ANALYSING THE PROSPECTS OF VLADIMIR PUTIN'S 'GRAND PROJECT' IN LIGHT OF THE 2014 CRIMEAN ANNEXATION

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Abstract

In late February 2014, Russian military forces invaded Ukrainian sovereign territory in Crimea and subsequently annexed it into the Russian Federation. A large selection of international reactions suggested that this was a part of a concerted plan by Vladimir Putin to challenge global order through a revisionist 'return to history'. However, a series of policy concessions made by Putin soon after, suggested that this may not necessarily be the case. This thesis proposes that by considering whether or not Putin possesses a 'grand political motivation' to challenge world order and a coherent motivational ideology to support it, it is possible to present a different image of what is happening in Crimea. This research will explore this problem by analysing responses to Russia's invasion and annexation of Crimea from a variety of policy-makers, analysts and media. I propose that Putin's foreign policy and subsequent actions can be viewed as the need to maintain the domestic Russian condition of *bespredel* by preserving, rather than challenging the current international order. Putin's actions in Crimea are therefore fundamentally orientated at protecting and managing the current Russian spatial order from what Moscow considers to be external revolutionary threats to its constitution.

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For Elizabeth “Betty” Churchouse

1931-2013

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Introduction

Within hours of Russia's invasion of Crimea, there was as noticeable response from international diplomats and media towards what was ostensibly *another* Russian challenge to global order. There was a palpable feeling among some observers that Crimea was a re-interpretation of Russia's invasion of Georgia and South Ossetia in May of 2008. However, unlike Georgia this time it was Ukraine; a country with significant cultural and historical ties with the Russian Federation. It was a transitional Ukraine still wrestling with its own recovery from the violence of the Euromaidan Revolution and the subsequent ousting of Viktor Yanukovich's alleged pro-Russian government.

Given the cultural and historic proximity of the two countries, Western journalists immediately asked whether Putin had lost his mind in the decision to invade Ukrainian territory.[1] Such was the incredulous reaction of observers, that there was a reasonable assumption that this was going to be a 'game changing' action with significant implications for regional and global order. The disbelief and disorientation of responses to Russia's invasion of Ukraine has prompted the reaction that "this isn't what the 21st century is supposed to look like" from some observers.[2] Russia had been trying to manage its relationship with former Soviet neighbours since the collapse of the Soviet Union through a variety of different means. These means have included the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the establishment of the polarising Eurasian Customs Union and various policies developed since Putin's first term that have emphasised Russia's special historical interests with the 'near abroad'.[3] The idea that Putin is pushing the boundaries of possibility and comprehension has therefore re-ignited the image of Putin the geo-strategic statesman in the consciousness of analysts. What is instructive about this pattern of thinking is that it apparently fits neatly within the established Western paradigm of Putin, complementing his

1 Taylor, Brian D. 'Putin's Own Goal', *Foreign Affairs*, March 6, 2014.
2 Kaplan, Robert D. 'Geopolitics and the New World Order', *Time*, March 20, 2014.
3 Kobzova et al., 'Russia and EU's Competitive Neighbourhood', in *The Great Power (mis)Management: The Russian-Georgian War and its Implications for Global Political Order*, Astrov, Alexander (ed)., Ashgate, 2011, p. 80.

prioritisation of playing towards the limits of the 'game'.[4]

Putin gave his first press conference on the invasion of Crimea in Moscow on March 4, 2014. He made it obvious that the events that occurred in Kiev could not be considered as a legitimate democratic revolution. Instead of it emerging from the will of the people, it was "an anticonstitutional coup and armed seizure of power." He further classified the resultant Yatsenyuk government in Kiev as "illegitimate."[5] At this time, Putin still actively denied Russia's military involvement despite the predictable backlash from Ukrainian and external actors. Throughout this initial period during late February and March of 2014, Putin's policies were loyally supported and promoted by his Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, who often protested forcefully against anti-Russian criticism. It of course, is immediately expected that Putin and his intimate policy-makers would default towards this kind of rhetoric.

However, Putin made a series of confusing and rather perplexing concessions in the week leading into the May 11 regional autonomy votes in the districts of Eastern Ukraine. Up until this point, Putin had supported the right of these regions to vote for greater autonomy from the 'illegitimate' and tyrannical central authorities in Kiev. However, he strongly suggested to the de-facto separatist authorities in these regions that they delay their votes to after the central Ukrainian elections on May 25th. Furthermore, he then recommended that there should be an immediate cessation of hostilities from both sides in order to facilitate the May 25 elections; although he crucially stopped short of fully recognising the legitimacy of the election. In addition to this concession and the removal of Russian troops from the proximate area to the Ukrainian border, Putin stated in an interview following a visit to China that:

> We are doing this as an additional step to help create a favourable environment for the upcoming presidential election in Ukraine… My view is that what is important is not the election itself but to organise relations with all of Ukraine's regions so that people, whether in the west, south, east or north of the country all feel that they are full-fledged citizens.[6]

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4 Kaylan, Melik. 'Kremlin Values: Putin's Strategic Conservatism', *World Affairs*, May – June 2014, p. 9.
5 Taylor, 2014.
6 Putin, Vladimir. "Replies to journalists' questions following a visit to China", *President of Russia*, 21 May 2014. [1]

He further elaborated that despite the fact that he considers Victor Yanukovich to remain in legitimately in power, and therefore that the legitimacy of the subsequent May 25 elections is problematic, steps towards resolving the crisis are always positive and worthy.

> In any case the political processes underway, including on legitimising the current authorities, are a positive step of course… In terms of legitimacy and objectivity of the results, this will raise big questions for us of course. I hope very much that our partners in Europe and the United States will finally hear and understand what is going on.[7]

Given the nature of Putin's hitherto public opposition to the Yatsenyuk government and his explicit support for the right of the Eastern regions to decide upon their status of autonomy, this indeed presents a puzzling picture. If we are to assume that Putin's actions in Crimea are a challenge to the established regional and global order, then the dominant trends in diplomatic and policy analyses of his actions are somewhat problematic. It is potentially enlightening to consider that Putin's 'grand project' is not of a great concern to him, or at least, not high on his list of priorities. I suggest that in order to better understand the constitution of Putin's actions in regards to Crimea, and in light of his perplexing volte-face, we must consider this question; does Putin have a 'grand mobilising project' and an ideology to support it or not? At this point is impossible to say with absolute certainty whether the answer to this question can be found. However, this research will analyse why the dominant contemporary responses are not convincing, and subsequently what alternatives can be considered. This is an important question that can provide a more detailed analysis of Russian actions in Crimea and further potential actions towards Ukraine.

To examine this question, this research will first analyse a broad selection of responses from policy-makers, policy-analysts and media towards Putin's initial invasion and annexation of Crimea. In doing so, I present that it is possible to grasp the genesis of the dominant trends in contemporary analyses of Putin's actions. The most dominant trend in response to Putin's actions

[7] Putin, 2014. [1]

suggests that there has been a re-affirmation Robert Kagan's idea that 'history's back'[8] This fits within the framework and continues to promulgate the contention that Putin's Russia is attempting to provoke an imperialist and revisionist 'new Cold War.'[9] The discourse of the 'new Cold War' has been largely popularised after the Russian invasion of Georgia. Demonstrated by Russia's apparent default use of hard power within the region, the 'new' Cold War paradigm is not an assumption that Russia is attempting to return to the order of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Instead, it insists upon Russia's acceptance of the need to project its influence through an integrated system of military, strategic, economic and cultural means to further its ambitions. In doing so, it frames Russian actions as backwards-facing and antagonistic towards liberalism.[10] If this is indeed the case, then Russia's continued movement towards antagonism and regional hegemony following the Georgian War, commits Russia to reject the possibility of new forms of territorial integrity emerging through Kiev's re-orientation towards the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).[11] I will also analyse the second major claim that Putin now possesses a more coherent motivational ideology of neo-conservatism, which effectively gives him a framework to guide his alternative vision of regional and global order.

However, I will suggest that these responses fail to capture the complexity of Putin's actions and motivations. In assuming the existence of Putin's grand motivations and dogmatic assertion of regional hegemony, I suggest that Putin's considerations are significantly less concerned with cultivating a grand strategy and promoting an image of Russian power externally. Instead, Putin is more concerned with the internal and domestic process of the stabilisation and pragmatic manipulation of post-Soviet politics towards the maintenance of internal Russian order. This hypothesis posits that the internal stabilisation of Russia occurs within the maintenance of the 'state

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8 Kagan, R. 'History's Back: Ambitious Autocracies, Hesitant Democracies', *The Weekly Standard*, Vol. 13, No. 6, 2008.

9 Lucas, Edward. *The New Cold War* 2nd Edition, Bloomsbury: London, 2008, p. 4.

10 Kobzova et al., p. 82.

11 Prozorov, Sergei. 'From Katechon to Intrigant: The Breakdown of the Post-Soviet Nomos', *The Great Power (mis)Management: The Russian-Georgian War and its Implications for Global Political Order*. Astrov, Alexander (ed)., Ashgate, 2011, p. 35.

of exception' as proposed by Giorgio Agamben.[12] But as Sergei Prozorov elaborates, the Russian political state of *bespredel* (literally translated as the absence of limits), recognises the potentially problematic openness that resulted from the collapse of the idea of the end of history. Thus, there is no restoration of a singular teleology over others; but simply the management of remaining time.[13] Russia therefore adapts its foreign policy towards the management of domestic order through the stabilisation of the state of *bespredel*.[14] Subsequently, Putin's actions in Crimea appears to present a tension between Russia's developing conservative nationalism and his latest policy concessions. Following these concessions, I suggest it is not at all clear Putin's ambitions continue towards the revisionist trends favoured in contemporary analyses.

