Munich Conference."
[64] Louis Charbonneau, "Putin says U.S. wants to dominate world," Reuters, published February 10, 2007, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-usa-idUSL1053774820070210
[65] Putin, "Speech Munich Conference."
[66] Tsygankov, *Routledge Handbook,* 240.
[67] Anthea Roberts, "Legality Vs Legitimacy: Can Uses of Force Be Illegal but Justified?" In *Human Rights, Intervention, and the Use of Force*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008): 181.
[68] Roberts, "Legality Vs Legitimacy," 182.

looked back on its consequences. Both speeches entail elements that emphasise how the Russian perspective has been disregarded that argue for Western unipolarity

> "they have lied to us many times, made decisions behind our backs, placed us before an accomplished fact. They kept telling us the same thing: "Well, this does not concern you." That's easy to say."[69]

This perceived exclusion and disrespect toward the great power status of Russia has made them feel threatened. Putin further implies that Russia was willing to cooperate and allow for a diplomatic resolution based on equal relations, but failed to notice any reciprocity.[70] In December he continues:

> "… – no one wanted to hear these arguments, let alone take them into account.
> Our response was to say: fine, if you do not want to have a dialogue with us, we will have to protect our legitimate interests unilaterally and will not pay for what we view as erroneous policy."[71]

The lack of clear communication and willingness to incorporate Russian interests has 'forced' them to act. The speech reiterates that the West failed to provide Russia the opportunity to have a say, which prompted the Russian response. It could be argued that Russia annexed Crimea to prohibit Ukraine from joining NATO or the EU. The ousting of President Yanukovych and the Euromaidan protests implied that Ukraine would go west. However, the fact that the Ukrainian population voluntarily wants to join does not argue for the multipolar hypothesis. On the contrary, it argues against it. Western overtures to Ukraine were most likely interpreted as disrespectful, however, the timeline does not match the response. The NATO invitation was announced in 2008, according to the disrespect Crimea should have been annexed by then. Even though Russia has disliked the West in past events where the US or NATO overstepped, the annexation of Crimea was because of the Ukrainian willingness to join, not a counter to a violation of multipolarity. Instead, Putin

[69] Vladimir Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation," transcript of speech delivered at the Kremlin, March 18, 2014, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603
[70] Putin, "Address by President."
[71] Vladimir Putin, "Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly," transcript of speech delivered at the Kremlin, December 4, 2014, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47173

aimed to destabilise Ukraine and secure Russian interests. Therefore the second hypothesis that RFP is based on the aspiration to strive for a multipolar world order is false.

4.1.3. Hypothesis 3: RFP is based on upholding the Westphalian principle of sovereignty

The international arena where RFP takes place is based on many agreed resolutions, principles, and signed treaties. One of the most important principles at the basis of all this is the principle of sovereignty. This notion of state sovereignty has been a core feature of RFP since the creation of the Russian Federation.[72] The definition of sovereignty and its implementation by international institutes and states have developed over time. Russia has taken a keen interest in the role of sovereignty and imagines itself as its defender on the global stage. Moscow has condemned the cases of Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, and later even Libya.[73] When Russia annexed Crimea it was held responsible for allegedly violating the very principle that it tries to uphold. Russia has provided multiple explanations for the annexation of Crimea, both political and legal. The scope of this thesis is limited, therefore I look at legality issues concerning the threat or use of Russian force. This means that other important aspects of the annexation of Crimea, like the referendum and its acknowledgement, are avoided.

To understand the context in which the annexation of Crimea occurred it is important to know the legal treaties and other official documents signed between Russia and Ukraine. The primary document is the Budapest Memorandum in 1994, which declares Russian commitment to Ukrainian sovereignty and independence it also stated that "none of their weapons will ever be used against Ukraine."[74] Furthermore, there is the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership whose second article confirmed "the inviolability of their common borders" and the Partition Treaty, also in 1997, which allows for the presence of Russian forces on the Sevastopol naval base that would respect Ukrainian sovereignty.[75]

These three pieces of legislation represent the relevant legal relation between Russia and Ukraine. A feature that complicates this relationship is the tumultuous way in which

[72] Ruth Deyermond, "The Uses of Sovereignty in Twenty-First Century Russian Foreign Policy," *Europe-Asia Studies* 68, no. 6 (2016): 962.
[73] Deyermond, "Uses of Sovereignty," 963 – 965.
[74] Olson, "Lawfulness," 25 – 26.
[75] Ibid., 26.

Ukraine transitioned into the new regime. Russia deemed Yanukovych the legitimate president of Ukraine due to the illegality of his removal and the appointment of the new government.[76] The technicalities of the process to replace Yanukovych should receive its own thesis, however, what matters is that Putin considered it unconstitutional and a revolution.[77] As a consequence, Russia saw it as the emergence of a new state "with which we have signed no binding agreements."[78]Therefore, according to themselves, Russia was absolved from all commitments and justified in the actions that would follow. There are two other aspects that were used as arguments to justify the use of force; Russian nationals in Ukraine were threatened and the 'legitimate' president Yanukovych had invited Russian armed forces.

