SUKHOIS OVER SYRIA: ANALYZING THE KREMLIN'S STATEMENTS AND JUSTIFICATION BEHIND RUSSIA'S 2015 SYRIAN AIR CAMPAIGN

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I, the undersigned, Aaron Korenewsky, hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. To the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where proper acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted as part of the requirements of any other academic degree or non-degree program, in English or in any other language.

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Abstract

Russia's air campaign over Syria, launched September 30, 2015, represents the first military intervention by Russian forces outside of the borders of what was the Soviet Union since 1979—an unprecedented act on behalf of an international pariah and another milestone in the application of Russian forces abroad. This thesis seeks to explain why the Kremlin decided to intervene in Syria, a topic that has not yet been addressed in the scholarly literature or in a systematic way. By collecting all those materials related to Syria published on the Kremlin's website between June 2015 and March 17, 2016 and conducting a thematic analysis of the resulting data body, the thesis identified two major overarching themes of (1) fighting terrorism and (2) an ideational dimension labeled the "Putin Doctrine." The intensity and dominance of the Putin Doctrine codes during the lead-in and directly after strikes began insinuates that this ideational dimension factored heavily into Russian thinking, despite claims to the contrary. Such a finding lends further support to the view that the Kremlin's thinking on intervention has fundamentally shifted during Putin's third presidential term.

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Introduction

On September 30, 2015, Russian President Vladimir Putin's request to undertake airstrikes in Syria was approved by Russia's Federation Council, unanimously and behind closed doors (Walker 2015). Within hours the first sorties of Russian Sukhois, mainly model Su-24 fighter-bombers making up the bulk of Russia's fleet of attack aircraft, began hitting their targets in Syria, an air campaign ostensibly still ongoing as of June 2016 despite President Putin's drawdown of forces announcement on March 14. The game-changing nature of these airstrikes and the Russian intervention in Syria cannot be overstated. Not only did they represent an extraordinary escalation of Russian support for the regime of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad—seemingly all but precluding Assad's removal from power—but also stand as a new milestone in Post-Soviet Russian military operations. In fact, this was the first military intervention conducted by Russian forces outside of the borders of what was the Soviet Union since the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 (*The Economist* 2015).

While this operation has certainly expanded the scope of Post-Soviet Russian military intervention beyond a mere regional concern and possibility, the linkage between this air campaign and Russia's precedent on intervention remains less clear. In fact, Russian policy on the use of force abroad has been considered something of an illogical mess ever since the 2008 August War against Georgia, which itself was the first use of Russian forces against another sovereign state during the Post-Soviet period (Nikitina 2014). Though this action outwardly appeared to upend over a decade's worth of non-interventionism, Russian policy seemingly reverted right back when Russia decided against sending peacekeepers to Kyrgyzstan in 2010 despite an official request (Nikitina 2014; Aris 2012). Russia's 2014 incursion into Crimea only complicates the picture, given that it argues that policy has shifted because a new anti-Western and anti-liberal dogma has taken root in Kremlin thinking and policy—the

consequence of domestic political concerns that reflect deep anxieties with Western-backed interventions. The shift to such a "Putin Doctrine" has enormous and far-reaching consequences for U.S. policymakers, especially if it is now manifesting beyond the Post-Soviet sphere in Syria: new constraints on the West's ability to pressure authoritarian regimes, even those committing blatant violations of international law; new limits on the flexibility of Western forces to operate abroad and increased risk of miscommunication and accidents; a more obstinate Russia on the UN Security Council; and a more uncompromising Russian line on those political crises it injects itself into, like Syria.

Understanding exactly what the thinking and motivations behind the Kremlin's decision to launch its air campaign in Syria is therefore all the more urgent and vital today, especially in determining whether this Putin Doctrine is at play there. Is the Russian air campaign another instance of the new Kremlin philosophy motivating military intervention, or perhaps something else entirely? Unfortunately, the existing literature is wanting. For one, no scholarly examination of the campaign has been published to-date, and the scholarly literature on Russo-Syrian relations during the Syrian Civil War was all published before strikes began, albeit sometimes only months beforehand. While some of this material suggests that Russo-Syrian relations have been sustained, despite the steep costs incurred, due to material interests like bases and arms sales (Blank 2015) or the security threat posed by an ISIS victory (Kozhanov 2014), others have claimed that the "Putin Doctrine" offers a better explanation (Dannreuther 2015; Averre and Davies 2015; Allison 2013; Charap 2013). Yet, rather than clearing up the picture, the actual claims surrounding Russian motivations in Syria from presumably credible media and official sources come across as contradictory and even at times outlandish. Significant criticism has been leveled at American analysis of the air campaign for registering a clear misunderstanding of Russian interests and tending towards cliché, alarmism and groupthink (Adomanis 2016; Khlebnikov 2016; Adomanis 2015). Indeed, the sheer level

of shock registered by the U.S. intelligence community and supposed Russia experts to both the launch of strikes and subsequent March 'withdrawal' undeniably revealed for some critics just how woefully unprepared the United States was to counter Russian propaganda, as well as how poor and methodologically sloppy U.S. analysis of Russia was and would remain without a conscious effort (Greene 2016; Sen 2016; Adomanis 2016).

This thesis aims to lead that effort by reviewing the existing literature and conducting a systematic study to begin working towards an answer of why Russian intervened in Syria. The thesis first discusses the literature on Post-Soviet Russian thinking on intervention and why the motivations underlying it matter, particularly in Syria. The thesis then discusses the many potential Russian motivations implied by the scholarly literature and Western pundits and officials, before assessing whether any of these potential motivations may actually hold up under empirical scrutiny by conducting a thematic analysis of Kremlin statements published online between June 19, 2015 and March 17, 2016. Such an approach cannot and does not claim here to uncover the Kremlin's true motivations—as Greene and Allison point out, without access to the actual minds of the Kremlin elite, any method available to scholars can simply be dismissed out-of-hand (Greene 2016; Allison 2009). But by looking at systematically collected Kremlin statements on the air campaign, this thesis can establish a snapshot of the air campaign in terms of the official narrative put forward by Vladimir Putin. Such a snapshot can provide insight into the Kremlin's potential thought process and desired framing of its air campaign, which can be compared against both previous and future studies.

In doing so, the thesis identifies two key themes utilized by the Kremlin: one related to the Putin Doctrine that is most intense before and directly after strikes began in September 2015 and a second related to fighting terrorism. The thesis then addresses the implications of these findings in light of the literature and the Syria crisis, before concluding on how the analysis conducted here can be expanded upon by others.