In order to develop a greater understanding of the implications of Crimea, I will begin by analysing differing interpretations of Putin's so-called 'grand strategy'. I will also subsequently analyse whether indeed he has a motivational ideology to support the claims made by contemporary observers, policy-makers and analysts. Following that analysis, I will suggest that two current interpretations of Putin's volte-face based upon the persistence of Putin's challenge to international order are insufficient, although not without some explanatory value. Finally, I will present the third explanatory hypothesis; that Putin does not fundamentally have a 'grand plan' and a coherent ideological stance to support his motivations.

[12] Agamben, Giorgio. *The State of Exception*. Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2005.
[13] Prozorov, 2011, p. 35.
[14] Ibid., pp. 26-27.

Chapter One: Responding to Crimea: the threats

This chapter will discuss the implications of contemporary responses to Putin's actions, of which, a large majority are premised on the assumption that he possesses a 'grand plan' to challenge international order and has a coherent motivational ideology to support it. However following Putin's volte-face, it is not at all clear that Putin has challenged international order, and therefore this chapter will include a discussion of why these arguments are problematic.

It is not surprising that there was a chorus of international dissent following the Russian military invasion and subsequent annexation of Crimea. After all, Russia violated sovereign Ukrainian territory in breach of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances. The memorandum clearly decreed that the territorial integrity of Ukraine's borders should be respected.[15] What is immediately noticeable in responses is the return of discussions that Moscow was actively trying to change the rules of the game. As Russell Mead described it, Putin has engaged in a manifestly forceful process to overturn the geopolitical settlement that followed the end of the Cold War.[16] A statement from the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs suggests that further actions instigated by Russia could have "irreparable consequences for international order."[17] The Foreign Ministry of Kazakhstan strongly suggested that there is a distinct and real possibility that "unpredictable consequences at both regional and global levels" will be permitted to occur in the wake of further military and diplomatic destabilisation by Russia and the forces that oppose them.[18] However, how much credence should be given to these kind of statements? They appears even to be self-evident in light of Georgia, Crimea and the resources poured by Putin into his other 'special project' for 2014, the Sochi Winter Olympics.[19]

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15 "Budapest Memorandums on Security Assurances, 1994," *Council on Foreign Relations*, December 5, 1994.

16 Mead, Walter R. 'The Return of Geopolitics', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 3, May 2014, p. 69.

17 Wojciechowski, Marcin. "Statement on the situation in Ukraine", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Republic of Poland*, 1 March 2014.

18 "Statement of the Foreign Ministry of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the situation in Ukraine", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Republic of Kazakhstan*, 3 March 2014.

19 Petersson, Bo. 'Still Embodying the Myth? Russia's Recognition as a Great Power and the Sochi Winter Games', *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 61, No. 1, January-February 2014, p. 31.

Responses can be sub-divided into two main categories. The first is that Putin's geopolitical challenge is grounded in a desire to maximise Russia's strategic position within the 'near abroad'. This places increased pressure back upon NATO, the EU and the United States to respect Russia's sphere of influence, creating a geographic buffer between Russia and her contemporary enemies. What this implies, is not that Russia has re-exposed the condition of the return to history; which is a response to Francis Fukuyama's suggestion that following the 'end of history', there will be no ideological competitors left to liberal democracy that will not become absorbed into the teleological horizon.[20] Or that Putin has fatally challenged the central teleology of liberal thought; the rationalist belief in the availability of a universal Hegelian consensus based upon reason.[21] But that these reactions only seem to confirm within the liberal paradigm the availability *of a delayed version of the end of history,* suggesting the eventual elimination of ideological competitors is determined by the rational process of "perfecting the system."[22] For Alexandre Kojève, the end of history leads to a situation devoid of ideology where men no longer fight. Under a political reading of this thesis, Kojève understood that history ends in a universal homogeneous state where ideologies have given way to a single human truth, which then ends in a tyrannical postmodern rationalism.[23]

The second major response is that Putin now possesses a more coherent motivating ideology – neo-conservatism. This operates within the Russian Federation's increasingly authoritarian 'sovereign democracy', which gives Putin the credence to ensure political and moral stability in the region from the influence of corrupting liberalism. Putin's conservative turn therefore feeds back into an idea of pan-Eurasian solidarity which promotes both regional and internal preponderance. The central thesis of both of these claims is that Russia both actively represses domestically and acts with aggression abroad according to an overriding desire to manage its interests within the formation of a new order centred on Moscow.[24] For the present discussion, I shall now outline the contemporary responses to Putin's actions in Crimea in more detail.

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[20] Kagan, 2008.
[21] Mouffe, Chantal. *On the Political*, London: Routledge, 2005, p. 10.
[22] Wallerstein, Immanuel. *After Liberalism*, New York: The Press, 1995, p. 149.
[23] Drury, Shadia B. *Alexandre Kojève: The Roots of Postmodern Politics*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994, p. 45.
[24] Lucas, *Foreword to the Revised Edition*, p. XV.

1.1 Putin and Crimea: revising unhappy precedents?

There has been a prevalent analytical trend towards Russian actions that suggest the annexation of Crimea is something more than simply an 'opportunistic land grab'.[25] Many responses to Russia's actions in Crimea have been premised on the assumption that that Putin's primary motivation is to challenge the current geopolitical global order established after the end of the Soviet Union.

Following the initial invasion, the United States Secretary of State, John Kerry, has been quoted as saying that "if Russia wants to be a G8 country, it needs to behave like a G8 country."[26] Kerry's argument against Russian legitimacy and the recognition of its actions stems from the assumption that Russia's self-conferred special duties and rights are not in-line with upholding the present international system, and therefore it does not legitimately have a managerial role. Instead, Russia's alternative challenge to order precludes its membership into the club of G8.[27] A part of the G8's attraction, British Prime Minister David Cameron states, is that the "G8 is a group of like-minded countries that share a belief in free enterprise as the best route to growth" and that "the standards we set, the commitments we make, and the steps we take can help solve vital global issues, fire up economies and drive prosperity all over the world."[28] The assumption by Kerry, Cameron and the other G7 heads, is therefore that membership within G8 is a signifier of not only Russian prestige in being a member of an elite group, but also a legitimisation, in Western terms of being a strategic and crucially - a democratic player. However, it is not at all clear what these duties so-conferred are, given the problematisation of Russian actions under such a potentially ambiguous ethical scope. Subsequently, there has been a sense that Moscow's aggression and insistence on its possession of 'special' duties, has signalled a shift within the perceptions of security for states in close vicinity to Russia. This perception has been heightened within those states with existing or

[25] Krastev, Ivan. 'Russian Revisionism', *Foreign Affairs*, March 3 2014.
[26] Dunham, Will. "Kerry Condemns Russia's 'Incredible Act of Aggression' in Ukraine", *Reuters*, March 2 2014.
[27] Bull, Hedley. *The Anarchical Society* 2nd Ed., London: MacMillan, 1977, p. 196.
[28] Horgan, Colin. "The G8 still matters: David Cameron", *iPolitics*, 21 November 2012.

'frozen' disputes with Moscow like Moldova, Georgia and the Baltic States.[29] It is also more prevalent within those states with considerable groupings of ethnic Russians, which, it is argued may allow for the facilitation of increasing ethnic and civil tensions. The heightened tension of these states therefore suggests that they believe their security is now in serious question.[30]

By questioning the strength of actors within the 'near abroad' to resist Putin's perceived strategy of inflammation, some diplomatic suggest that a Pandora's Box of potentialities has been opened. Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaite said that not only was Russia attempting to re-write borders in Europe based upon some distorted idea of post-War Europe, but that this would likely lead to an imperial domino effect – to further the Cold War analogies. Grybauskaite suggested that following Ukraine's partition, Moldova would be challenged, and that would lead to yet more expansion towards Europe and a widening of Russia's sphere of influence.[31] Grybauskaite claimed that Russia is therefore attempting to enforce "new political logics imposed unilaterally" on others.[32] The Rising Powers Initiative noted some media sources have taken to doomsday-type predictions. In India, *The Hindu* forewarned that "no Western bloc may be able to stop the dismemberment of Ukraine and prevent the start of the new Cold War." In Brazil, the personal showdown between US President Barack Obama and Putin was portrayed in one media source as a modern take upon a resonant history of "unhappy precedents." Furthermore, an editorial in the *People's Daily* in China deemed that the conflict would be the "final battlefield in the 'cold war.'"[33]

In a joint statement, the leaders of Visegrád Four countries responded by appealing to the idea that Russian actions would create a "dangerous new reality in Europe" that would threaten peace and security. An explicit part of the Visegrád response, was a coordinated disgust at the real

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[29] Mearshimer's 'freezer theory' suggests smaller scale conflicts that existed between groups and states during the Cold War were kept in-check by the bipolar system. At the conclusion of the Cold War, these limits were removed and therefore the conflicts became more prevalent. For more information see Mearshimer, John. 'Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War', *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 1, Summer 1990.

[30] Vişan, George. 'Turmoil in Ukraine', *Aljazeera Center for Studies*, 20 March 2014, p. 6.