The process of usurping the absent president Yanukovych and the policies of the new government were the results of the Euromaidan protests. Putin did not like this at all, whether it was argued that it was a revolution or a coup d'état, the Russians felt that the Russian nationalists and Russian-speaking people living in Ukraine were under threat. One of the arguments was that the Ukrainian parliament had passed draft legislation prohibiting the official use of the Russian language.[79] Another argument was that there was such turmoil in Ukraine that they feared for the safety of Russian nationals as they were threatened by extremists. Furthermore, the Russian duty to protect its citizens abroad is included in its constitution, stating that it "shall guarantee its citizens defense and patronage beyond its boundaries."[80] These arguments were aimed at constructing a narrative that would fit under the self-defence clause of article 51 of the UN Charter, which bases self-defence on the condition of an 'armed attack.'[81] Nevertheless, none of these reasons could aim to justify or build a case for the use of Russian force in Ukraine. The language policy was vetoed, the Russian constitution is overshadowed in the context of international law and Russia failed to provide any convincing factual evidence for their perceived threats.[82]

---

[76] Vladimir Putin, "Vladimir Putin answered journalists' questions on the situation in Ukraine," transcript of speech delivered at Novo-Ogaryovo, March 4, 2014, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20366
[77] Allison, "'deniable' intervention," 1265.
[78] Putin, "answered journalists' questions."
[79] Olson, "Lawfulness," 34.
[80] "Russian Constitution SECTION ONE Chapter 2," Bucknell University, accessed December 29, 2022, https://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/ch2.html
[81] Olson, "Lawfulness," 33.
[82] Olson, "Lawfulness," 33 – 35; Allison, "'deniable' intervention," 1261 – 1263.

There were no credible reasons nor threats for the Russian armed forces to cross the border and thereby infringe on Ukrainian sovereignty. Russia was aware that the self-defence claims in its legal case adhering to international law were lacking, therefore they supported it by emphasizing that the invite originated from the 'legitimate' President Yanukovych. Russia was asked, "to use the armed forces … to establish legitimacy, peace, law and order and stability in defence of the people of Ukraine."[83] This invitation would allow them to bypass the illegality of sending armed forces as the consent did not violate Ukraine's sovereignty. However, it does not matter if the ousting of Yanukovych was constitutional, or even if it is accurate to claim that he is the legitimate ruler. It is the Ukrainian parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, who has the constitutional right to 'approve the presence of foreign troops', not former president Yanukovych.[84]

The contention surrounding Russian assertion of the legality of its actions did not deter Russia to deploy its armed forces in Ukraine. However, it is not an invasion or intervention according to Putin. There was no use of force as there was not a single gunshot fired, nor did Russia overstep the Partition Treaty with its military presence in Sevastopol, therefore Russia supposedly did not violate Ukrainian sovereignty. The problem here is that the Ukrainian forces refrained from firing so as to not give the Russian armed forces any form of legitimacy. Furthermore, the UN Charter prohibits both the actual use of force as well as its threat, and a lack of casualties does not translate into a lack of coercion.[85] Putin also states that the Partition Treaty was adhered to because the limit of troops on Sevastopol was not exceeded. However, the presence and actions of Russian armed forces in Ukraine failed to comply with the treaty's restrictions, which violates the treaty and thereby the Ukrainian sovereignty.[86]

The violation of the Budapest Memorandum, the Partition Treaty, and the UN Charter article 2 paragraphs 3,4, and 7, in combination with the UNSC's rejection of the referendum, concludes that the Russian annexation of Crimea infringed on Ukrainian

[83] United Nations, "Security Council, 69th year : 7125th meeting, Monday, 3 March 2014, New York," S/PV.7125, 3 – 4, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/766547
[84] United Nations, "Security Council 7125th meeting," 5.
[85] Olson, "Lawfulness," 27.
[86] Ibid., 27 – 30.

sovereignty.[87] Therefore the hypothesis that RFP is based on upholding the Westphalian principle of sovereignty is false.

The annexation of Crimea was one of the most controversial Russian foreign policies of the 21st century. Russia was re-emerging as a great power and had seemingly made its point clear in 2008 by displaying hard power in the Russo-Georgian War. However, the West had failed to gain a better understanding of how to deal with Russia and continued to provoke, unintentional or not. The annexation of Crimea came as an unexpected consequence. This chapter has tested three hypotheses to gain deeper knowledge of Russian motivation to shape this foreign policy. The results indicate that due to the threats to the naval base in Sevastopol and the expansion of NATO and the EU, the annexation of Crimea was based on perceived threats to Russian security. However, the aim for a multipolar world order failed to provide a direct link to the case of Crimea. Furthermore, the claim that Russia wants to uphold Westphalian sovereignty and strictly adheres to this principle in the international arena is also disproven through blatant violations of Ukrainian sovereignty.

4.2. The Syrian Civil War 3439

The three hypotheses that have been tested in the first chapter on the case of the annexation of Crimea, will now be applied to examine the second case study: the Syrian Civil War. The roots of the civil war in Syria are highly complex and multifaceted. Syria is a religiously divided sectarian state with a growing general sense of frustration due to deteriorating living conditions and deepening social inequalities.[88] The Arab Awakening, a regional wave of anti-government protests, transferred to Syria after it had taken hold of Libya. The international context of the Syrian civil war is also very intricate, it is the battleground for the geopolitical contest of neighbouring states, Islamic sectarian rivalries, and a symbolical proxy war between the West and Russia.[89] The Syrian civil war was quickly divided into Bashar Al-Assad's regime, backed by Russia, versus the anti-government forces

[87] Hansen, "Framing," 142.
[88] Benedetta Berti and Jonathan Paris, "Beyond sectarianism: Geopolitics, fragmentation, and the Syrian civil war," *Strategic Assessment* 16, no. 4 (2014): 22.
[89] Ted Galen Carpenter, "Tangled Web: The Syrian Civil War and Its Implications," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (2013): 3 – 4.

supported by the West, primarily the US. This chapter engages with the reasons why Russia got involved in the Syrian civil war and how it conducted its role of supporting Assad.