Chapter 1: The Literature on Contemporary Russian Thinking on Intervention

This chapter overviews the scholarly literature on Post-Soviet Russian thinking on military intervention and the potential motivations behind it. Though much of the earlier work dictates that the motives behind Russian thinking and policy regarding intervention are material-based conceptions of interests, a growing body of recent work has begun to suggest that Putin's third term in office, ushered in by significant domestic and global unrest, has seen the rise of a new ideational element in Kremlin thinking representing the redefinition of the concept of sovereignty for Russian elites against Western notions of democracy and legitimacy. This ideational element, labelled here as the "Putin Doctrine," arguably better explains the Russian response to the Arab Spring and the impetus behind intervening in Crimea, suggesting that now ideology, rather than material interests, drive Russian policy toward the use of force abroad.

Discussing Motive

Attempting to understand what motivates the Kremlin to use military force in Syria necessitates a discussion of the scholarly literature on Post-Soviet Russian policy on intervention, which is permeated by international relations theory. However, at its most basic divide, this literature can be understood as split between those advocating (i) explanations for Russian action based on materialist and rationalist oriented frameworks of international relations like neo-realism or neo-liberalism and (ii) those taking a constructivist approach to studying the international sphere, which at its core comprehends norms, identity and social context as driving force behind decision-making and state behavior. This is not to say that norms do not factor into the theories of the first group of scholars, or that material interests do not concern the second. Rather, the distinction over motivations is that materialist and

rationalist oriented theories of international relations, like neo-realism, conceptualize state behavior on the world stage as the result of cost-benefit calculations aimed at maximizing utility, usually with regards to static considerations of power, security and wealth (Hurd 2008, 299; Checkel 1998, 327). Norms or ideologies at most limit the pursuit of material gain and interests, even within the neo-liberal camp in which international norms and institutions have added emphasis (Checkel 1998, 327). On the other hand, from the constructivist point of view, norms along with belief can create systems of beliefs and rules—usually called doctrines or ideologies—that create specific roles and identities that states adopt. These norms, beliefs and identities are all socially constructed through interactions with other actors, and these in turn produce interests that drive state behavior and goals in the international sphere (Hurd 303). Within this framework then, interests and the ideas and norms that shape them are dynamic and learned through experience and exposure.

However, trying to link action, justification, and motive based on the kinds of evidence available is perhaps something of a fool's errand. As Russia scholars like Mark Adomanis and Samuel Greene conceded in the fallout of Putin's March 2016 drawdown announcement, no one truly knows what Vladimir Putin or any other Kremlin official for that matter are actually thinking, despite many claims to the contrary (Adomanis 2016; Greene 2016). And in spite of any rhetoric, Kremlin elites are human—they may act out of haste or opportunism, overact and posture, make decisions without seemingly rational bases, and intend to deceive or obfuscate. A quality analysis must therefore decide whether to assume that statements and actions can reliably indicate core motives, and then usually settle for making less grandiose pronouncements (Greene 2016; Allison 2009, 173-174). Trying to perfectly pin down Russian motives and to then predict the Kremlin's actions, while the intended goal of many analysts, is therefore impossible—no method available is infallible and can predict Kremlin action perfectly (Greene 2016; Adomanis 2016).

This does not mean, however, that such approaches are worthless. Some would argue that such approaches can inform and instruct for strategic planning purposes, as well as provide plausible reasons for action especially when combined with systematically collected evidence (Adomonis 2016; Greene 2016). And as Allison notes, analyzing the Kremlin's justifications and actions can provide insight into the Kremlin's thought process, what it believes is significant, and *potentially* what underlies its foreign policy mindset (Allison 2009, 174). To be sure, he work cited below, while taking slightly different approaches, is more often than not based on evidence from Russian officialese. In discussing this scholarly literature, something of a grand narrative regarding Russian thinking and policy regarding military intervention comes forward—a narrative that increasingly suggests that Russian thinking on the use of force abroad appears to have radically changed after Putin returned to the presidency for a third term.

Post-Soviet Non-Interventionism and the August Exception

At least until early 2014, there was some consensus that Post-Soviet policy with regards to military intervention was consistently non-interventionist, with the 2008 August War between Russia and Georgia representing something of a bump in the road, an exception that did not fit the precedent before or after it (Nikitina 2014, 1). Indeed, the August War was the first instance of Russian forces being used against a sovereign state during the Post-Soviet period (Karagiannis 2014, 405), and moreover, upended over a decade's worth of maintaining and furthering Russian strategic interests without the need for military operations in its so-called "backyard" (Allison 2009, 188). What exactly had caused this seeming break in precedent? A number of scholars have argued for a realist explanation at the heart of the intervention in Georgia, which was mainly aimed at challenging the post-Kosovo hegemony of the West and flexing muscle to stave off NATO's advance into Georgia and Ukraine (Karagiannis 2014, 406; Allison 2009, 186; Averre 2009, 590). Even after five years, Allison's view remained unchanged in seeing the humanitarian and legal justification behind the five-

day war as a hastily devised attempt to cover challenging Western encroachment in its sphere of influence, an approach it completely dropped once it was met with significant backlash (Allison 2013, 166-68).

Russia appeared for all intents and purposes to do a complete about-face after the August War, and returned to a policy of non-intervention (Nikitina 2014). This seemed evident from the way that the Russian government situated itself on the issue of intervening to stop the bloodshed between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in and around the city of Osh in Southern Kyrgyzstan. Despite an official request for assistance from Kyrgyz President Roza Otunbayeva to Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, the Kremlin was reluctant to intervene, with Medvedev flatly denying the request on the basis that Russia did not and would not inject itself into another country's internal affairs (Nikitina 2014; Aris 2012). As Aris argues, this decision appears to be supported by a realist standpoint, given that the Russian elite wanted to prevent the appearance of another Georgia-like intervention that would (i) upset still jittery Central Asian leaders and (ii) bog down Russian forces in a humanitarian crisis that did not actually threaten its material interests in Kyrgyzstan (Aris 2012, 467-468). Indeed, Nikitina goes so far as to assert that, "Russia has not supported friendly regimes by way of intervention," a predicament that seems to hold true even past Crimea (Nikitina 2014, 3).