[31] Grybauskaite, Dalia. "Russia trying to redraw the map of Europe", *President of the Republic of Lithuania*, 6 March 2014. [1]

[32] Grybauskaite, Dalia. "Strong EU response to Russia's aggression is needed", *President of the Republic of Lithuania*, 20 March 2014. [2]

[33] "Policy Alert: Rising Powers Respond to Crimea Crisis", *Rising Powers Initiative*, 20 March 2014.

possibility of a military intervention by Russia in the 21st century, akin to their own domestic experiences in 1956, 1968 and 1981 respectively.[34] The Czech Foreign Minister, Lubomír Zaorálek made an explicit connection between the Crimean crisis and the violation of Czech sovereignty during the Prague Spring.[35] Indeed, the image of Russian tanks rolling back across the pages of history has not been lost on some. Fareed Zakaria opined that the Crimean annexation should remind the world that there are two kinds of rulers, those who think about the past and those who think about the future. He claims that Putin's actions are firmly entrenched in a form of historical fetishisation. Zakaria suggests that Crimea's intense association with Russia dating back to the 18th century, rests on the basis that the territory was a hard-fought prize, wrestled from the Ottoman Empire and presented as a jewel in the crown of the Russian Empire.[36] The conflation of Russia and Putin's entrapment within an obsession towards history and geography therefore frames actions in Crimea as revanchist and revisionist. This is a questionable claim, because it conflates the contemporary geostrategic importance of Crimea from historical precedents. Sure, Crimea is the location of Russia's Black Sea Naval base at Sebastopol and it is an important part of Russian military history. But Putin has stated, the Crimea of 2014 is not the Crimea of the 18th-19th centuries. Putin suggests there is little material evidence (in modern military and economic terms) of its worth unless NATO begins to occupy it.[37] Further, one report claims that there is even a Federal plan to develop a prospective Crimean "gambling zone" to attract tourists; a highly sought after imperial prize indeed.[38]

Revisionistic suggestions have been further accentuated by talk that Russia is behaving in an imperial manner a kin to competition between nineteenth century powers. John Kerry suggested that: "you just don't in the 21st century behave in a 19th century fashion by invading another country

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[34] "Statement of the Prime Ministers of the Visegrád Countries on Ukraine", *Prime Minister's Office – Hungary*, 4 March 2014.

[35] "Ukraine: Minister Zaorálek´s Statement on the Russian Stance", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic*, 1 March 2014.

[36] Zakaria, Fareed. "Looking Back in Anger", *Time*, Vol. 183, No. 10, 17 March 2014, p. 20.

[37] "Putin: We do not fear NATO enlargement", *Interfax*, 17 April 2014.

[38] Stolyarova, Galina. 'Russian Unorthodox: Putin's Gamble in Crimea', *Transitions Online*, Online issue 4/29, 24 April 2014, p. 1.

on a completely trumped up pre-text" and that it was a "terrible act of aggression."[39] Kerry's remarks about the backwards-facing return-to-history type thinking of Putin and Sergei Lavrov, is remarkably similar to comments made by the Estonian President Toomas Ilves in 2008 after Russia's invasion of Georgia and pronouncement of South Ossetian independence. In 2008, Ilves suggested that everything arranged and assumed in the security of Europe was hitherto contingent upon the premise that Russia would not engage in aggression towards it. Ilves added, that Russia was acting in a 19th century manner in a 21st century post-modern society.[40] David M. Smick stated that the world, "after all, is returning to the late nineteenth century. In today's new Wild West of disorder and unpredictability, there is no Sheriff Wyatt Earp on the scene. Case in point: Russia annexes Crimea. The potential for Putin copy-catting worldwide is enormous."[41]

The primary contention of these analyses is that Russia has descended into the status of a rogue state; a bandit who recognises lawlessness is the condition that the world now operates within. Thus, there appears to be a pyrrhic sense that Fukuyama's 'end of history' can only be considered a brief aberration following the collapse of the Soviet Union and that we have returned to an era of zero-sum confrontation.

1.2 Rogues and the Russian challenge

Even from within avowed Russian allies, there is a strong trend towards understanding Putin's actions as significant within a wider strategic context. Syrian President Bashir al-Assad expressed his unconditional support and solidarity for the Russian President. The Syrian state-run SANA news agency reported on March 6 that Assad "reiterated Syria's support to President Putin's rational approach, which favors peace and seeks to establish a global system that supports stability and

[39] Dunham, 2014.
[40] Wagstyl, S. et al., 'Sphere of Intolerance', *Financial Times*, 3 September 2008.
[41] Smick, David M. 'Welcome to the Late Nineteenth Century', *The International Economy*, Winter 2014, p. 6.

combats extremism and terrorism."[42] Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro further suggested that the de-facto authorities in Kiev threatened the stability of the entire region; effectively endorsing Russia's subsequent measures.[43]

A certain element of reflexivity is therefore to be expected from regimes that are diplomatically more closely aligned with Moscow. Thus, while responses from Russian allies continue to propagate the idea the Russia has a civilising mission, this is congruent with some of the rhetoric emerging from key policy actors within the Russian government. In a speech made prior to his volte-face, Putin stated that the necessity in securing Crimea was in fact, a strategic imperative for Russia and Russia only, for the "area should be under strong, stable dominion, which, in fact, can only be Russian."[44] Within Putin's inner diplomatic circle, this is symptomatic of a wider trend to justify actions in Crimea as an essential element of regional policing, which suggests the locus of regional stability should be premised around Moscow. The head of the Russian Military Forces, Sergei Shoigu was recently quoted as saying that external actors in Europe and the United States "cannot stomach the formation of new centers of power."[45] This kind of rhetoric suggests there is a fundamental hegemonic struggle between two opposing projects which can never be rationalised. Chantal Mouffe argues that this form of antagonism fundamentally questions the set of regulatory institutions in which procedures are managed by adversaries.[46] Thus, within such a framework, there is a pervasive sense of division between the 'new' locus and those in opposition around other or former strategic centres.

This can be further elucidated with reference to Ernesto Laclau's concept of the 'chain of equivalences'. Laclau states that "in a relation of equivalence, each element of the chain functions as a symbol of negativity as such." Thus, each political subject faces equivalent threats to its identity

[42] Allafi, F. ' President al-Assad expresses Syria's solidarity with Russian efforts to restore security and stability to friendly Ukraine', *Syrian Arab News Agency*, 6 March 2014.
[43] "Policy Alert: Rising Powers Respond to Crimea Crisis", *Rising Powers Initiative*, 20 March 2014.
[44] Ibid.
[45] "West's expansion to the east ruins historic chance at unification – Lavrov", *Russia Today*, 23 May 2014.
[46] Mouffe, 2005, p. 21.

that exist along continuum.[47] What this means for our contemporary response, is that Russian policy elites construct an oppositional position based upon the existence of a chain that frames each link as a part of the antagonistic model. Therefore, Ukraine's movement west is tied in-line with the EU, NATO and the United States (US). So for Russia, the approval and 'success' of actions in Crimea is seen to oppose not just Crimean opposition, but also the claims of legitimacy extending from Kiev, through Brussels and into Washington.[48] The logic of opposition employed by Moscow and supported by some external diplomatic voices towards the inadmissibility of Ukraine's courting of NATO, constructs a tense and essentially problematic choice for oppositional external actors. Either Ukraine's movement west leads towards the inevitability of an annexation, or movement towards Russia would allow for the maintenance of Ukrainian territoriality; but would necessitate a raise in Russian preponderance which would be seen as unpalatable by the Kiev-Washington nexus.[49]

Subsequently statements like "'where in Putin's mind, does Russia end?' The answer is that it ends where the U.S. begins" from Andrey Kurkov, continue to extend and promulgate the logic that the Russia-Ukraine nexus is grounded in a discursive chain with no logical break or gap, unless that gap is created forcefully by removing links.[50] This chain has been re-enforced by the rhetoric of Russian policy elites, and further entrenched through Russian allies. Therefore, external analyses are more likely to assume that the equivalences are *basic*; more easily co-opted by Russian political elites for some kind of instrumental political, social or economic gain. However, crucially, these analyses are more easily mobilised in opposition towards Russia according to the premise that the world has returned to an era of great power antagonism.

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47 Laclau, Ernest. *Emancipation(s)*, London and New York: Verso, 2007, p. 14, in Makarychev, Andrey. 'Russia and NATO after the Georgian War: Re-Actualizing the Great Power Management Prospects', in *The Great Power (mis)Management: The Russian-Georgian War and its Implications for Global Political Order*. Astrov, Alexander (ed)., Ashgate, 2011, p. 70.

48 Makarychev, pp. 70-71.

49 Ibid., p. 71.

50 Kurkov, Andrey. 'Why Putin Won't Hold Crimea', *Time International (Atlantic Edition)*, Vol. 183, No. 10, 17 March 2014, p. 15.

1.3 Putin's newfound ideology: back to the future

I shall now move on to the second substantive trend in responses to Crimea, Putin's possession of a more coherent ideology of neo-conservatism which informs his grand challenge to global order.

It is not new to suggest that Russia has been possessive of a self-conferred special and unique status within the world. Russian nationalists decried the degradation of the state under the liberalisation of Yeltsin, suggesting that Russians should begin to distance themselves from 'dangerous' Europe which fastidiously maintained a will to reach the limits of everything.[51] The alleged incompatibility between Russia and Europe stems from the perception of diverging trajectories of development. This incompatibility is a starting point for many analyses on contemporary Russia, and presents a method of analysing Russian actions in binary ideological terms.[52] The key contention in this discourse is the divergence between Russian and European ideals of sovereignty. Russia is seen to exist largely within the Westphalian and Schmittian image of 'sovereign democracy' which is often characterised in contemporary analyses as state-centric and authoritarian.[53] With this in mind, what has made interpreting Russian actions for external actors more problematic is that the justifications of humanitarianism used in both Georgia and Ukraine rest on discourses promulgated by former and existing great powers of liberal interventionism. As Sergei Prozorov argues, using this justification for Russia has been fundamentally "weakened by a lack of credibility due to the gap between the liberal foundations of the discourse and the increasingly illiberal character of Russia's political regime."[54] The confusion and mistrust of Russia stems from the reading of the end of history thesis which takes into consideration Russia's domestic illiberal political trends and the societal disengagement which has suspended the "performative

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51 Neumann, Iver B. *Russia and the Idea of Europe*, London: Routledge, 1996, p. 191.

52 Kononenko, Vadim. 'Boundaries of Sovereignty, Frontiers of Integration: Rethinking "Conflict" between Russia and the EU', in Ted Hopf, ed., *Russia's European Choice*, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2008, p. 199.