4.2.1. Hypothesis 1: RFP is based on perceived threats to its domestic security

In addition to the naval base in Sevastopol, Russia has another strategically important naval base located in Tartus, Syria. It was originally leased in 1971 and set up as a supply and maintenance facility for smaller ships of the Russian Black Sea fleet.[90] Warm-water ports are very scarce for Russia and the Tartus naval base is the only one that provides Russia with access to the Mediterranean Sea, which allows for the opportunity to exert influence in the region. However, the military capabilities and strategic value of the base must not be overstated. For the Russian navy to reach Tartus they must first pass through the Bosporus Strait, where Turkey holds the right to close it.[91] The Vice Admiral to the Russian Navy stated in 2012 that "the base is critical for us", however, there is debate on whether that is true.[92] The naval base is modest at best and would remain limited in its capabilities if it did not receive some serious upgrades. Whether the Tartus naval base represents a strategic or symbolic function matters less when considering that a change in regime would presumably lead to the termination of the Russian naval base.[93] It can be argued that Russia got involved to secure its base, but, as Trenin contends, Tartus is only of secondary importance.[94] Even if it was of primary significance, a threat to the naval base in Tartus does not represent a threat to Russia's domestic security, as Sevastopol did.

Another reason why Putin was interested in getting involved in the Syrian Civil War was the growing presence of Islamic terrorism. Russia has held a traditionally strong stance on terrorism and how to quell its related security threats. The concern for instability in the Middle East fuelled by insurgent or rebellious forces is a highly sensitive issue with a long track record. Putin blames the West for 'creating' recruits for the Islamic State (IS) thanks to

[90] Jiri Valenta and Leni Friedman Valenta, "Why Putin Wants Syria," *Middle East Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (2016): 4.
[91] Nicos Panayiotides, "The Great Syrian Civil War: A Realist Approach to the Syrian Conflict," *IUP Journal of International Relations* 14, no .1 (2020): 63.
[92] Dina Moulioukova and Roger E. Kanet, "Assertive Foreign Policy Despite Diminished Capabilities: Russian Involvement in Syria," *Global Affairs (Abingdon, Oxfordshire, UK)* 6, no. 3 (2020): 254.
[93] Moulioukova and Kanet, "Assertive," 254.
[94] Dmitri Trenin, "Syria: A Russian Perspective," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, published June 28, 2012, https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/48690

the Iraq War and overthrowing Libya.[95] However, it is not only the fault of the West, a lot of the foreign fighters in Syria are in fact North Caucasian. Since 2012 there has been a stream of volunteers coming from the North Caucasus, that make up the second-largest group of foreign fighters in Syria.[96] If Putin blames the West for adding to the number of IS combatants, he should also blame Russia. By destabilising the North Caucasus for decades they created a strongly felt resentment that inspired radicals amongst the primarily Muslim inhabitants of the region to join the struggle against IS. Moreover, the Russian Federal Security Service had allegedly even helped Dagestan and Chechen rebels travel to Syria.[97] Their departure may have initially been interpreted as a positive development because terrorist attacks in the region had halved, however, the prospect of jihadis coming back to Russia turned increasingly worrisome.[98] As the Islamic State grew, so did the threat that these returning extremists could represent to Russia. The danger posed by IS and its thousands of Russian fighters could spill over.[99] Putin had also taken notice and stated: "Now that those thugs have tasted blood, we can't allow them to return home and continue with their criminal activities."[100] It could be argued that the RFP was in part based on fighting terrorism. However, the number of returnees turned out to be an exaggeration and it was estimated that the majority would stay to defend IS to the very end.[101] Fewer had returned than anticipated which made the threat they posed more manageable.[102]

The naval base in Tartus failed to constitute a domestic security threat and has not proven significant in Russia getting involved in Syria's civil war. Furthermore, it is difficult to argue that this RFP is based on the domestic threat of North Caucasian jihadists returning to Russia. The threat they represent was overblown and the possible consequences do not strongly call for military intervention. Putin could have tried to stabilise the North Caucasus instead of provoking jihadis by fighting IS in Syria. Therefore, this hypothesis is false.

---

[95] Vladimir Putin, "70th session of the UN General Assembly," transcript of speech delivered at New York, September 28, 2015, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50385

[96] Emil A. Souleimanov, "Globalizing Jihad? North Caucasians in the Syrian Civil War," *Middle East Policy* 21, no. 3 (2014): 154.

[97] Valenta and Valenta, "Putin Wants Syria," 8.

[98] Ibid., 8; Souleimanov, "North Caucasians," 160.

[99] Richard Barrett, "*Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees,*" The Soufan Center, 2017, 12 – 14.

[100] Putin, "UN General Assembly."

[101] Barrett, "*Beyond the Caliphate*," 14.

[102] Ibid.

4.2.2 Hypothesis 2: RFP is based on the aspiration to strive for a multipolar world order.

A focal point of RFP under Putin is to regain the status of a great power, which Russia had lost after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The institution that they consider embodying the arena of international politics is the UN, more specifically the UNSC. Russia is a permanent member that holds a lot of sway thanks to its right to veto in the 'concert of world powers'.[103] In the case of the Syrian Civil War, the UNSC has proven to be the perfect place for Russia to express its desire for multipolarity. It has vetoed multiple resolutions that were drafted by Western countries that conflicted with the Russian political approach how to deal with Syria. In reality, this meant that Russia has protected Syria from Western punishment over the course of the civil war.

Before examining these draft resolutions it is important to contextualise the Russian perspective on the UNSC and its role in the Middle East. Russia saw the Iraq War of 2003 and, more recently, the military intervention in Libya as failures. In 2011, the US persuaded Russia to withhold its veto so the UNSC could pass Resolution 1973 based on humanitarian intervention, which would be abused by NATO's bombing campaign and lead to the overthrow of Ghaddafi.[104] There was a sense of betrayal, that the US had deliberately misled Russia to push their NATO intervention through the UNSC, and the consequence was Russian unwillingness to contribute to similar political failures.[105] The unity of the five permanent members was threatened and Russia disagreed with the three Western counterparts on the council. As Churkin, the Russian Representative at the UN described the context for Syria:

> "After destroying Libya and considering that a great success, the troika … turned on Syria. And this time, most unfortunately, Paris … has become one of the loudest promoters of an ill-conceived policy of regime change in Damascus."[106]

The reference to the troika, which means trio in Russian, underpins the feeling that Russia was being excluded while the representatives of the West were working together in the

[103] Philip Remler, "Russia at the United Nations: Law, Sovereignty, and Legitimacy," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, published January 22, 2020, https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/01/22/russia-at-united-nations-law-sovereignty-and-legitimacy-pub-80753
[104] Valenta and Valenta, "Putin Wants Syria," 7 – 8.
[105] Ibid., 8.
[106] Ümit Seven, "Russia's Foreign Policy Actions and the Syrian Civil War in the United Nations Security Council," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 24, no. 6 (2022): 906.