In fact, the Medvedev period even saw Russia allow for a friendly regime to be toppled, albeit not intentionally, through its decision to abstain from vetoing the Western-backed intervention in Qaddafi's Libya before the UN Security Council. As Dannreuther elucidates, Medvedev actually pushed to support the Libya intervention given that the costs of supporting the beleaguered Qaddafi regime were far outweighed by the potential economic and security interests gained in exchange with the West, specifically WTO membership, in supporting or at least not vetoing UN Resolution 1973 (Dannreuther 2015, 82). This produced a rather public spat between President Medvedev and then Prime Minister Putin, who criticized the decision

and insinuated the resolution reminded him of a crusade, which Medvedev publicly rebuked—this now appears in hindsight to have crippled Medvedev's support and bid to run for a second presidential term (83).

Putin's Third Presidential Term

This tiff within the Kremlin's inner circle marked the beginning of a new wave of anti-Western rhetoric from Putin, who began his third term as president in 2012 amid mass demonstrations that harkened to the color revolutions seen previously in Ukraine and Georgia. For some scholars, who found it much harder to explain Russian policy on intervention from a materialist-conception of interests and motives in this period, the Kremlin's this nascent ideology actually appeared to hold the key to understanding the Kremlin's reaction to the Arab Spring and Ukraine's Euromaidan. In looking at Kremlin discussion of these two issues, scholars began to perceive that Russian reaction was linked to the Kremlin's shift on defining the concept of sovereignty in new ways, directly opposed to the perceived Western definition of the concept.

Putin and the Arab Spring

As Dannreuther argued, Russia's response to the Arab Spring, and the Syrian Civil War specifically, was better explained by an ideational factor than materialist ones, specifically the concept of "sovereign democracy" (Dannreuther 2015, 79). As described in the literature, sovereign democracy represents the foundation to, as Kurowska puts it, "a discourse of resistance towards [the] ideological homogeneity synonymous with liberal democracy" (Kurowska 2014, 495). Indeed, the Kremlin sees the liberal Western conception of democracy as inappropriate for non-Western societies like Russia, given its perceived incompatibility with Russian culture, and as violating Russia's sovereignty to decide its own path based on its traditions and history, rather than an imposed model (Dannreuther 2015, 90). Moreover, Western insistence on promoting its concept of democracy abroad had wreaked havoc and

allowed radical Islamists to overthrow stable and multi-confessional societies throughout the Arab World. The Libya intervention thus acted as the confirmation of the Kremlin's belief that Western intervention and democracy exportation was dangerous, misguided and inappropriately being imposed where it did not belong (92).

But the argument over the violation of sovereignty was not just over the concept of democracy, but also legitimacy. As Allison argues, the Kremlin viewed regime change in Libya as a judgment by the West on Qaddafi's political legitimacy, in which highly centralized and personality driven regimes that do not want to play by the West's rules or norms are delegitimized (Allison 2013, 797). Some have even argued that Putin may personally identify with these embattled Arab leaders, seeing the potential for his own demise (817; Golts 2012). What is central for understanding the Russian reaction to the Arab Spring is therefore Putin's "preoccupation with Russian domestic state order," which requires the Kremlin to push against any further solidifying of Western interventionism with a regime change motivation into UN-backed norms (818). The Kremlin has internalized a kind of domino theory outlook, "regime security," in which if Assad, or another regime falls by Western hands, is but one step closer to directly threatening the Kremlin's own legitimacy. The Kremlin must therefore protect illiberal regimes under threat, to ensure its concept of sovereignty is not ousted by Western norms.

These two concepts of sovereign democracy and regime security have apparently fueled a new turn in Russian policy toward intervention since Putin's return to the presidency, which has solidified into a precedent of siding with sitting governments in disputes (Nikitina 2014, 1), and of opposition to international intervention if the Kremlin suspects "the stated or unstated motive is removal of a sitting government" (Charap 2013, 36). For example, despite the rage over Libya and Syria, Russia supported the French-backed UN resolution over intervention in Mali in 2012 given that the Kremlin perceived it as credibly aimed at supporting, rather than

undermining the Malian regime (*Id*., 39; Allison 2013, 816). But while the Kremlin was willing to veto interventions, at least as of 2014 it had not yet intervened militarily on behalf of a regime threatened by Western regime change (Nikitina 2014, 3).

Crimea

Beyond the Arab World, however, regime security and sovereign democracy appeared to play into Russia's abrupt and surprising intervention in Crimea. While Russian rhetoric and Putin's' justification for action explicitly stated that one motive behind the intervention was to "enhance" the defense of its naval facilities during the political upheaval in Kiev against "armed nationalists" (Karagannis 2014, 410), there did not appear to be any obvious trigger event to spark intervention (Marten 2015, 189). Indeed, the new government in Kiev benefitted heavily from keeping Russian bases in Crimea, and had not openly signaled it would act to push the Russians out. So while material considerations do factor into recent analyses by Karagannis and Allison, both authors claim that concerns over sovereign democracy or regime security motivated Russian intervention in Crimea, with Allison going farthest in claiming that regime security represented "the most decisive influence" behind the decision to seize the peninsula compared to material or nationalist-oriented identity politics (Allison 2014, 1289; Karagannis 2014; 411). The implication of the Crimea campaign then is that it represents the first Russian military intervention seemingly motivated by what this thesis labels the "Putin Doctrine," which combines the two ideational concepts discussed above related to the redefining of sovereignty in Russia today. Crimea therefore breaks once again the chain in Russian non-interventionism, and also marks a shift away from materialist to constructivist frameworks being perceived as better suited to explaining Russian thinking on intervention.

Where does Syria Fit?

Blank argued in the spring 2015 that Russian policy in Syria was limited to "three major instruments: tenacious diplomacy, energy deals, and large-scale arms sales (Blank 2015, 72). Clearly, that list of policy options expanded by one to include military intervention. The question now turns to whether Syria, far beyond the Post-Soviet space, represents another military intervention seemingly motivated by the Putin Doctrine. Not only would such a finding suggest that this dogma has supported the launching of two back-to-back interventions—suggesting that Crimea was the start of a new precedent rather than a one-off exception like the August War has been conceived—but also that this thinking and underlying motivations is not geographically bound to the Post-Soviet sphere. Finding out whether this ideational turn actually underlies the Syria campaign is therefore crucial for understanding the trajectory of Russian thinking on intervention. In working towards an answer, the next chapter overviews the existing literature on Russo-Syrian relations and Western media claims to see what potential motivations it puts forward and implies are behind Russia's 2015 air campaign over Syria.