53 Medvedev, Sergei. 'The Stalemate in EU-Russia Relations: Between "Sovereignty and "Europeanization', in Ted Hopf, ed., *Russia's European Choice*, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2008 p. 218.

54 Prozorov, 2011, p. 35.

efficacy of all ideological maxims and all versions of historical tasks and missions."[55]

Despite this, ideology has not disappeared from contemporary reactions to Crimea. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of South Ossetia stated that the situation in Ukraine was dire and the need for intervention by Russia was essential for regional peace and stability.

> the Verkhovna Rada [Supreme Council] of Ukraine is passing resolutions that are limiting rights of language minorities and prohibiting unwanted political parties, gross interference into the ecclesiastical affairs and establishment of nazi dictatorship is observed. In my opinion the country is on a verge of economic and humanitarian catastrophe that will hurt the entire European continent [sic].[56]

It would be simple to dismiss these claims as the ramblings of a pro-Putin acolyte. However it is an image of Putin's motivations that has become increasingly prevalent of late. The protection of ethnic Russians from the threats posed by 'extremist' elements within the Ukrainian far-right such as the Right Sektor, is founded upon Moscow's interpretation of an ethical and moral duty to reinstate the rule of law as quickly as possible.[57] The concrete risk towards the safety and recognition of ethnic Russians within the instability of contemporary Ukrainian politics is therefore presented as a humanitarian ethical duty. Given the tenuous nature of threats to Russians in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, it is tempting to assume Russia's actions were largely pre-emptive or framed within a wider context that permits further action. The implications of pre-emption are quite important. Pre-emption suggests a degree of planning for situations which require methodical action.

In some responses to Putin's invasion, it has been argued that Putin's actions have been pre-emptively motivated by an increasingly coherent ideology of neo-conservatism which affords him a guideline for action. The main crux of these claims is that Putin is now more prepared to challenge the legal and moral norms of Europe and the West according to his ideological stance.[58] Melik Kaylan suggests that Putin's actions in Crimea are a further logical extension of his development of a more cohesive neo-conservatism that could be used against the liberal development of proxies in

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55 Prozorov, 2011, p. 36.
56 "Commentary of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of South Ossetia", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Republic of South Ossetia*, 5 March 2014.
57 Vişan, p. 3.
58 Krastev, 2014.

the region.[59] Anton Barbashin and Hannah Thoburn argue Putin's motivations extend from a long tradition of Russian imperial conservatism and in particular, includes elements of Alexander Dugin's neo-Eurasianism.[60] Barbashin and Thoburn claim Putin's conservatism is 'authoritarian' in essence as it places ecclesiastical values and public submission above individualism; more recently, they claim it has also become expansionist.[61] The limits placed upon individualistic freedoms in Russia, a traditional understanding of family, general intolerance of homosexuality and the centrality of the Russian Orthodox Church are considered to be primary aspects of a great Russian state revival.[62] The uniqueness ascribed to Russia, contains an element of what Iver Neumann considers to be a "temporal uniqueness" suggesting that Moscow is the head of a living church, which remains present in time.[63] Within an analysis of Putin's renewed interest in ideas, Putin's actions in Crimea have therefore come to represent a self-fulfilling ideal of Putin as the "last bastion of order and traditional values."[64] Ecclesiastical concerns have been present in Russian domestic policy for some time, and has been documented recently through the ongoing saga over the feminist punk band, Pussy Riot. The trend towards social and moral policing within Russia appears to confirm some humanitarian motivations within Russian foreign policy. In this sense, humanitarianism implies the interpretation that upholding a moral or ethical duty overrides other institutional duties.[65] This leads to the suggestion that judgements premised on moral decisions legitimate continuous social and moral regulation, and can be co-opted into further expansionist ideologies.[66]

The claim that Russia's reversion to prestige is tinged with Cold War overtones, is reminiscent of competition between great powers competing for honour, assertiveness and the moral

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59 Kaylan, p. 10.

60 Alexander Dugin's 'Neo-Eurasianism' (as differentiated from classical Eurasianism, by its insistence on a broader definition of Eurasia, inclusion of the US as an enemy and racism towards Jews) suggests that civilisations tend to prosper when they maintain a 'pure' approach and remain within their own social structure. It is thus, not revolutionary but conservative. For more information see: Laurelle, Marlène. *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire*, Mischa Gabowitsch, trans., Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008.

61 Barbashin, Anton and Thoburn, Hannah. 'Putin's Brain: Alexander Dugin and the Philosophy Behind Putin's Invasion of Crimea', *Foreign Affairs*, 31 March 2014.

62 Ibid.

63 Neumann, p. 7.

64 Krastev, 2014.

65 Waltzer, Michael. *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, New York: BasicBooks, 1977, p. 106.

66 Ibid., pp. 106-107.

bragging rights. Andrei Tsygankov suggests that claims to prestige that develop within the desire for recognition are fundamentally based on feelings of humiliation.[67] Within Putin's conservatism, claims that Russia possesses a special moral code therefore asserts and image of Russian competence and legitimacy. Thus, contemporary responses strongly infer that Russia is confirming its historical prestige within the region; demonstrating to others that it is no longer a morally and spiritually corrupt oligarchic state.[68] Crucially, these analyses also suggest Putin has the material ability to enforce his alternative vision, and therefore becomes a viable threat.

1.4 Problematising the existence of a "grand strategy"

Subsequently, both trends within contemporary responses suggest that Putin's main interest is in the changing of global order. However, the primary assumption that there has been a return to history is problematic. In recognising an element of continuity between historical precedents, these claims do not recognise elements of discontinuity between the present Putin government and those discourses they conflate. Thus, these responses tend to privilege the assumption that Putin's challenge to political order is 'just another' illiberal problem that will be overcome in due time. But what is to be overcome has not yet been made clear. This is largely driven by the conceptual problem of being stuck with the framework of conflating liberal democracy with the teleology of history, and subsequently viewing any alternatives in zero-sum terms.

Viatcheslav Mozorov argues that from a liberal perspective, the elements of continuity and familiarity within thought on Russia's authoritarianism therefore privileges the idea that "current western hegemony relies on one global relational network of meaning, which defines the West as a unified democratizing actor."[69] Tim Dunne suggests the ascription of a present end-state is an

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[67] Tsygankov, Andrei P. *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin: Honor in International Relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 254-255.
[68] Ibid., p. 253.
[69] Mozorov, Viatcheslav. 'Sovereignty and Democracy in Contemporary Russia.' *Journal of International Relations and Development*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2008, p. 171.

increasingly common dual error inherent in liberal thought. Dunne argues that equating modernity with Westernisation and Westernisation with liberalism considerably skews interpretations of alternative means of understanding the augmentation of global order.[70] Thus, responses that assume Russia's antagonism is a direct attempt to change global order tend also to ignore potential sources of discontinuity within Russian policy.[71] As I will suggest, sources of discontinuity derive from a misinterpretation of Putin's motivations and the subsequent misapplication of policies which are premised upon the existence of Russia's image of alternative order.

The implications of over-estimating the Russian threat is potentially very significant. Indeed, the US and the EU have already enforced economic sanctions on Russian elites associated with the Putin government. The impact of these sanctions and international condemnation have been immediately felt, and not just by those individuals and companies targeted:

> after the start of Russia's intervention in Crimea, on 3 March, the Central Bank (of Russia) raised its benchmark interest rate to 7.0 per cent from 5.5 per cent (the first change in 17 months), referring to the need to address risks to inflation and financial stability arising from increased financial market volatility. It raised the rate again in late April, to 7.5 per cent.[72]

The escalation of threats between Russia and NATO are dependent on the validity of the assumption that Putin is both capable and willing to enforce his image of order. If we follow these assumptions and attribute 'grand' motives, then further policy implications would have to be based on indeterminate judgements towards the limits of Russian action. These would be not only implausible under these responses, but involve the potential for a return to dangerous zero-sum thinking. Putin himself stated in 2007 that the intensification of conflicts leads to situations where "no-one feels secure" because "no-one can find refuge behind the stronghold of the international law."[73] Furthermore, while Putin, Lavrov and Russian deputy Prime Minister Dmitri Rozogin have consistently stated publically that they do not fear NATO enlargement, Putin's sometimes jovial

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[70] Dunne, Tim. 'The Liberal Order and the Modern Project', in *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 3, 2010, p. 537.

[71] Dannreuther, Roland. 'Russia and the Middle East: A Cold War Paradigm?', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 64, No. 3, May 2012, p. 544.

[72] "Prospects for Individual Economies", *National Institute Economic Review*, No. 228, May 2014, p. F28.

[73] Putin, Vladimir. "Speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy", *President of Russia*, 10 February, 2007.

responses towards tense situations hints at the potential further that escalation could bring. In response to a remark that NATO has been creating a suffocating feeling towards Russia, Putin quipped that "we can suffocate them ourselves, so don't be afraid."[74] While this may be a bluff, or at least hiding behind an assumption of caution, Putin's actions are indeed difficult to predict.