UNSC. Russia opposed the 'ill-conceived policy' and aimed to defy this by vetoing resolutions to protect the Syrian regime. This way Russia would combine both elements of multipolarity used in this thesis; having a say in global politics while diminishing Western influence.

An example is the UNSC draft resolution that got vetoed by Russia in February 2012. The UNSC drafted a resolution that condemned Syria for the egregious human rights violations and demanded that the government immediately implement a plan constructed by the Arab League.[107] However, Russia disagreed with the text that indirectly proposed that Syrian president Assad stepped down, and went against the 13 other members by issuing its veto. Churkin explained that Russia had arranged to meet with Assad and aimed to find a peaceful settlement, a process that was being undermined by Western states.[108] The involvement of Assad represented the Russian approach to the Syrian civil war: dialogue with the president who was violently cracking down on his own protesting citizens. Russia protected Assad by pushing the narrative that they needed him to end the conflict. This was very different from certain Western states who wanted to see Assad be removed from office. Russia went against this preference and aimed for multipolarity by vetoing a resolution that decried the Syrian human rights violations, an ideal whose universality is promoted by the West.[109]

Before Russia got militarily involved in 2015, it had used its veto to protect the Syrian regime four times. However, Russia proved that it did not need to go against the grain to push for multipolarity. Evidence of the use of chemical weapons against Syrian civilians came out in 2013 and almost culminated in a Western intervention. However, Putin proposed a joint UN-mandated effort to get rid of Syria's chemical arsenal, which alleviated pressure on Assad while showcasing UNSC unity.[110] It was a great tactical play from Putin who had prevented intervention and strengthened the relationship with Assad while centralising Russian influence to deal with the conflict. This consolidation of Russian importance to be included in handling the Syrian Civil War came at the cost of France and

[107] "Security Council Fails to Adopt Draft Resolution on Syria as Russian Federation, China Veto Text Supporting Arab League's Proposed Peace Plan," United Nations, published February 4, 2012, https://press.un.org/en/2012/sc10536.doc.htm
[108] United Nations, "Veto Text."
[109] Remler, "Russia at the United Nations."
[110] Richard Gowan, "*BURSTING THE UN BUBBLE: HOW TO COUNTER RUSSIA IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL*," European Council on Foreign Relations, 2015, https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep21507

Britain. The political clout of these two permanent UNSC members diminished when Russia came to a bilateral resolution with the US, who would prioritise Moscow more frequently.[111]

When Russia had extended its influence in the UNSC by both vetoing and agreeing on resolutions, it had come to the understanding of how useful the Syrian civil war could be for advancing multipolarity. Therefore, it decided to get militarily involved under the banner of fighting terrorism. In the speech that announced this involvement, Putin emphasised the severity of the Islamic State and the necessity to have Assad included, as his forces were the ones really fighting terrorists.[112] This was a reiteration of the political approach that Russia had been pushing in the UNSC for the past years. The military involvement was a strong addition to improve multipolarity; Russia had now made itself indispensable in dealing with Syria's civil war.

Russia had correctly calculated that the conflict in Syria would provide an opportunity to increase its influence in global politics. The Russian behaviour in the UNSC, whether cooperative or disruptive, had enhanced multipolarity by having a say that simultaneously diminished Western influence. The RFP of getting involved, both politically and militarily, was based on the aspiration to strive for a multipolar world order, and for that reason this hypothesis is true.

4.2.3. Hypothesis 3: RFP is based on upholding the Westphalian principle of sovereignty.

Putin has shown to be very keen on upholding international legal norms and principles when forming and executing RFP. In the Russian Federation, these principles and norms, specifically the principle of sovereignty, represent the foundation of international politics. This belief is repeated in the Russian Foreign Policy Concept, which was published in 2013, after the Libya intervention and the aggravating Syrian crisis. Moscow decried "concepts that are being implemented … aimed at overthrowing legitimate authorities in sovereign states under the pretext of protecting civilian population" and that international peace and order are threatened by "politically motivated interpretation of … non-use of force or … respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of states."[113] This Foreign Policy Concept

[111] Gowan, "*BURSTING*."
[112] Putin, "UN General Assembly."
[113] "The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation 2013," Voltaire Network, published February 12, 2013, https://www.voltairenet.org/article202037.html

unequivocally reiterated that Russia strongly opposed recent arbitrary interpretations of international law that had violated sovereignty. A contentious example of this is the R2P, whose development has become linked with disputes on intervening in a sovereign state to cease human rights violations.[114] The intervention in Libya abused this concept and ended up overthrowing the government. Russia was frustrated by this illegitimate regime change and brought this mindset to the UNSC when dealing with the Syrian Civil War. The R2P has indeterminate aspects and Russia had concerns about the effects of the blurred lines on its trigger for military intervention, especially with the aim of regime change.[115] Syria could not become a repetition of Libya.