Chapter 2: The Existing Literature Regarding Russian Motivations in Syria

This chapter overviews the potential motivations put forward regarding Russian action in Syria, both before and after airstrikes began. The academic literature provides competing theories for explaining Russia's steadfast support for the Assad regime during the Syrian Civil War. However, this material was all published, albeit sometimes only by a few months, before the air campaign actually began. The many claims made regarding Russian motivations behind the actual intervention by Western press, think tanks and officials fail to clear up the picture, and American analysis of the air campaign has been heavily criticized for being largely unsubstantiated and for its tendency toward alarmism and groupthink. Altogether, these two sets of materials hint at a number of potential codes and themes that could explain why Russia decided to intervene militarily in Syria that need to be considered empirically with respect to the actual campaign.

The Scholarly Literature on the "Russo-Syrian Enigma"

Written in the backdrop of the Syrian Civil War, the most recent scholarship submits that contemporary Russo-Syrian relations present "a certain enigma for analysts" (Kozhanov 2014, 2). As Assad has turned into a pariah, the diplomatic costs for the intensive and consistent support Russia has produced and displayed on behalf of the Syrian regime have increased dramatically, particularly since it (1) works against salvaging relations with the West, which are at such a low point over events in Ukraine that there is talk of a "New Cold War" or "Cold War 2.0," but (2) puts it directly at odds with other major Middle East players like the Gulf States and Turkey who want Assad gone. These are the very same countries that Putin had built friendly and substantive economic ties with since coming to power, itself regarded as both an

absolute and unlikely reversal of fortunes since the Cold War in Russian influence in the region (Bagno 2009; Katz 2008).

The existing scholarship on contemporary Russo-Syrian relations can be summarized as revolving around three potential drivers of Russian action that arguably explain away Kozhanov's enigma: (1) geo-strategic and material concerns and interests; (2) the threat posed by Islamic terrorism; and (3) the nascent "Putin Doctrine" based around the concepts of regime security and sovereign democracy reflecting anxieties over the perceived intentions of Western intervention. Each of these three explanations is discussed in turn below.

Strategic or Material Interests

Within the literature there are some authors that claim the maximization of geostrategic and material interests in terms of power and wealth serve as the primary motivation for Russian diplomatic action over Syria. Issues raised in the literature regarding this theme include: (1) arm sales; (2) other Russian economic interests in Syria; (3) maintaining the naval facility at Tartus; and (4) ensuring the safety of Russian citizens residing in Syria. While some raises these claims seriously, facts on the ground and criticism from other recent scholarship contest whether these potential motivations are really that significant.

Arms Sales and Economic Interests

The volume of arms sales, particularly in earlier work on Russo-Syrian relations, is considered as one of the key reasons for continued strong relations between Russia and Syria (Kreutz 2007; Gafarli 2012). Arms sales to Syria are big money—roughly $1.32 billion as of 2012, reportedly making it the seventh largest importer of Russian military hardware and seemingly the largest in the Arab world (Gafarli 2012). Moreover, there is the suggestion that these sales, both in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, "transcend purely commercial motivations," and function hand-in-hand with deals over potential bases in the region, including northern Iraq (Blank 2015, 72).

However, a number of others have claimed that these numbers are less impressive. Kozhanov, for example, points out that the volume of arm sales were significantly higher to Qaddafi's Libya, with the potential and actual losses to Russian arms exporters in the billions (Kozhanov 2014, 5). Such losses were not apparently enough to garner a veto over Western airstrikes into Libya. And both Allison and Dannreuther cite to similar examples of far greater arms sales to Turkey, Israel and other Arab states that want Assad gone in arguing that such contracts cannot convincingly explain Russia's unwavering support for the Syrian regime (Dannreuther 2015, 88-89; Allison 2013, 805).

Linked to this are claims of Russian business interests in Syria, namely natural gas and oil fields that Russian companies could develop (Blank 2015, 71). Yet Allison claims that Syrian production has been steadily declining—making any ventures less profitable in the long run—and that support for Assad has already cost Russia much more lucrative contracts with the Gulf States (Allison 2013, 807). Further undermining the importance of economic ties is the fact that Russia maintains more extensive and substantive trade relations with those regional powers like Turkey and the Gulf States actually funding the opposition in the Syrian Civil War than with Syria (Dannreuther 2015, 88-89).

Tartus

Another oft-repeated Russian strategic interest in Syria is the naval facility at Tartus, which has been under lease since the 1970s and represents the "only functioning naval base the Russian Navy can count on in the Mediterranean" (Gafarli 2012, 146). But the importance of Tartus has been panned throughout the academic literature, given that has been described as rundown, consisting of only a few piers that can barely qualify it as a 'base,' and has not been refurbished or expanded despite plans to the contrary since 2006 (Allison 2013; Kozhanov 2014; Dannreuther 2015). Furthermore, in June 2013, all civilian and military personnel were seemingly evacuated from Tartus, with the Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov going

so far as to claim that Tartus had "no military or strategic significance" (Englund 2013). Rather than representing a major strategic motivation, Tartus comes across as another red herring.

Protecting Russian Citizens

There is also some limited discussion regarding the possibility of the Kremlin feeling a duty to protect Russian civilians in Syria. However, the most recent literature perceives this as a non-issue, with Kozhanov heavily disputing the Russian government's old claim that some 10,000 Russian citizens reside in Syria, instead coming to a figure of roughly 5,300 (Kozhanov 2014, 5-6).

Terror Threat

Kozhanov advocates that the answer to the Russo-Syrian enigma does not lie in any of the aforementioned material concerns or for that matter in any ideological component in citing Putin's 2012 claim, "that Moscow would not repeat the Soviet-era mistake of supporting any regime or country for ideological reasons without carrying out cost-benefit calculations" (10). Instead, the threat posed by Islamic terrorism represents a distinct material-based interest regarding security for the Kremlin. Even if Putin wanted to dump Assad, the Kremlin worries that Islamist opposition, a la Libya, would likely fill the resulting power vacuum. In surveying Russian analysts' discussion of Syria, Kozhanov finds that these analyses highlight that (1) Syria is geographically closer to Russia and therefore more threatening than the Libyan collapse and (2) see a real threat from the large number of Chechens and Russian Muslims fighting on behalf of ISIS (Kozhanov 12-13). Support for Assad is therefore aimed at maximizing security and shoring up against this terror threat.

Yet, at least in terms of this scholarly literature, Kozhanov appears to stand alone in making such a stark claim. Blank, for example, maintains that given Russia's continued support for Hamas and Hezbollah as well as its silence on Syria filtering jihadists into Iraq during the

mid-2000s, any claims of fearing the threat of terrorism today ring rather hollow and are representative of "nothing more than consummate hypocrisy" (Blank 2015, 76).