Within the events that are currently unfolding, John Ikenberry argues that it is possible to misread the logic and character of the existing world order in which Putin is allegedly attempting to challenge. Ikenberry suggests that the current order is more stable and expansive than those who swear upon the demise of the liberal project. Russia is not therefore a full-scale revisionist power and is devoid of a 'master' geopolitical strategy.[75] It should come as no surprise writes Ikenberry, that Russia is not seriously entertaining the thought of changing the status-quo because it has become deeply integrated within the existing international order. It is a member of the United Nations Security Council and maintains its veto rights; it is also a member of the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the G20.[76] Would it not therefore be redundant to consider Russia as anything other than an insider within the system that it is allegedly attempting to overthrow? This questions why indeed Putin and his regime would want to significantly challenge the existing order and potentially threaten what Russia already is privileged to. The restraints of the liberal system therefore confer a measure of stability due to the overwhelming status of democratic states in existence which place considerable pressures on larger powers to act appropriately.[77]

For certain, the kind of constraints that liberals like Ikenberry suggest involve a devaluing of realist balancing, but in practice, their application points towards a similar trend of relative security and stability. In a March 13 opinion piece published in the New York Times entitled *Getting Ukraine Wrong*, John Mearshimer argues that:

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74 "Putin: We do not fear NATO enlargement", *Interfax*, 17 April 2014.
75 Ikenberry, John G. 'The Illusion of Geopolitics', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93. No. 3, May 2014, p. 80.
76 Ibid.
77 Astrov, Alexander. 'Great Power Management Without Great Powers? The Russian-Georgian War of 2008 and Global Police/Political Order, *The Great Power (mis)Management: The Russian-Georgian War and its Implications for Global Political Order*. Astrov, Alexander (ed)., Ashgate, 2011, p. 5.

> Mr. Putin's view is understandable. Because there is no world government to protect states from one another, major powers are acutely sensitive to threats — especially near their borders — and they sometimes act ruthlessly to address potential dangers. International law and human rights concerns take a back seat when vital security issues are at stake.[78]

Mearshimer's primary assumption is that Russia acts in accordance with strategic imperatives to ensure territorial integrity within a balance of threat situation. Such an analysis leads to the conclusion that Russia is first a rational actor who acts to protect its interests from external antagonism. For Mearshimer, Putin would not need a grand strategy in order to act aggressively. Because deterrence towards Crimea has obviously not worked he further argues, "this can lead aggressors to conclude falsely that they can coerce others by bluffing war, or even achieve outright victory on the battlefield."[79] Mearshimer argues a multipolar post-Cold War Europe promotes conflict because the restraints of the bi-polar system have been removed. Thus, multipolar dyads degenerate into a system of anarchy with no higher power, body or institution to regulate actions between states.[80]

The security threat towards Russia posed by NATO expansion seems to affirm Mearshimer's suggestions. However, this point requires a caveat. On April 17, Putin stated that while he did not fear NATO expansion, it was within foreseeable and reasonable limits to secure Russian military and strategic positions in the region. Putin said, "whenever the infrastructure of a military bloc is moving towards our borders we have certain fears and questions. We have to take some steps in return. This is also true and no one can deny this to us."[81] If we assume that Putin is reacting authentically in these claims, then this problematises the existence of his grand strategy. If these responses and balancing take place out of some immediate pressures, then it is more difficult to argue these tensions are a part of a wider strategy to challenge order. If anything, Putin's balancing of NATO reconfirms the existence of institutional imperatives to prevent larger scale conflicts

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78 Mearshimer, John. 'Getting Ukraine Wrong', Op. Ed., *New York Times*, 13 March 2014.
79 Mearshimer, John. 'Why We Will Soon Miss The Cold War', *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 266, No. 2, August 1990, p. 37. [2]
80 Mearshimer, John. 'Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War', *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 1, Summer 1990, p. 12. [1]
81 "Putin: We do not fear NATO enlargement", *Interfax*, 17 April 2014.

between actors. This kind of technical crisis management does not exclude the possibility of conflict occurring, but universalises regulations upon state action, crucially leaving managerial roles within regional constructs for sovereigns with sufficient power to enforce moderation; but not to challenge the overall consensus.[82]

Within initial responses, some degree of confusion is to be expected. No-one can be certain of what an actor is attempting to do. However, these current analyses, which rely on a rather linear reading of Putin's agency have been problematised by his concessions towards stability in Ukraine. What Putin's volte-face has shown, even without further analysis, is that there is the potential that more is at play than a simple reductionism, or balancing of imperatives.

[82] Makarychev, p. 76.

Chapter Two: Exploring Putin's volte-face

Indeed, the suggestions that Putin was forming a structured plan to challenge international order in the lead up to, and during the annexation of Crimea are not without some attraction. However, his volte-face has cast some doubt upon this end. If reactions to Russian actions were being overcome with a doomsday-type hysteria and potentially over-playing or misreading Putin's abilities and intentions, where does that leave our analysis? I will now present two alternative accounts of Putin's actions in light of his policy volte-face. Both of the following accounts are premised on the assumption that Putin maintains his 'grand strategy' and has an ideology to mobilise his plan despite the softening of his policy rhetoric. Taking these claims seriously under contemporary analyses, it is possible that Putin's volte-face could be a calculated bluff within a wider continuation of his existing strategy. It is also possible that the sanctions imposed by Western actors upon Russian political and economic elites are having serious repercussions. They will be both analysed in turn.

2.1 Putin's bluff

Putin's volte-face can be analysed within a wider image of Russian foreign policy as an attempt to further ferment discord and destabilise post-Soviet states between 'doves' and 'hawks'.[83] Under this interpretation, it is possible to argue that Putin is attempting to marginalise and weaken states who have strongly condemned Russian actions in Crimea. Those states calling for tough, immediate economic and diplomatic sanctions are therefore less likely to pursue harsher policies towards Russia. Furthermore, Putin's delaying tactics can be interpreted as an attempt to fracture the EU and NATO. By exacerbating internal divisions between states that have been more hesitant to admonish Moscow, Russia can undermine the constitution of Europe's already weakened coherence.[84]

[83] Traynor, Ian. "Ukraine crisis: Vladimir Putin has caught the west napping again", *The Guardian*, 8 May 2014.
[84] Pere, Paertel-Peeter. 'On the Finlandization of Europe', *EU Observer*, 8 May 2014.

Nicholas Redman argues that by reducing the impetus of the EU's coordination over the crisis, Moscow may be further able to capitalise upon the discord already present inside the EU.[85] Putin's conciliatory stance makes it more difficult for external actors to justify and legitimise more extensive sanctions against Russia as there is a perception that sanctions may cause an unwarranted escalation of threat. This also potentially leads towards renewed 'Finlandization'[86] of Europe, as smaller states attempt to maintain a "degree of sovereignty" over an actor they cannot effectively influence, or in light of Putin's policy turn, perhaps predict.[87]

Because Putin's material gains in Crimea are tangible and he has documented his willingness to use force, then it is plausible according to the balance of threat, that smaller states will be attracted to Russia's strength. Stephen Walt's theory argues that weaker states will therefore 'bandwagon' and ally with who they perceive to be the dominant, but more importantly, the primary *threatening* actor.[88] There are two main motivations for weaker actors in such situations; they can either share in the gains of the threatening actor, or act to simply appease them.[89] In the case of Putin's volte-face, he may be aware that continuing to act with aggression towards post-Soviet states is likely to lead to a situation where proximate states will seek refuge with a protective alliance like NATO. This conditions a pragmatic response from external states towards Russia's foreign policy, whereby states will default towards a role that fits within the wider policy structure of their environment. However, states are constrained within their roles by institutional and cultural sources of value.[90] Thus, Putin may be aware that the small states who have tended to ally with him, can be manipulated. This remains a dangerous and potentially unsettling game. In mobilising rhetoric towards traditional social and economic values that will resonate with Europe's considerable right-

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85 Redman, Nicholas. 'Russia's Breaking Point', *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol. 56, No. 2, 2014, p. 241.

86 Where small states justify their alliance to larger powers based on special vulnerabilities.

87 Aalto, Pami. 'Pragmatic Foreign Policy: Managing Power Differentials in the Wider European Society of Stats', in *The Great Power (mis)Management: The Russian-Georgian War and its Implications for Global Political Order*. Astrov, Alexander (ed)., Ashgate, 2011, p. 122.

88 Walt, Stephen M. 'Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power', *International Security*, Vol. 9, No. 4, Spring 1985, p. 7.

89 Ibid., pp. 7-8.

90 Holsti, K.J. 'National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy', *International Studies Quarterly*, Vo1. 14, No. 3, 1970, p. 239.

wing bloc, Putin must be careful not to alienate political actors within states partial to him by empowering radical nationalist or pro-Russian groups. This makes choices for European governments reliant on careful judgements of the offensive intentions of Russia and the domestic threats they face.[91]

One salient example is the Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán. Orbán has made several policy turns in the last few year based upon complex judgements of Hungary's worth and relative position between Russia and the EU. Hungary's diplomatic and economic links with Russia since 2008 had been steadily developing, culminating in 2013 with the signing of an agreement with Russia build two nuclear powered reactors in Paks, Central Hungary.[92] Orbán was slow to condemn Russian actions in Crimea, but in the wake of increasing connections between Moscow's promotion of nationalism and conservative values popular with Europe's far-right (including Hungary's Jobbik party), he has instead taken to defending the values of the EU.[93]

> Orbán can be seen as a classic balancer, willing to bow neither to the West nor to Russia but seeking to create room to maneuver around both. Hungary is important to Russia, because it is a key stop on the South Stream pipeline project that Russia is constructing to bypass Ukraine and bring Russian gas under the Black Sea to Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Italy, and Serbia.[94]

One potential explanation of Putin's volte-face extending from this response, is that Putin cannot afford to lose the economic linkages of states who have become wary of Russia's subversive recourse towards nationalism and conservative social values, and therefore Putin tends to act with more caution without discarding his plan. The importance of European complicity towards Moscow becomes more obvious when we consider the potential shift in Russian foreign policy from hegemony towards domination. Hedley Bull suggests that perception of influence will typically take three forms. The first is primacy; a peaceful but concrete preponderance without force or the threat of force. The second is hegemony, which involves the non-habitual threat or use of limited force

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91 Walt, p. 12.
92 Orenstein, Mitchell and Krekó, Péter. 'A Russian Spy in Brussels? The Case of "KGBéla" - and What It Means for Europe', *Foreign Affairs*, 29 May 2014.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.