This notion underpinned Russian voting behaviour in the UNSC. The first draft resolution on Syria that Moscow vetoed occurred a couple of months after the start of the conflict in 2011. The resolution would have condemned Syria for its systematic abuses of human rights and threatened Assad's regime that sanctions would follow under Chapter VII of the UN Charter if they did not cease the bloodshed.[116] The Kremlin's prefaced the explanation of its veto by criticising the Syrian regime's violence, calling for increased dialogue with the opposition and Arab League. However, Moscow had made proposals for the draft to include the non-acceptability of military intervention and respect for sovereignty, which had been disregarded. It also opposed the threat of sanctions and sole blame on Damascus, while extremist rebels were trying to bait foreign intervention. In light of the recent context, Russia was concerned that the draft resolution could usher in an approach comparable to the illegitimacy of Libya as the Syrian crisis was not dissimilar. UN Representative Churkin contended that the Syrian people "did not share the demands for quick regime change."[117] The multifaceted arguments for why Russia opposed the draft resolution clearly derive from their desire to uphold the Westphalian principle of sovereignty when conducting international politics. Moscow continued to veto draft resolutions that did not explicitly include an emphasis on the non-use of military

[114] Derek Averre and Lance Davies, "Russia, Humanitarian Intervention and the Responsibility to Protect: The Case of Syria," *International Affairs (London)* 91, no. 4 (2015): 815.
[115] Averre and Davies, "Case of Syria," 819.
[116] "Security Council Fails to Adopt Draft Resolution Condemning Syria's Crackdown on Anti-Government Protestors, Owing to Veto by Russian Federation, China," United Nations, published October 4, 2011, https://press.un.org/en/2011/sc10403.doc.htm
[117] United Nations, "Condeming Syria's Crackdown."

intervention or forced regime change, as they did not rule out possible infringement of Syrian sovereignty.

While the war continued to devastate Syria and its people, Islamic terrorism consolidated its foothold through the IS. The growing concern about this surge caused Putin to modify his strategy, which led to the involvement of the Russian military and to the adoption of UNSC Resolution 2249. Moscow argued that their airstrikes did not violate Syrian sovereignty because President Assad had requested the support.[118] The invitation provided Russia with the legal context necessary to intervene in compliance with international law and the principle of sovereignty. The invitation itself was deemed legal by Russia because the two conditions were met. The consent was validated as it had come from Assad himself, who was still the incumbent president of Syria.[119] The status of a ruler's legitimacy is muddled in times of civil war, however, the relevant Russian interpretation considered him legitimate. In addition to complying with international law, the military intervention adhered to UNSC Resolution 2249 which had called for "all necessary measures" to suppress IS.[120] There were claims that Russia had hit anti-Assad targets instead of IS, however, Lavrov defended the Russian position to be "absolutely in line with international law."[121] The new approach to the Syrian civil war, one of military intervention, did not violate Syrian sovereignty.

The example of Russian protective voting behaviour in the UNSC on draft resolutions concerning Syria is relevant to this hypothesis as well as the previous hypothesis. The distinction is that Churkin's elaboration on the UNSC vetoes directly mentions elements of sovereignty that argue in favour of this specific hypothesis. Neither the diplomatic support provided by Russia in the UNSC nor the military support through airstrikes violated Syrian sovereignty. A goal that was purposefully included in crafting the RFP for Syria. It was based on upholding the Westphalian principle of sovereignty, therefore this hypothesis is true.

---

[118] "Syria's Assad wrote to Putin over military support: statement," Reuters, published September 30, 2015, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-putin-idUSKCN0RU17Y20150930

[119] Samuel Mercier, "The Legality of Russian Airstrikes in Syria and 'Intervention by Invitation'," E-International Relations, published April 29, 2016, https://www.e-ir.info/2016/04/29/the-legality-of-russian-airstrikes-in-syria-and-intervention-by-invitation/

[120] Mercier, "The legality of Russian Airstrikes."

[121] Somini Sengupta, "Russian Foreign Minister Defends Airstrikes in Syria," *The New York Times*, published October 1, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/02/world/europe/russia-airstrikes-syria-assad.html

The Syrian civil war is regrettably still an active conflict, although the intensity has been reduced. The aftermath is felt by millions displaced and whose country is in ruins. It was, and remains, a very complex conflict that was not only experienced on the ground but also in the political realm. The decision to get involved in Syria's civil war has resulted in a very controversial RFP, amplified by supporting the Syrian regime. This chapter has examined three hypotheses to better understand what motivated Putin to shape this foreign policy. The first hypothesis analysed two security factors and found that the naval base in Tartus, Syria was too insignificant to pose a security threat. Furthermore, the threat that North Caucasian jihadis posed was overblown and the link to the Russian strategy in Syria was too weak. The case of Syria does argue for the multipolarity of the second hypothesis. Russian voting behaviour in the UNSC has both resulted in the increase to have a say and the diminution of Western influence. The third hypothesis is also true as Russia stated in its Foreign Policy Concept of 2013. The vetoes in the UNSC have been clearly linked to the desire to uphold Westphalian sovereignty. In a similar fashion, the Russian military involvement was according to international law.

4.3 Synthesis of results

4.3.1. Synthesis

In the case of Crimea, the threats to the Russian naval base in Sevastopol combined with the aggressive expansion of NATO and the EU support that the RFP was based on threats to domestic security. However, this is not the case for Syria. Both the threats posed by the North Caucasian jihadis and the importance of the naval base in Tartus were overstated. This indicates that perceived threats to Russia's domestic security are a primary influence on foreign policies concerning states in the Near Abroad, whereas it is less important for dealing with the global stage. Furthermore, the geographical location is important as threats to Russia's vicinity are more direct and could spill over more easily. The case of Crimea has clearly shown that Russia does respond to what they perceive as domestic threats. Nevertheless, the global stage contains a scattered Russian diaspora that is not to be underestimated as Russian jihadis did pose a threat, though negligible.