An Ideational Dimension: "Putin Doctrine"

A third group of scholars have criticized this focus on material considerations of power or security in explaining the Russo-Syria enigma. Theses scholars like Allison, Dannreuther and Charap argue that the level of Russian support for the Syrian is highly disproportionate, given that the perceived value of economic and military ties between the two countries is outweighed by the costs attached to the Kremlin's intense and consistent diplomatic support for Assad. Instead, these scholars argue that such support is best explained by an ideational rather than material dimension, namely the Kremlin elites' interpretation and conception of sovereignty with regards to state legitimacy and sovereign democracy, a concept pitted against the importation of Western liberal democracy to non-Western societies (Dannreuther 2015, 79; Allison 2013, 796). Rather than seeking to maximize power, wealth or security, the Kremlin stood by the Syrian regime in order to make a principled stand against Western liberalism and to prevent any establishment of additional precedent regarding regime change.

Claims regarding Russian Motivations for Intervening in Syria

Given that no scholarly work has examined the intervention to-date, the thesis overviewed the many claims propagated by major media outlets, Russia experts, and American officials as to why the Kremlin decided to intervene in Syria. While the discussion below is not necessarily exhaustive, it does outline the potential motives that were either suggested to have fairly wide expertise behind them or came from reputable or unignorable sources.

Fighting "Terrorism"

In summing up the end of the campaign in March 2016, Fred Weir for *The Christian Science Monitor* claimed that the Putin administration had projected its primary objective as

defeating ISIS (Weir 2016). However, American officials, including Secretary of Defense Ash Carter, declared that despite Russian insistence to the contrary, Russian actions were aimed at rebel rather than terrorist targets (Carter 2015).

Rescuing Assad

On October 19, 2015, *Bloomberg* quoted unnamed Russian officials in reporting that the "Kremlin's real goal is to help Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad retake as much as possible of the territory his forces have lost to opponents" (Arkhipov, Kravchenko, and Meyer 2015). *Business Insider* went one step further in labeling the stated primary objective of fighting terrorism as a lie to cover up protecting Assad (Bender 2015). And by November, Nikolay Pakhomov asserted in the *National Interest* that the dominant opinion amongst Western experts was that Putin's motivation for intervening in Syria was actually rescuing Assad, rather than fighting terrorism (Pakhomov 2015). All of this seemed to gain extra authority when in April 2016, British MP David Davis revealed that during a personal meeting with Assad, the Syrian President related that Putin had assured him "We will not let you lose," and that the scaling back of forces was undertaken "Because Russia was being criticized for stalling the [peace] talks" (Cooper 2016).

Others, however, claimed that Putin were using airstrikes to better position Russia for the Post-Assad order. As the Oxford Research Group declared, the Kremlin's "longterm motivation remains to make sure that a post-Assad Syria will still be an ally or client of Russia" (Rogers and Reeve 2015, 3).

Distract from Ukraine

Another interpretation, prominently displayed in *The New York Times*, was that experts believed that President Putin aimed to use Syria as a vehicle for distracting from the on-going conflict in Ukraine, rebuilding Russia's image with the West, and ending sanctions (MacFarquhar and Kramer 2015). *The Economist*, the Institute for the Study of War, and the

Atlantic Council all echoed this sentiment (*The Economist* 2015; Spaulding et al. 2015; Sen 2016).

Protecting Russian Strategic Interests

A CNN listicle of reasons behind Russia's intervention provided a number of strategic and material motivations: to protect its naval base at Tartus, to signal it was again a world power, and to showcase its weaponry to generate arms sales (Chance 2016). The Institute for the Study of War similarly stressed two weeks before strikes began that the buildup of troops in Syria was likely aimed at enabling Russia to secure Tartus and to protect Russian citizens in Syria (Spaulding et al. 2015).

Display the Prowess of Russian Weapons

There were also claims that Russia's intervention functioned as a testing ground and showcase of Russian military superiority. The European Council on Foreign Relations, for example, alluded that the extensive use of long-range missile systems in Syria, which could be fitted with nuclear warheads, was intended as a warning to Europe and sign that Russia did not need bases in the Mediterranean to reach its enemies (Gressel 2016).

Weaponize Refugees

Some, including U.S. Air Force General Philip Breedlove—the Supreme Allied Commander Europe of NATO—and Open Society Foundations Chairman George Soros, went so far as to claim that Russia's intervention in Syria was aimed at 'weaponizing' refugees (Ferdinando 2016; Soros 2016). The bombing of civilian areas was a clear indication that the Kremlin aimed to create refugee flows that would serve to divide the European Union, possibly helping to end Western sanctions and distract from Ukraine.

All of the above claims have an air of credibility given the sources, even if some sound rather conspiratorial. But several critics have insinuated that American analysis of the intervention has been lacking in credibility and value, particularly after the March drawdown

announcement. On the one hand, it was clear that American policymakers and punditry were truly taken aback by the launch of strikes in September and then again by the March announcement, and were never seemingly able to pinpoint what Russia's actual motives were despite insistence to the contrary (Greene 2016; Weir 2016; Adomanis 2016). The reaction by the U.S. government and so-called Russia experts, rather than suggesting vigilance and competency, actually signaled an inability to understand and analyze Russian strategic thinking. Indeed, the Atlantic Council went so far as to claim in April 2016 that the U.S. government appeared to have mismanaged its intelligence capabilities in relation to the Russian intervention, and had apparently not relied upon or utilized open source Russian media materials to the extent it should have, further inhibiting any retort to Russian propaganda (Sen 2016). Likewise, as Mark Adomanis argued in October 2015 and then again in March 2016, analysis of the situation—particularly from defense officials—expressed exceedingly alarmist and exaggerated tones, going so far as to insist the U.S. would lose in an armed conflict with Russia; was based on cliché rather than hard evidence or even flew in the face of actual facts; and took on a tendency toward group-think that perpetuated this sorry (and dangerous) state of affairs (Adomanis 2015; Adomanis 2016). Rather than representing a literature to rely upon, the claims made above must therefore be considered with caution, and compel this thesis to conduct research to see which, if any, of these potential motivations may come through in an analysis of the Kremlin's statements regarding the actual air campaign.