against other states according to overriding principles. The third is dominance; a more explicit habitual use of force against neighbouring states that stops short of actually forming an imperial sovereign relationship.[95] By bluffing and letting Eastern Europe fracture itself further, Putin's more 'restrained' style of hegemony does not then necessarily need to develop into a concrete relationship of dominance. If this process does occur, and Russia becomes dominant it may be ruinous towards Russia's diplomacy with more typically relaxed European partners like Slovakia, who remains almost entirely dependent on Russian gas supplied through pipelines traversing Ukraine.[96]

In order to head off more intense international condemnation, Putin may also be biding his time to see what develops in the fractious regions of Eastern Ukraine. Russia's limited use of force in the first instance against the Ukrainian forces stationed in Crimea is suggestive that Putin is aware that escalation is not something he can afford. While it was never in doubt that Russia was behind the invasion, the insignia-less invasion force could be a concerted effort to avoid "being labelled as the aggressor."[97] By diverting attention away from his wider plan, and towards a reduction in aggression, it is therefore possible that Putin will not need to act in a more overt manner to destabilise Ukraine and Europe allowing Moscow to introduce "a new, successful type of warfare."[98]

Subsequently, Robert Kaplan suggests that Putin is not likely to instigate further military or large scale action in Eastern Ukraine in a conventional way. Putin will "send in secessionists, instigate disturbances, probe the frontier with Russian troops and in other ways use the porous border with Ukraine to undermine."[99] Thus, it is not necessary for Putin to completely eschew other international actors, for he feels confident that the subversive measures he maintains will therefore be sufficient to dissolve any resistance towards Moscow's hegemony within Ukraine and especially in the Eastern regions in close geographic proximity to Russia.

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95 Bull, pp. 207-209.

96 Duleba, Alexander. 'Slovakia's Relations with Russia and Eastern Neighbours', in Gabor Foti and Zsuzsa Ludvig, eds., *EU-Russian relations and the Eastern Partnership – Central-East European Member-State Interests and Positions*, Budapest: HAS Institute for World Economics, 2009, p. 28.

97 Vişan, p. 4.

98 Paertel-Peeter, 2014.

99 Kaplan, 2014.

2.2 Do the sanctions bite?

If we continue to follow the broad analysis that Putin's volte-face has not compromised the existence of his grand strategy, then it would be wise to include an analysis of whether or not the economic sanctions imposed upon Russia have influenced his concessions. It is possible that Putin's policy volte-face is indicative of the effectiveness of considerable economic pressures and constraints placed upon Russian political, military and economic elites by external sanctions from multiple actors including the US, Canada and the EU.

Tom Keatinge suggests that in the absence of viable military threats from the West, economic sanctions may indeed be more ruinous to Putin's grand plan than some may suggest. Keatinge states that no international actors seriously expects "the outside world to respond to Russia's actions in Ukraine with violence and so, perhaps for the first time, sanctions have been left on their own."[100] In this situation, the lack of a threat posed by military action against Russia, indicates the potential for a "new era of financial warfare."[101] This appears to suggest that while great power management was incapable of stopping the initial invasion of Crimea, Russia's existing integration within the international economic and financial system may indeed be contributing to Putin's softened stance. If the sanctions were imposed as a means to secure the international order, under Bull's conception of great power management, there has been an attempt by international actors at policing Russia under the pretext of the maintenance of an order based on security.[102] If the threat of military force from NATO and the US is beyond current comprehension and would only lead to divisiveness, then economic sanctions may indeed be a plausible means of policing Russia.

Despite this, it is not at all clear how diplomatic or economic sanctions would actually hurt Russian interests.[103] The contention that Russia has been significantly damaged by the sanctions signifies within the that states are not simply engaged in a antagonistic relationship, where justice

[100] Keatinge, Tom. 'Sanctions Score: How the West Can Still Beat Putin', *Foreign Affairs*, 30 March 2014.
[101] Ibid, 2014.
[102] Makarychev, pp. 62-63.
[103] Redman, p. 239.

and retribution abound. But they are limited in their conflicts by common rules and institutions. This implies that there is an acceptance of the general requirements of coexistence and cooperation within a society of states that is not explicitly formed as a system.[104] Thus, while Putin may be indeed attempting to challenge the international order with his own vision, Russia nonetheless is entrenched within a system of management which is based on the maintenance of the current order.[105] This does not then challenge Putin's vision, rather his ability act in order to break through the sanctions which allegedly have restricted his agency. Russia's weak counter sanctions against Canadian policy makers further suggests Russia's position inside the institutional framework is perhaps more entrenched than some analyses suggest.[106]

From the perspective of a cost-benefit rationale, Putin's actions were fraught with risk. Crimea itself contains no great economic panacea – no large deposits oil, productive industry and no useful minerals. And thus, if the sanctions have taken hold, Moscow will have to shoulder the cost of what it has seized with seemingly little chance to recover the cost, at least in the short to medium term.[107] Subsequently, it is possible that the events in Crimea have negatively impacted upon the Russian economy by denting confidence for Russia's long term growth model.[108] There is also the potential that if the sanctions do critically cause damage, then the Russian economy could to be put into a "crisis mode" in order to uphold macroeconomic stability. In essence, the management of short term issues will take precedence over longer term stability.[109] The institutional reliance upon the international banking system and Russia's capital association with the West will therefore be placed under serious duress. Furthermore, sanctions on Russia's energy industry can even be considered unnecessary due to the continued awareness for the need to diversify global oil reserves, as well as the US and the EU's strategy to reduce demand from Russia.[110]

However, how much of an effect will the sanctions have? It is not sufficient to argue that

[104] Bull, pp. 25-26.
[105] Makarychev, p. 63.
[106] Razumovskaya, Olga. "Russia Places Travel Sanctions Against Canada", The Wall Street Journal, 24 March 2014.
[107] Kurkov, p. 15.
[108] "Russian Economic Report 31: Confidence Crisis Exposes Economic Weakness", *The World Bank*, 26 March 2014.
[109] Keatinge, 2014.
[110] Ibid.

economic sanctions placed upon Russian elites are enough to force Putin to make a significant about-face. While indeed Russia's economy has been weakened of late, Russia still maintains a wealth of natural resources. It also maintains the ability to manipulate the energy market within Europe, of which many NATO and EU states remain largely dependent on Russian gas. Fyodor Lukyano also has suggested that "there is no previous experience of enacting effective sanctions against a nuclear superpower... who retains influence all over the world."[111] Indeed, Russia has not stopped attempting to diversify its economic position, only just recently concluding a $US400-billion dollar gas deal with China in the wake of the sanctions.[112] It is also possible that while Putin may indeed be feeling the effects of the sanctions, this too could be a part of a calculated bluff to further deflect attention away from his ability to use his preponderance in energy towards downstream states.

In sum, contemporary interpretations that suggest Putin is bluffing and that the economic sanctions placed upon Russia and Russian elites are working run into considerable issues. First it potentially over-estimates both the fractious nature of the EU; but also that the sanctions levied against key actors are anything other than symbolic. It should not be assumed that Putin's policy concessions denote either weakness or strength, but rather that multiple factors may indeed be at work. From here, it is not at all clear, if Putin is bluffing and desires further expansion, where indeed this would take place. Now that the Ukrainian government has been allowed to re-form (to some degree) further actions would be catastrophic. It is even more daunting to consider Russian actions against a NATO member, most likely because the logistics would potentially cripple Moscow. Russia domestically is not the monolithic power bloc that is assumed under a majority of current responses, and neither is Putin the unrivalled strongman. Indeed, the charges of backwards-thinking authoritarianism have been heightened by the recent international media exposure over contentious human rights issues within Russia. Thus, it is not at all clear that Russia is a well ordered police state with the means to repress. Further zero-sum framing of Russian actions by the

[111] "Policy Alert: Rising Powers Respond to Crimea Crisis", *Rising Powers Initiative*, 20 March 2014.
[112] Solomon, Lawrence. "Russia-China gas deal a good deal for the world", *Financial Post*, 29 May 2014.

West is only going to entrench and strengthen the idea that Putin's conservatism is a real and present threat. Thus, by making a pariah out of Russia, external actors are potentially ignoring the importance of the maintenance of Russia's internal stability, which I argue that Putin strongly desires and is in a way, bound towards in the following chapter.[113]

[113] Taylor, 2014.

Chapter Three: Putin's management of the domestic Russian order

How then, can we alternatively explain Putin's actions based upon the assumption that he does not possess a grand plan to challenge global order and a motivating ideology to support it? It is not devoid of explanatory potential to assume that following his volte-face, Putin does not really care about either Ukraine, or challenging the post-Soviet order and seeks to further entrench his position within the status quo. In this chapter I will therefore present an alternative image of Putin's actions in Crimea based upon this hypothesis.

Peter Rutland states that if we shelve the idea of Russia's grand strategy, maybe we can find a more mundane explanation for Russian behaviour. He suggests that "As things were falling apart in Kyiv, Putin had to be shown to be doing something – anything – even if it did not make much sense from the point of view of Russia's national interests."[114] While this image is no help in elucidating what Russian national interests actually are, it does raise an interesting point. The retractions made by Putin hints at the possibility that Russia is not the over-zealous steamroller of states some may suggest. It may therefore be wise to explore the idea that 'making sense' of Putin's actions requires a greater understanding of the nature of post-communist politics in Russia.[115] So, what then are the implications if Putin does not have a 'grand strategy' to challenge international order and a coherent ideology to enforce it? I will not suggest that Putin does not have *any* kind of plan or motivation, for that would be a claim which cannot be substantiated at this point. Rather, that any plans and motivations he maintains can be more appropriately viewed as orientated towards the maintenance of the domestic stabilisation of *bespredel*. This entails no reliable expansionist foreign policy; but the defence of the very possibility of suspending the post-Soviet order and exporting the domestic vision of management of *anomie*.