Russia did not strive for a multipolar world order by annexing Crimea. The Ukrainian population wanted to join the West voluntarily, they were not forced, and neither the West

nor the Kremlin had a decisive say in the matter. Moreover, it is probable that Putin annexed Crimea in an attempt to secure national interests instead of diminishing Western influence. Contrariwise, the Russian involvement in Syria's civil war consisted of multiple aspects of multipolarity. Both the cooperation in the UNSC and the disruptive vetoes had decreased Western influence while making Russia indispensable in dealing with the Syrian conflict. Putin had correctly interpreted the civil war in Syria as a possibility to increase Russian influence in global politics. The West wanted Assad to be removed and supported anti-government rebels. The protection of the Syrian regime, by means of a diplomatic shield in the UNSC and later on military support, allowed Russia to thwart Western goals and diminish their influence. This shows that RFP concerning affairs on the global stage is more likely to be based on multipolarity than in the Near Abroad. These events provide Moscow with the opportunity to have a say in global governance and to exert influence in faraway places which is fitting for a great power like Russia. There is less of a need to prove themselves in the Near Abroad as it is arguably part of the Russian sphere of influence.

Putin tried to argue in official speeches that the annexation of Crimea was in accordance with international law and therefore a foreign policy that upheld the Westphalian principle of sovereignty. However, this defence was to no avail as the annexation had infringed on Ukrainian sovereignty by violating multiple international agreements. The RFP in Syria depicted the opposite: Moscow berated any expression that hinted at possibly violating the sovereignty and issued its veto accordingly. The military intervention also abided by international law. The results of both cases argue that Russia uses a dual approach to upholding the Westphalian principle of sovereignty. On the global stage, it is a fervent defender of the principle while it applies a 'post-Soviet model' in the Near Abroad.[122] This translates to a disregard for the principle of sovereignty when it concerns post-Soviet states. The dual approach holds up when considering Russian denunciation of the war in Iraq and the intervention in Libya, while falsely defending sovereignty violations in the Russo-Georgian war and Crimea.

[122] Deyermond, "Uses of Sovereignty," 957 – 973.

4.3.2. Discussion

The results from the three hypotheses applied to the first case indicate that Russia annexed Crimea based on perceived threats to domestic security, while arguments for multipolarity and sovereignty are secondary and less significant. Russian involvement in Syria shows the opposite results; security threats were insignificant and the foreign policy was both aimed to strive for a multipolar world order and to uphold the Westphalian principle of sovereignty. It is important to mention that the conclusions of my results should be interpreted while being aware that there are some caveats. There are themes that greatly influence the intricate process of Russian foreign policymaking, e.g. internal politics and the influence of domestic politics, that have been consciously left out. The results do not imply that a priority for security mutually excludes sovereignty or multipolarity, merely that a key feature is prioritised over another. Furthermore, the wording of the hypotheses as well as the case studies that represent the Near Abroad and the global stage have been simplified to stay within the limited word count. This thesis does not claim to constitute a fully comprehensive account of Russian foreign policymaking in the Near Abroad and the global stage.

Nevertheless, with these caveats in mind, the results do provide proper insight into Putin's foreign policymaking. The three themes chosen for the theory are prominent throughout the relevant scholarship and are underpinned by suitable hypotheses. Furthermore, the annexation of Crimea and the involvement in Syria's civil war were predominant foreign policies that accurately represent the Near Abroad and the global stage. The conclusions drawn from the results provide the answer to the research question of how Russian foreign policy in Putin's third term can be explained in the Near Abroad versus the global stage. By comparing the Near Abroad with the global stage it becomes clear that Putin modifies the three prominent features to effectively shape his foreign policy. He uses a bifurcated approach in prioritising these aspects to efficiently implement foreign policy in the different regions. Perceived threats to domestic security are a higher priority than multipolarity or sovereignty when forming foreign policy in the Near Abroad, whereas the order is reversed for the global stage. A deeper understanding of this takes away from Putin's seemingly enigmatic foreign policy and can aid other states in dealing with Russia.

5. Conclusion

The foreign policy of Russia has been difficult to understand and even harder to anticipate. In recent years RFP has become increasingly bolder, illustrated by the Russo-Ukrainian War that commenced in 2014. The annexation of Crimea was a prelude to the war which the West had failed to foresee. Consequently, it has become more urgent to have a grasp on RFP, more specifically on Putin's foreign policy. After Putin's re-election for his third term, he implemented foreign policies whose effects still linger today. Therefore, this thesis aimed to answer how Russian foreign policy in Putin's third term can be explained in the Near Abroad versus the global stage. The RFP theory that supports this research question focuses on security, great power identity, and international norms. Furthermore, selecting two significant case studies that tested three hypotheses allowed for a suitable approach to examine and compare the Near Abroad and the global stage. The results of the case on the annexation of Crimea showed that Putin primarily based the RFP on the perceived domestic threats by the expansion of NATO and the EU, and the threat to the Russian naval base in Sevastopol. The hypothesis on the multipolar world order did not prove significant and although Putin publicly claimed to abide by international law, Russia had clearly violated Ukrainian sovereignty. The results from Russian involvement in the Syrian civil war argued for the opposite and were less about security. Instead, Putin's foreign policy was aimed to strive for a multipolar world order, demonstrated by Russian voting behaviour in the UNSC. Furthermore, the vetoes in the UNSC and the military intervention conformed to upholding the Westphalian principle of sovereignty. The comparison underpins the notion that Putin prioritises security for forming foreign policy in the Near Abroad and that Russia maintains a dual approach to sovereignty that is different on the global stage. The three prominent elements of RFP all influence Putin's foreign policy, however, to varying degrees. Another conclusion drawn from the comparison illustrates that Putin incorporates whether the foreign policy will take place in the Near Abroad or on the global stage and that he rearranges the priority of the three key features of RFP accordingly. This means that Putin shapes his foreign policy based on what region it will affect, however, it is not a random case-by-case approach as there is an underlying strategy customised for both regions. The results and conclusions of this thesis were aimed to unravel Putin's enigmatic foreign policies. It is imperative for future scholarship with a similar goal to draw lessons from the

Russo-Ukrainian War as its consequences will reshape Russia’s position in the international arena.