Potential Codes and Themes from this Literature

By taking these two sets of materials discussed above, an extensive list of potential motivations has been considered, which can now actually be assessed in light of empirical evidence and data collected around the time of the actual campaign. A number of potential codes have been identified and can already be divided into three preliminary themes—a

collection of codes that relate to one another or display a particular pattern—based on the scholarly literature: (1) a "Material Interests" theme; (2) a terrorism-related theme distinct from any other material-based conceptions of power or security found in the data body; and (3) a "Putin Doctrine" theme that represents the ideological dimension suggested by the likes of Allison and Dannreuther combining the concepts of regime security and sovereign democracy. Figure 2 below classifies the conceivable codes that make up these three potential themes:

Figure 1: Potential Themes and Related Codes Identified During the Literature Review

Potential Theme	Potential Codes
Material Interests	1. Tartus 2. Mentioning of arm sales 3. Syria operation a testing ground for weapons 4. Protecting Russian business interests in Syria 5. Protecting Russian citizens in Syria
Terrorism	1. Threat posed by Islamic terrorism to Russia/ CIS 2. Spillover into Russia 3. Need to form anti-terror coalition 4. Russian citizens joining/in ISIS 5. Mentions of Chechen/ North Caucasus terrorism
Putin Doctrine	1. Cannot allow for another Libya 2. West's motive is regime change 3. Western values unnatural to region 4. Arab Spring as Color Revolution 5. References to Ukraine as coup 6. Aim is to prop up or rescue Assad 7. Support for opposition illegal or against norms

Having generated these three overarching themes from the literature regarding the air campaign, the thesis can move towards investigating whether (i) these particular codes and themes, (ii) the claims from the Western press or experts, or (iii) some other codes are identifiable within a data body of material related to the actual air campaign, with the intention to analyze which, if any, codes or themes can be interpreted as illuminating the Kremlin's thinking behind the decision to intervene in Syria.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In order to examine which, if any, of the aforementioned themes and codes may form the basis for justifying and potentially motivating Russia's military intervention in Syria, the thesis gathered materials published by the Kremlin during a set timeline of events and utilized a thematic analysis approach in studying them.

Establishing the Data Body

There are several approaches that could be taken to analyzing the motivations behind the Russian air campaign. But as Marten claims, Russian policymaking is personality driven and rather nebulous, with decisions "made not within well-defined constitutional bodies or bureaucratic institutions, but behind closed doors" (Marten 2015, 193). But as she notes, it is Vladimir Putin and his small, and apparently shrinking, circle of confidants that represent the highest rung of the policy-making cycle, which has come to mean during Putin's third stint as president a series of seemingly emotive and surprising decisions on major issues, including Ukraine. To best fit this thesis with and to supplement the existing literature in a valuable way, the effort undertaken here concentrated solely on those materials published on the official website of the President of Russia: kremlin.ru, since it archives the President's official statements and remarks. Given that the intervention has yet to be studied from a scholarly perspective or at least publically in a systematic way, ascertaining and systematizing exactly what President Putin has said concerning Syria over a determined timeframe represents a clear, essential and worthwhile first step in producing tangible data to begin dissecting and locating Russian thinking behind the military intervention in Syria.

Certainly, relying on this material has its disadvantages. First and foremost, such material generally represents crafted talking points and sound bites for domestic and foreign consumption, rather than pure unfiltered discourse. Moreover, there is simply no way to

measure or verify the sincerity of the claims made in this material, and even then, a number of potential motivations claimed during the literature review are unlikely to ever be addressed publically—it is doubtful Russian officials would openly declare that Russian forces are committing war crimes to produce refugees to pressure Europe or launched a campaign to demonstrate its nuclear-delivery capabilities. Verifying these types of motivations are simply beyond the scope of any analysis possible here, or perhaps by anyone.

This does not mean that official statements and materials are not worthwhile or useless; rather, the fact that it was published by the Kremlin to be consumed gives this material significance and weight. For one, it is the President of Russia who is constitutionally bound to set the guidelines for Russian foreign affairs, who conducts foreign negotiations, and serves as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces ("President of Russia" 2016). And it is this through this type of material, though perhaps not as systematically collected as here, which has formed the basis of much of the conclusions from the most recent literature on Russo-Syrian relations and Russian precedent on intervention. Moreover, while perhaps not revealing the true or exact motivations behind the campaign, exploring this type of discourse can offer insight into present-day Kremlin rationale on when, where and why Russia will use force abroad (Allison 2009). Concentrating on the presidential website thus (1) narrows the focus of this thesis to arguably the most important figure in Russian policymaking and discourse on Syria; (2) is best suited for comparison to the existing literature; and (3) serves as a snapshot of the campaign for future comparison, perhaps either with later statements by Kremlin insiders that can corroborate what was publically stated 2015-2016 or with other contemporary discourse coming from other institutional sources. Collecting and analyzing such a data body is consequently a worthwhile approach, supported by the literature and likely to produce added value for both scholars and policymakers.

Individual searches of the presidential website's archives were made using four specific search terms in Russian: "Сирия" [Syria] "сирийский" [Syrian]; "Башар" [Bashar] and "Асад" [Assad]. Using these four search terms, it was reasonably assumed that all of the documents published related to the intervention in Syria could be identified and a representative data body of Putin's statements on the campaign could be compiled. Moreover, these searches were made within a predetermined date range based on a timeline of major events surrounding Syria, provided below:

Figure 2: Timeline of Major Events surrounding the Russian Air Campaign 2015-2016

June 29, 2015 – Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem visits Moscow

July 2015 – Assad gives some type of formal request for assistance during July; Major General Qassem Soleimani of the Iranian Quds Force visits Moscow (Bassam and Perry 2015)

September 30, 2015 – Russian State Duma approves air campaign over Syria, bombing runs begin a few hours later

October 31, 2015 – Metrojet Flight 9268 crashes in Sinai; Daesh claims responsibility

November 24, 2015 – Russian Sukhoi Su-24 downed by Turkish Air Force, the first shoot down of Russian warplane by NATO force since Korean War

March 14, 2016 – President Putin orders withdrawal of 'excess' forces and states Russian goals have been met

March 17, 2016 – Gala ceremony for distinguished officers at St. George Hall in the Kremlin marking the "end" of the campaign

The key dates for collection purposes are the beginning and end dates. Though it is well established that President Assad formally requested Russian assistance, it is less clear exactly when that appeal was made. The start date for data collection was set at June 1, 2015, given that the Syrian Foreign Minister arrived in Moscow at the end of June, and Reuters claimed that the request came in either June or July, before Major General Qassem Soleimani of the Iranian Quds Force arrived in Moscow, allegedly to discuss coordination between Russian and

Iranian forces (Bassam and Perry 2015). The end date of collection was less ambiguous to fix. While Russian warplanes continue bombing missions as of June 2016, the end date of collection was set as March 17, 2016, the date of a medal awarding ceremony held at the Kremlin marking the end of the campaign, three days after President Putin had announced an official draw down of forces.