To analyse this hypothesis, I will suggest that Putin's recent policy concessions towards Ukraine have provided a glimpse into the Putin's managerial aversion towards *anomie.* I will

[114] Rutland, p. 3.
[115] Tsygankov, p. 253.

elaborate further upon Sergei Prozorov's contention that Russian post-communist politics exists in within the condition of a timeless state, where, through Giorgio Agamben's interpretation of the 'end of history' as messianic time, has rendered historicism obsolete. This in turn, characterises the nature of post-Soviet politics as the management of the state of exception by the management of the exception itself.[116] However, to substantiate this claim, it is necessary to grasp how Putin's management of this order can be extended without his regime being consumed within the nature of the system itself. Assuming Putin can manage this paradox, it is possible to therefore suggest that Putin's volte-face is based upon the most pragmatic series of calculations – but orientated at his own regime.[117] To observe this, I will to analyse some of Putin's recent foreign policies to grasp a more convincing understanding of Russia's current foreign policies in light of Crimea.

3.1 Post-communism and timelessness

In opposition to Fukuyama's version of the end of history, the collapse of the Soviet Union is perhaps more appropriately grasped through the lens of Giorgio Agamben's conception of the end of history as the emergence of messianic time. Under this interpretation, there is a suspension of the end of history, so that all potential versions of history are fulfilled within the present. This renders the emergence of a 'singular' remaining historical path redundant. Agamben elaborates that:

> Simply because history designates the expropriation of human nature through a series of epochs and destinies, it does not follow that the fulfilment and the appropriation of the historical telos in question indicates that the historical process of humanity has now cohered in a definitive order.[118]

Sergei Prozorov suggests that under this reading of the end of history, the suspension of time leads

[116] Prozorov, 2011, p. 26.
[117] Ibid., p. 39.
[118] Agamben, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2000, p. 111.

to a state of timelessness where all versions of the past and the future are present at once.[119] Prozorov argues that the 1990s was a time of many ends of history, as competing images became redundant. The collapse of the Soviet Union rendered history inoperable not because of the triumph of liberalism, but that the sheer meekness of the Soviet demise made the idea of teleological competition pointless.[120] Prozorov argues that:

> The messianic time of postcommunism is the time of extraordinary condensation of potentialities, all of which are suspended, however, in the aspect of their actualisation. All restorations of the now are summoned up in the messianic now and are now in a certain sense accomplished...[121]

During the Yeltsin period, there was a sense that everything was negotiable and could therefore be turned in to a political issue – this included everything from public morality to the borders of existing post-Soviet states.[122] While the political state of Russia of the Yeltsin era was open to the point of extravagance, the possibility of developing a coherent ideological project was precluded by the contingent nature of the political regime. The removal of value-based antagonism within the social realm essentially "left Russian politics to its own devices."[123] In contrast to the Yeltsin era, Vladimir Putin's presidency has been marked by the concerted effort to suspend the political permissiveness that flourished during the 1990s. Prozorov considers that Putin's main task is therefore the negation of the suspension. In the process of doing so Putin has attempted to strengthen the state according to a doctrine of 'sovereign democracy' in order to prohibit the return to the condition of *bespredel*.

Under the guise of Putin, the opposition towards the revolutionary nature of the 1990s was essential in his desire to stabilise the state. The management of *bespredel* under Putin's 'sovereign democracy' involved the merging of the interests of the state with the reduction of the importance of the individual. A part of this process was to overcome the collective humiliation of Russia through

[119] Prozorov, 2008, p. 213.
[120] Ibid., p. 213.
[121] Ibid., p. 213.
[122] Prozorov, 2011, p. 28.
[123] Prozorov, 2008, p. 214.

the cultivation and restoration of honour.[124] Mozorov further elaborates on this point:

> The anti-liberal measures are designed to secure freedom but instead of liberating the individual, the concern is the freedom of the common will, the national self-fulfilment by means of a great state. Politics as such... disappears in contemporary Russia. What is left is the higher domain of sovereign freedom and everyday depoliticized activity of the executive structures.[125]

Therefore, the empty nature of Putin's sovereign vision became a signifier of its own juridical logic. Putin could not mobilise a 'vision' of historical development within the maintenance of *bespredel*. Thus, Putin's recourse to conservatism and domestic policies of stabilisation are only capable facilitating the stabilisation the condition of *bespredel* itself. As Prozorov argues "what was decried, tolerated or barely survived in the 1990s as a 'transitional moment', an exceptional condition on the way to something positive or substantial, became in the Putin presidency translated as the substance of contemporary Russian life as such, as *all there is*."[126] This is why, for instance, when Fareed Zakaria argues that Putin is still trapped by history and geography, Zakaria is in some part correct. Putin is indeed trapped; but not by history, but through the absence of any image of what Russia can be without the ability to manage the condition of *bespredel*.[127] In the quest for stability, Putin's project of transforming Russia from oligarchic hedonism to a 'new Russia' essentially distils down to the maintenance and international re-assertion of a technocratic nihilism where nothing much happens at all.[128] Although it may seem obvious to state, but the negation of negativity does not then necessarily lead towards positive affirmations or 'improvements' in the political system. In fact, what is more apt, is that the attempt to manage the post-historical status of contemporary Russia in such a manner only therefore further entrenches this paradox. This does not suggest that the state of *bespredel* is deterministic towards negativity, rather its permissiveness allows for all manner of acts, which allows Putin to act against the emergence of radical or revolutionary threats.

The logic of opposition to the historical precedents of the Soviet and neo-liberal periods has

[124] Tsygankov, p. 247.
[125] Mozorov, p. 163.
[126] Prozorov, 2011, p. 36. Emphasis in original.
[127] Zakaria, p. 20.
[128] Prozorov, 2008, p. 221.

continuously manifested itself within the negation of the opponent. Sebastian Kaempf argues that by "annihilating the opponent, essential ideas of the Russian past become destroyed simultaneously."[129] Kaempf suggests that the main pitfall of this train of thought is the idea that the past was the source of the error of the present and must be completely negated in any way possible. In practical terms, Putin's Russia cannot accept ideological rivals as the expression of the legitimate voice of the Russian tradition.[130] While this is a domestic issue, it is problematised on the international level because of Russia's inability to enhance its reputation in the eyes of others. Russia is therefore hamstrung by the domestic condition of *anomie* which precludes the formation of coherent ideologies and any kind of long term political progress. The lack of an ability within Russian political pluralism to subsequently engage in agonistic debate over the specific nature of the Putin regime, finds a similar expression within the international arena. The lack of an agonistic debate over possible alternatives to the dominant Western hegemonic order precipitates resistance against it; as occurs within Russia, precisely because no alternatives can find legitimate forms of expression.[131]

3.2 Exporting *bespredel*

If it is subsequently apt to characterise the nature of Russian post-communist politics as the continuation of depoliticisation. Putin has inherited an aversion to the permissive politics, but crucially, contrary to the responses of many contemporary analysts, has also been averse to ideologies that attempt radical change. In this place, there has been a transformation of Russian politics into a technology of scheming and manipulation, of which Putin has a developed a firm

[129] Kaempf, Sebastian. 'Russia: A Part of the West or Apart from the West?', *International Relations*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 2010, p. 321.
[130] Ibid., p. 321.
[131] Mouffe, Chantal. 'Democracy in a Multipolar World', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 3, p. 552.

understanding.[132] So how does this manifest itself within Russian foreign policy, and what does that mean for our present case?

The primary implication of Russia's management of *anomie*, is that Putin selectively bends norms, regulations and the institutions of international governance to assist in the maintenance of his own internal regime based up a "wager upon scheming."[133] The defence of the paradox of Russian sovereignty therefore allows Russia to consolidate its own order by placing barriers on external threats. The emergence of threats from NATO, the European Union, the United States and others, subsequently take on a spatial significance. Fundamentally, the structure of Putin's authority and the formation of Giorgio Agamben's conception of the 'camp' are the same. The state of exception – a temporary suspension of the state of law, can transform into the camp when it acquires a permanent spatial arrangement which, as such remains constantly outside the normal state of law.[134] The protection of freedom which is in question under the pretext of 'protective custody', is a "protection against the suspension of law which characterizes the state of emergency."[135] When the idea of protecting freedom is dissolved by the state of exception upon which it was founded, the state of exception is then able to exist under 'normal' circumstances. Thus, the camp is "the space which opens up when the state of exception starts to become the rule."[136] In lieu of the formation of the camp within Russia, Putin acts to retain this order in its arrangement because it continues to reinforce his aversion to *anomie*. Thus, the desire to keep Russia secure from external challenges requires centralising *bespredel*, to more effectively keep external threats at distance. In a press conference following the annexation, Putin stated that Russia has no fear of NATO, "yet we have to bear the realities in mind."[138] The realities are speculative, but if NATO or indeed another actor is allowed to destabilise Putin's sovereignty, then it is not obvious that he would be able to maintain his position as the manager of the post-Soviet space.

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[132] Prozorov, 2011, p. 40.
[133] Ibid, 2011, p. 41.
[134] Agamben, 2000, p. 39.
[135] Ibid., p. 39.
[136] Ibid., p. 39.
[138] "Putin: We do not fear NATO enlargement", *Interfax*, 17 April 2014.

Within the post-historical period, the timeless nature of existence constantly throws challenges at the sovereign, who must negotiate them or succumb. Walter Benjamin proposes that a faced with the task of self-preservation in such an order, the sovereign can take several courses of action. They may act to maximise all opportunities and become a rogue tyrant; they may give in and succumb to the condition of anomie and become a martyr, or they may become the *intrigant*.[139] The *intrigant* is aware that the chaotic nature of the order is all there is, and therefore plots and schemes towards a position which is advantageous towards the maintenance of their ability to further plot and scheme. As Prozorov argues, the *intrigant* does not necessarily need to act in a malevolent manner to maintain their position. Indeed, precisely because of the need for incessant manipulation, such an actor is aware that their position can be maintained through immanent rule. Such rule is driven by human nature itself, therefore allowing both benevolent and malevolent actions.[140] Benjamin suggests that the nature of the post-historical condition therefore endows upon the sovereign only an image or likeness of executive power and not necessarily lends itself to any contingency because of the natural flaws present in humanity.