6. Bibliography

Adiyia, Michael, and William Ashton. *Comparative Research*. Brandon University, Rural Development Initiative, 2017.

Allison, Roy. “Russian 'deniable' Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules.” *International Affairs (London)* 90, no. 6 (2014): 1255–97.

Averre, Derek, and Lance Davies. “Russia, Humanitarian Intervention and the Responsibility to Protect: The Case of Syria.” *International Affairs (London)* 91, no. 4 (2015): 813–34.

Barrett, Richard. “*Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees*.” The Soufan Center, 2017.

Bellamy, Alex J. “Realizing the Responsibility to Protect.” *International Studies Perspectives* 10, no. 2 (2009): 111–28

Berti, Benedetta, and Jonathan Paris. “Beyond sectarianism: Geopolitics, fragmentation, and the Syrian civil war.” *Strategic Assessment* 16, no. 4 (2014): 21-34.

Bevan, Scott. “Ukraine, Georgia NATO membership a 'direct threat to Russia'” ABC News. Published April 4, 2008. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2008-04-05/ukraine-georgia-nato-membership-a-direct-threat-to/2393800

Buchan, Russell, and Nicholas Tsagourias. “The Crisis in Crimea and the Principle of Non-Intervention.” *International Community Law Review* 19, no. 2-3 (2017): 165–93.

Bucknell University, “Russian Constitution SECTION ONE Chapter 2.” Accessed December 29, 2022. https://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/ch2.html.

Cadier, David, and Margot Light. *Russia's Foreign Policy : Ideas, Domestic Politics and External Relations.* New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Carpenter, Ted Galen. “Tangled Web: The Syrian Civil War and Its Implications.” *Mediterranean Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (2013): 1–11.

Charbonneau, Louis. “Putin says U.S. wants to dominate world.” Reuters. Published February 10, 2007. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-usa-idUSL1053774820070210

Deyermond, Ruth. “The Uses of Sovereignty in Twenty-First Century Russian Foreign Policy.” *Europe-Asia Studies* 68, no. 6 (2016): 957–84.

Dudovskiy, John. “Inductive Approach (Inductive Reasoning).” Business Research Methodology. Accessed, 28 November, 2022. https://research-methodology.net/research-methodology/research-approach/inductive-approach-2/

Eckel, Mike. “A Cry from Crimea.” *World Policy Journal* 31, no. 4 (2014): 85–96.

European Parliament. “Sergei Lavrov's accusations against the Eastern Partnership.” Parliamentary question. Published January 21, 2011. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-7-2011-000572_EN.html?redirect

Gardner, Hall. “NATO, the EU, Ukraine, Russia and Crimea: The Reset that was Never Reset.” *NATO Watch Briefing Paper* 49, no.3 (April 3, 2014): 1 – 15.

Gasparini, Amedeo. “Do Not Forget the Crimean Crisis: Why Russia "Annexed" the Peninsula? A (pro-) Western-European Perception.” *Global Affairs (Abingdon, Oxfordshire, UK)* 7, no. 3 (2021): 405 – 410.

Götz, Elias. “It's Geopolitics, Stupid: Explaining Russia's Ukraine Policy.” *Global Affairs (Abingdon, Oxfordshire, UK)* 1, no. 1 (2015): 3–10.

Gowan, Richard. “*BURSTING THE UN BUBBLE: HOW TO COUNTER RUSSIA IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL.*” European Council on Foreign Relations, 2015. https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep21507

Granholm, Niklas, Johannes Malminen, and Gudrun Persson, eds. *A rude awakening: Ramifications of Russian aggression towards Ukraine*. Försvarsanalys, Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut (FOI) 2014.

Gunitsky, Seva, and Andrei P. Tsygankov. “The Wilsonian Bias in the Study of Russian Foreign Policy.” *Problems of Post-Communism* 65, no. 6 (2018): 385–93.

Gurganus, Julia, and Eugene Rumer. “Russia’s global ambitions in perspective.” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Published February 20, 2019. https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/02/20/russia-s-global-ambitions-in-perspective-pub-78067

Hansen, Flemming Splidsboel. “Framing Yourself into a Corner: Russia, Crimea, and the Minimal Action Space.” *European Security (London, England)* 24, no. 1 (2015): 141–58.

Krickovic, Andrej. “Catalyzing Conflict: The Internal Dimension of the Security Dilemma.” *Journal of Global Security Studies* 1, no. 2 (2016): 111–26.

Kuchins, Andrew C., and Igor A. Zevelev. “Russian Foreign Policy: Continuity in Change.” *The Washington Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (2012): 147–61.

Leichtova, Magda. *Misunderstanding Russia: Russian Foreign Policy and the West*. Taylor and Francis, 2016.

Lieven, Anatol. “Russian Opposition to NATO Expansion.” *World Today* 51, no. 10 (1995): 196–99.

Liu, Fenghua. “Russia’s Foreign Policy Over the Past Three Decades: Change and Continuity.” *Chinese Journal of Slavic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2022): 86–99.

MacFarlane, Neil. “Kto Vinovat? Why Is There a Crisis in Russia's Relations with the West?” *Contemporary Politics* 22, no. 3 (2016): 342–58.

Mankoff, Jeffrey. *Russian Foreign Policy: the Return of Great Power Politics*. Lanham, MD [etc.]: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009.

MccGwire, Michael. “NATO Expansion: 'a Policy Error of Historic Importance'.” *Review of International Studies* 24, no. 1 (1998): 23–42.

Mearsheimer, John J. “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin.” *Foreign Affairs (New York, N.Y.)* 93, no. 5 (2014): 77 – 89.