After conducting searches for all four terms for this date range and eliminating any duplicative results, a total of 132 pieces were compiled. These materials included notices of events, telephone calls and future meetings between President Putin and other leaders; transcripts of addresses and other prepared remarks; and responses to questions from the press during conferences or other venues. Of these 132 documents, 131 of them were officially translated and accessible in English alongside the original Russian. A check was made of the quality of three of these translations, which were deemed faithful and accurate to the original Russian text. Each of these documents was downloaded and assigned an identifier (e.g. Document 1, Document 2, etc.) that is used in later chapters for referencing purposes. A table listing each of these documents with both the Russian and English language titles, date of publication, and a hyperlink to the original Russian text is attached as the Appendix.

Thematic Analysis

With this data body compiled, the thesis could begin working towards uncovering how this material presented the case behind the Russian intervention. To do so, the thesis used the method outlined in the guidebook *Applied Thematic Analysis* (Guest, MacQueen, and Namey 2012). This approach would uncover not only the base content of this material and the Kremlin's official narrative, but to also see what patterns exist within the data body and what relationships form between codes to create overarching themes within the discourse that may suggest underlying motivations and thinking.

This method first involves assembling and reading the entire data body as a whole. The purpose of this initial read-through is to become acquainted with the entire data body, as well as to jot down any and all potential codes, which would also confirm the presence and frequency of those codes identified at the end of Chapter 2. Having printed the entire data body and conducting an initial read-through in this way, an initial codebook was generated that would be used during a second read-through in actually marking up the data body for analysis. In order to facilitate the speed of the coding process and to allow for some quantification of the data, the full data body was uploaded in PDF format to ATLAS.ti, a data-analysis software. The results of this process are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Analysis

This chapter details the results of the coding process, showing that while all three potential themes identified during the literature review could be found in the data body, the themes related to the Putin Doctrine and terrorism stood out as the most substantial in terms of number of codes identified and intensity over the course of the air campaign. Furthermore, these two themes oscillated over the June 2015-March 2016 timeframe, with the codes related to the Putin Doctrine appearing most intensely before and directly after the launch of airstrikes on September 30, 2015.

Codes and Subsequent Themes Located

The read-throughs and coding process revealed that all three potential themes raised in the literature review could be found in the Kremlin's discussion of the Syrian air campaign between June 19, 2015 and March 17, 2016. Of 620 codes marked in the data body: 257 (37.6%) were categorized as clearly falling under a terrorism theme; 183 (29.5%) were categorized as clearly under the Putin Doctrine theme based on the fact they coincided with statements and phrases referenced in the literature review; and 50 (.08%) were related to the "Material Interests" theme. Another 130 items were coded in the data body that related to various issues, such as refugees, respect on the world stage, or the parameters of the intervention, which did not necessarily or obviously fall under one theme or another. Figure 3 below highlights the individual codes by theme and the number of instances of that particular code in the whole data body.

Figure 3: Themes by Individual Codes

Theme	Code	Number of Instances
Material Interests	Defend Russia	9
	Protect Russian Interests	9
	Russian Bases	4
	Protecting Citizens Abroad	1
	Weapons System Prowess	27
Terror	American Coalition	7
	Form Anti-Terror Coalition	30
	Evil	10
	Fight International Terrorism	76
	"Fight them there"	3
	"Healthy Opposition"	16
	Illicit Oil Trade	13
	ISIS as Tool of Other Powers	4
	Metrojet	8
	References to Chechen Terrorism (90s/00s)	6
	Existence of Russian/CIS citizens in ISIS	23
	Revenge	5
	Remember Russians killed by Terrorists	2
	Terror Threat to Russia	12
	Terrorists Will Infiltrate Russia	15
	Turkey is Islamist	2
	Stabbed in the Back	8
	U.S. Ineffective in Combatting Terrorism in Middle East	17
Putin Doctrine	At Request	16
	Capacity Building	9
	Compliance with International Law	14
	Double Standard	13
	External Support	12
	Iraq Quagmire	14
	Lawful Authority	6
	Legitimate Authority	10
	No Russian Meddling	5
	No Unilateral Action	7
	Not Another Mess like Libya	15
	Regime Stability	12
	Syrian People Decide	18
	U.S. Hegemony	1
	U.S. Knows Best	9
	Ukraine as Example of Regime Security	3
	UN	16
	Without Outside Intervention	3

These codes were individually entered into a spreadsheet in relation to the timespan covering the dates of publication from June 19, 2015 to March 17, 2016 in order to uncover both (i) how the themes were used before and after the start of the campaign and (ii) how individual codes arose, evolved and disappeared over this timespan.

Why and Why Not According to the Kremlin

Before jumping into what the coding process and mapping of the subsequent codes exposed, it is important to first establish what the Kremlin stated were those explicit reasons motivating its intervention in Syria.

Stated Reasons Why Not

President Putin provides a number of explicit denials as to motives behind why Russia pursued military operations in Syria, specifically:

(1) Not to distract from Ukraine (Document 19);

(2) Not to pick sides in the Shiite-Sunni split ["This is a false message and wrong argument. We make no difference between Shiites and Sunnis […] We have absolutely no desire to get entangled in inter-religious conflicts of any sort in Syria" (Document 31); "The aim of Russia's military operations and diplomatic efforts in this area is to fight terrorism and not to mediate between representatives of the different currents of Islam." (Document 42)];

(3) Not abstract geostrategic interests or to test weapons ["Our actions were not dictated by some incomprehensible abstract geopolitical interests" (Document 85)] or ["by the desire to test new weapons systems, which in itself is also important" (Document 85)];

(4) Not to gain superpower status ["Let me clarify a few things about Russia. First, we do not claim the role of a superpower. This role is very costly and it is meaningless" (Document 96)]; and

(5) Not to create refugees ["I want to add that this refugee crisis began long before Russia began its antiterrorist operation in Syria … They are refugees from Afghanistan. What have Russia's operations got to do with them? Their situation is totally unconnected to our operations. Our operations have one sole aim: to stabilize the situation" (Document 118)].

These denials therefore directly contradict some of the claims made by experts in the literature review, though establishing their sincerity is impossible. What is obvious, however, is that the Kremlin specifically wanted to preclude these reasons from the official justification for action so as not to distract from its core narrative surrounding the campaign.

Stated Reasons Why

President Putin also makes a number of explicit claims as to why Russian forces are in Syria. Of the 17 instances in the data body when such a claim is made, 14 are direct statements that the objective or primary aim of the air campaign is to combat terrorism [Documents 23, 33, 42, 49, 103, 127, 128 and 132] or to provide air support to Syrian ground forces fighting terrorists [Document 56, 88, 132].