> the gesture of executive power as his characteristic gesture, and having him take part in the action with the words or behaviour of a tyrant even where the situation does not require it; in the same way it was probably unusual for full robes, crown and sceptre to be wanting when the ruler appeared on the stage.[141]

Benjamin suggests that sovereigns who are stuck within this state tend to appear to act harsh because of their changing resolve. He classifies that the "sheer arbitrariness of a constantly shifting emotional storm" belies the nature of the post-historical sovereign.[142]

What this implies for contemporary Russia, is therefore somewhat more obvious. Putin's policy shifts appear to be arbitrary and contradictory, and in a material sense they are. Why go through the trouble of invading a sovereign state, only to challenge your own motivations for action

[139] Benjamin, Walter. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, John Osborne, trans., London: Verso, 1998, p. 69.
[140] Prozorov, 2011, p. 40.
[141] Benjamin, p. 69.
[142] Ibid., p. 71.

in the second act? John Ikenberry suggests that given this uncertainty, Putin's Russia is more a kin to a 'spoiler', who acts in order to maintain and enhance its position within the international system which affords it already considerable stability. Fighting against that order would therefore be self-defeating for a state who cannot properly effect large scale change.[143] Because of this arbitrary sense of drama, Russia then appears capable of exporting the management of *bespredel* in a number of ways. It can do this both directly towards the states that compromise the post-Soviet space, and indirectly through proxies further abroad.

Roy Allison suggests that relations between the Russia and the Assad regime in Syria places emphasis on the mutual support of sovereignty, territorial integrity and the "repudiation of externally promoted regime change." Allison explains that this is why Russia can more effectively bond with the 'legitimate' incumbent Assad and condemn opposition forces based upon their 'revolutionary' status.[144] At the same time, this relationship gives credence to Russia's contention that it acts in accordance to ethical principles through the projection of its desire for internal post-Soviet stability. By proxy, the rhetorical support of stability is a rejection of supporting external regime change – and is antagonistic towards Western powers. Allison suggests that Russia's policies towards Syria are referring almost solely towards itself; predicating a defensive warning to any actor attempting to further cause destabilisation within the contemporary Russian regime.[145] This allows Russia to conflate and aggrandise the claim towards territorial rights in the post-Soviet space by postulating the 'defence' of ethnic Russians from states of proposed 'radicalism' characterised within recent post-Soviet 'Colour Revolutions'. In the process of breaking territorial borders, it extends and internationalises the condition of domestic management. Therefore, it can be appropriate to view that the "valorization of state sovereignty must be understood as the defence of the very boundary that delimits the zone of *bespredel* from its outside."[146]

Because the idea of Russia promoting internal stability appears contradictory in light of

[143] Ikenberry, 2014.
[144] Allison, Roy. 'Russia and Syria: explaining alignment with a regime in crisis', *International Affairs*, Vol. 89, No. 4, 2013, p. 803.
[145] Ibid., pp. 815-816.
[146] Prozorov, 2011, p. 42.

Ukraine, there has been little recourse by Moscow towards legitimising Russian external policies. One of the potential reasons for this, is that by wagering on Moscow's ability to secure favourable bilateral relations with external actors, be that through mutual means or some measure of coercion, Putin is capable of by-passing potential pitfalls.[147] This wager is more visible within Russian contemporary bilateral relations with post-Soviet neighbours. For example, Russia's passportisation policy towards former Soviet citizens can be interpreted as a promotion of an image of Russian sovereign democracy, by maximising the valorisation of the Russian state at the expense of others. While passports have been offered by Russia to all former Soviet citizens since 1991, the process was continued in Georgia and South Ossetia and has also been evident in Crimea.[148] In the latter case, passports were even being actively distributed by Russian officials before Crimea was officially annexed.

Another example of how the Russian domestic order conditions foreign policy, can be seen within the context of the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics. The games, beset by consistent infrastructural and security concerns have been touted as the most expensive Winter Olympic games in history.[149] The enormous financial risk taken by the Russian government in order to garner global attention was according to Bo Petterson, a carefully manipulated publicity stunt directed at both internal and external audiences. Petterson argues that: "set against the need to counter the specters of stagnation and waning popularity, the Sochi Olympics in 2014 may no doubt prove to be politically advantageous for Putin."[150] What problematises this statement is that no less than three days after the closing ceremony of the Sochi games, Putin invaded Crimea. Subsequently, it "makes little sense for Russia to squander the international goodwill it generated from the unexpectedly successful Sochi Olympics for a few million Russians living in Ukraine."[151] Although it is

[147] Prozorov, 2011, p. 35.
[148] Kobzova et al., p. 90.
[149] There is contention over how much the games actually cost. Many sources claim up to $US50 billion. However, it is also plausible that the budget was exaggerated by Putin for show, or inflated through local corruption and extraneous expenses charged for projects in the hinterland around Sochi.
[150] Petterson, p. 35.
[151] Stoner, Kathryn. 'Putin's Search for Greatness: Will Ukraine bring Russian the Superpower status it seeks?, *Foreign Affairs*, 2 March 2014.

speculative to argue that the games generated 'goodwill' towards the Putin government abroad, it is indeed difficult to make sense of Crimea and Sochi within such a close period of time to one another. If we therefore assume that Putin's volte-face was all about saving face internationally; then the previous actions make little sense, unless of course, he simply is not that interested in international opinion. Returning to the situation of the camp, where norms and rules are suspended and everything becomes possible, the link between Sochi and Crimea becomes more clear if we interpret it along a the lines of the *intrigant*. Putin survives off the uncertainty and confusion of his actions; postulating strength and success, but also manipulating by managing the exception to his own advantage.[152]

[152] Prozorov, 2011, p. 41.

Conclusion

In sum, where does this leave the existence of Putin's grand strategy to challenge international order? This research has suggested that there have been two dominant responses from international policy makers and analysts towards Putin's invasion and annexation of Crimea. These responses have suggested that Vladimir Putin is attempting to 'return to history' by promoting an explicit expansionist imperialism with a focus on securing strategic geographic areas within the post-Soviet space. To mobilise this plan, and further move towards the formation of a grand Russian state, it was also argued that Putin now possesses a more coherent ideological stance which could be defined as nationalist neo-conservatism. While indeed there has been an increasing trend within Putin's Russia to prioritise the spiritual and moral values of conservative Russian orthodoxy, this has become potentially over-wrought within policy analyses. Indeed, following his about-face, it is not all convincing that Putin cares for the humanitarian, moral and ethical values his regime propagates, as killings and disorder continue in Eastern Ukraine. Nor does it necessarily care to challenge the international order which affords it, paradoxically, a privileged position.

However it is plausible that Putin's volte-face is a rational calculation to wager on the maintenance of stabilising the Russian domestic condition of *anomie* following the Crimean annexation. While it is also indeed possible the that sanctions have hurt Russian interests, and that Putin may be bluffing to buy more time; however, given the potential zero-sum calculations that international opposition has mobilised towards perceptions of his 'grand strategy', it is also plausible to suggest that Putin is aware of the limits conferred upon Russia. Therefore, Putin can be seen to be doing *anything* within reason to preserve Russia in this point of time, imperfect though it surely is. The process of exporting the Russian domestic maintenance of the state of *bespredel* towards external actors is therefore neither a fully revisionistic claim to imperialism, as suggested by claims

made for Putin's 'new' nationalised conservatism.[153] Neither is it a completely arbitrary and nihilistic expression of 'rogue' violence.[154] Instead, the particular logic and rationality of the *intrigant*, writes Prozorov, is based on the fact that decision to suspend the order has already been made, and the contingency of the sovereign lies in its place.[156]

While it is difficult to truly draw and concrete conclusions towards the motivations and agency of Putin's actions following his volte-face, I have suggested that analyses must take into consideration the sources of discontinuity within Russian policy. The primary source of this disconnection, is not a 'return to history' or a revanchist image of great Russian neo-imperialism, but rather that the marginalisation of politics from the Russian domestic sphere, and the institutionalisation of Putin's maintenance of *bespredel*, essentially suspends Russia within a state of *anomie*, of timelessness. This condition exists largely because Putin has inherited from the fall of the Soviet Union, an intense aversion to ideologies that co-opt a radical ethos. Thus, Russia's foreign policy can be interpreted as being fundamentally orientated towards exporting the ability to maintain the state of *bespredel* in post-Soviet neighbours and proxies abroad to manage Putin's aversion towards the state of *anomie*. The threats posed to the maintenance of this order by external actors therefore conditions an appropriate response.

Indeed, while domestic opinion may turn out to be harsh upon Putin's concessions towards the 'illegitimate' authorities in Kiev, in light of the rapid annexation of Crimea, it is potentially too soon to extend a meaningful analysis. Furthermore, the economic sanctions and international pressure placed on Russia may indeed fall on deaf ears under such an analysis of the Russian domestic condition. However, this should not assume that Russia is sufficiently strong economically to withstand significant further degradation. But in essence, these motivations are entrenched within an awareness of Russia's domestic condition, and not as a critical challenge to the international order which paradoxically feeds his opportunism and ability to turn the *anomie* to his advantage.

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[153] Gaelotti, Mark and Bowen, Andrew S. 'Putin's Empire of the Mind', *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2014, p. 19.
[154] Prozorov, 2011, p. 37.
[156] Ibid., 2011, p. 41.

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