Mercier, Samuel. “The Legality of Russian Airstrikes in Syria and ‘Intervention by Invitation’.” E-International Relations. Published April 29, 2016. https://www.e-ir.info/2016/04/29/the-legality-of-russian-airstrikes-in-syria-and-intervention-by-invitation/

Moulioukova, Dina, and Roger E. Kanet. “Assertive Foreign Policy Despite Diminished Capabilities: Russian Involvement in Syria.” *Global Affairs (Abingdon, Oxfordshire, UK)* 6, no. 3 (2020): 247–68.

Nadibaidze, Anna. “Great Power Identity in Russia's Position on Autonomous Weapons Systems.” *Contemporary Security Policy* 43, no. 3 (2022): 407–35.

Olson, Peter M. "The Lawfulness of Russian Use of Force in Crimea." *Military Law and the Law of War Review.* 53 (2014): 17-44.

Orchard, Phil, and Heather Rae. “Russia and the R2P: Norm entrepreneur, anti-preneur, or violator?” In *Constructing the Responsibility to Protect*. 168 – 186. Routledge, 2020.

Panayiotides, Nicos. "The Great Syrian Civil War: A Realist Approach to the Syrian Conflict." *IUP Journal of International Relations* 14, no. 1 (2020): 59 – 70.

Patten, Mildred L. *Understanding Research Methods: An Overview of the Essentials*. 5th ed. Routledge, 2005.

Pickvance, Christopher G. "Four Varieties of Comparative Analysis." *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 16, no. 1 (2001): 7–28.

President of Russia. "Vladimir Putin submitted appeal to the Federation Council." Published March 1, 2014. http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20353

Putin, Vladimir. "Address by President of the Russian Federation." Transcript of speech delivered at the Kremlin, Moscow, March 18, 2014. http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603

Putin, Vladimir. "Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly." Transcript of speech delivered at the Kremlin, December 4, 2014. http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47173

Putin, Vladimir. "70th session of the UN General Assembly." Transcript of speech delivered at New York, September 28, 2015. http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50385

Putin, Vladimir. "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy." Transcript of speech delivered at Munich, February 10, 2007. http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/copy/24034

Putin, Vladimir. "Vladimir Putin answered journalists' questions on the situation in Ukraine." Transcript of speech delivered at Novo-Ogaryovo, March 4, 2014. http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20366

Remler, Philip. "Russia at the United Nations: Law, Sovereignty, and Legitimacy." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Published January 22, 2020. https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/01/22/russia-at-united-nations-law-sovereignty-and-legitimacy-pub-80753

Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs. "Charter of the United Nations." Updated August 23, 2016. https://legal.un.org/repertory/art51.shtml

Reuters. "Putin says annexation of Crimea partly a response to NATO enlargement." Published April 17, 2014. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-putin-nato-idUSBREA3G22A20140417

Reuters. “Syria's Assad wrote to Putin over military support: statement.” Published September 30, 2015. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-putin-idUSKCN0RU17Y20150930

Roberts, Anthea. “Legality Vs Legitimacy: Can Uses of Force Be Illegal but Justified?” In *Human Rights, Intervention, and the Use of Force*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Roberts, Kari. “Understanding Putin.” *International Journal (Toronto)* 72, no. 1 (2017): 28–55.

Savranskaya, Svetlana, and Tom Blanton. “NATO Expansion: What Yeltsin Heard.” National Security Archive. Edited March 16, 2018. https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2018-03-16/nato-expansion-what-yeltsin-heard#_edn6

Sengupta, Somini. “Russian Foreign Minister Defends Airstrikes in Syria.” *The New York Times*. Published October 1, 2015. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/02/world/europe/russia-airstrikes-syria-assad.html

Seven, Ümit. “Russia's Foreign Policy Actions and the Syrian Civil War in the United Nations Security Council.” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 24, no. 6 (2022): 896–911.

Shevchenko, Inna. “Giving Russia the top job at the UN is an Orwellian nightmare and a betrayal of global peace efforts.” *International Business Times*. Published, September 4, 2015. https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/giving-russia-top-job-un-orwellian-nightmare-betrayal-global-peace-efforts-1518495

Souleimanov, Emil A. “Globalizing Jihad? North Caucasians in the Syrian Civil War.” *Middle East Policy* 21, no. 3 (2014): 154–62.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*. Published 1 December, 2016. https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1538901/?lang=en

Treisman, Daniel. “Why Putin Took Crimea: The Gambler in the Kremlin.” *Foreign Affairs (New York, N.Y.)* 95, no. 3 (2016): 47–54.

Trenin, Dmitri. “Syria: A Russian Perspective.” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Published June 28, 2012. https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/48690

Tsygankov, Andrei P. *Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy*. London, New York: Routledge, 2018.

Tsygankov, Andrei P. "Russia in the Post-Western World: The End of the Normalization Paradigm?" *Post-Soviet Affairs* 25, no. 4 (2009): 347-369.

Tsygankov, Andrei P. *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*. Fourth edition., 2016.

United Nations. "Security Council Fails to Adopt Draft Resolution Condemning Syria's Crackdown on Anti-Government Protestors, Owing to Veto by Russian Federation, China." Published October 4, 2011. https://press.un.org/en/2011/sc10403.doc.htm

United Nations. "Security Council, 69th year : 7125th meeting, Monday, 3 March 2014, New York." S/PV.7125. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/766547

United Nations. "Security Council Fails to Adopt Draft Resolution on Syria as Russian Federation, China Veto Text Supporting Arab League's Proposed Peace Plan." Published February 4, 2012, https://press.un.org/en/2012/sc10536.doc.htm

Urnov, Mark. "'Greatpowerness' as the Key Element of Russian Self-Consciousness Under

Valenta, Jiri, and Leni Friedman Valenta. "Why Putin Wants Syria." *Middle East Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (2016): 1 – 17.

Voltaire Network. "The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation 2013."Published February 12, 2013. https://www.voltairenet.org/article202037.html

Ziegler, Charles E. "Contesting the Responsibility to Protect." *International Studies Perspectives* 17, no. 1 (2016): 75–97.