However, there are at least three occasions when President Putin states the objective of the campaign without referencing terrorism, and instead uses language reminiscent of the Putin Doctrine. During an interview with Russian journalist Vladimir Solovyov on October 12, Putin stated, "Our only goal is to support the lawful government and create conditions for a political settlement. This was our original aim, and this remains the guideline for our actions now" (Document 31). On January 12, during an interview with the German newspaper *Bild*, Putin

responded, "Regarding your question if al-Assad is an ally or not and our goals in Syria. I can tell you precisely what we do not want to happen: we do not want the Libyan or Iraqi scenario to be repeated in Syria" (Document 96). And finally on February 26, during remarks at a Federal Security Service (FSB) board meeting: "Our operations have one sole aim: to stabilize the situation in these countries and create conditions for people from these countries to be able to return to their homes" (Document 118). Yet, there is at least one specific denial that supporting Assad is the primary or intended goal of the operation. One November 13 Putin stated, "Let me repeat once again that the main purpose of this operation is not to support President al-Assad but to fight international terrorism" (Document 56).

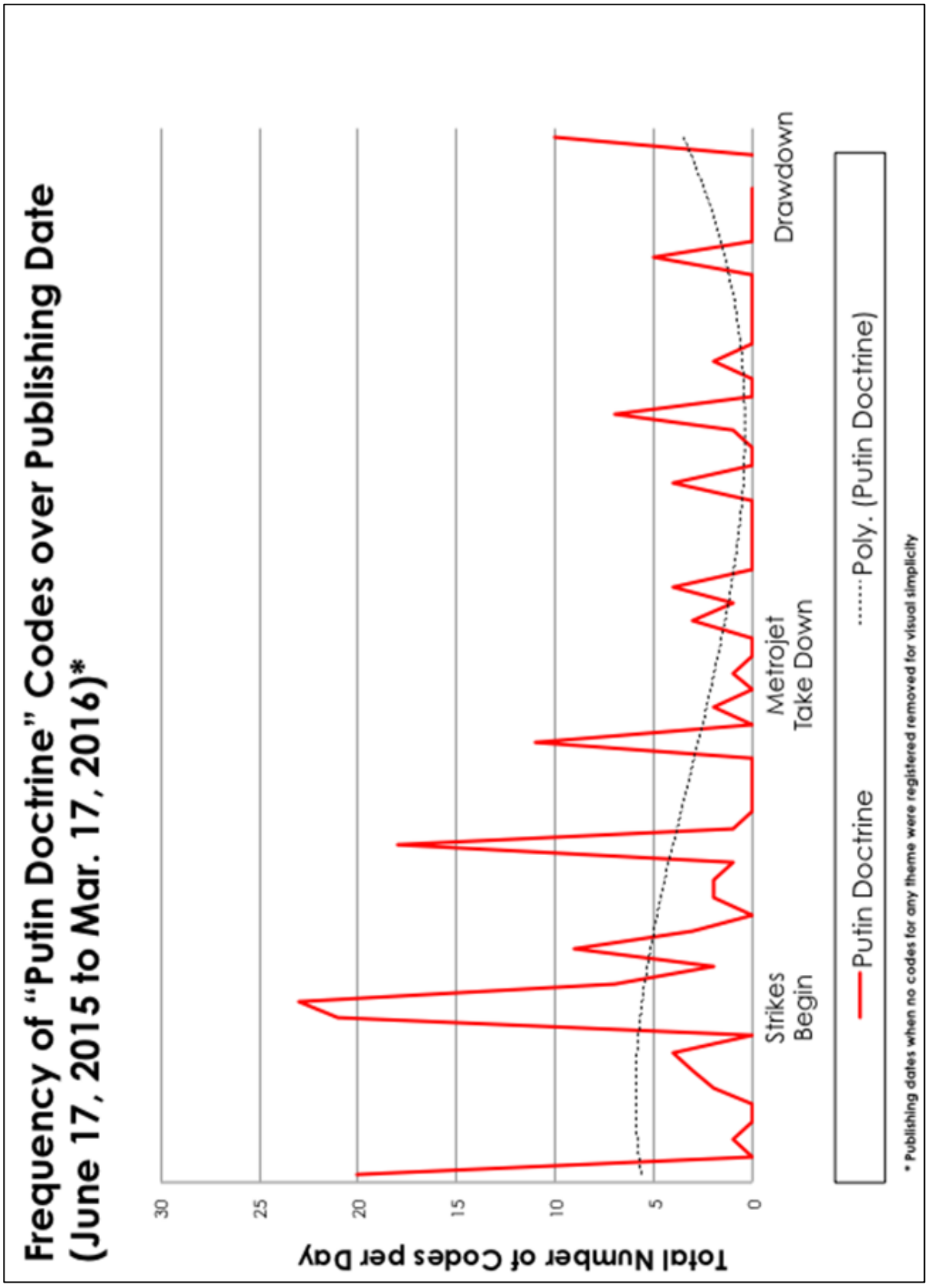
The Kremlin's Discourse on Intervention

Given these statements, the official Kremlin narrative presents a rather consistent line of justifying the use of force in Syria based on fighting terrorism. The codes and themes uncovered during the coding process, however, suggest that the codes associated with the Putin Doctrine dominated discourse between June and October 2015, signifying it factored heavily into the Kremlin's official justification and thinking, despite remarks to the contrary. Eventually, as discussed below, this theme trailed off almost completely by mid-October and was supplanted by a surge in references to terrorism, which marked a recasting of the campaign following the Metrojet incident over the Sinai and the Turkish shoot down of a Russian Sukhoi fighter-bomber on November 24.

Putin Doctrine

Figure 4 depicts the number of instances of Putin Doctrine codes recorded between June 19, 2015 and March 17, 2016.

Figure 4: Frequency of "Putin Doctrine" Codes over Timeline



As Figure 4 clearly shows, regime security codes were most intense during the lead into air strikes on September 30, as well as directly after, before trailing off almost completely before mid-October, shortly before the Metrojet incident. It is also evident that in comparison to the terror theme, as depicted in Figure 5, the Putin Doctrine theme was dominant during the same timeframe. What *Bloomberg* and *Business Insider* insisted was some kind of false flag, thus appears through the coding process to be nothing more than a misreading of Russian sentiment. Indeed, Putin had already explicitly and publicly stated in an interview with one of Russia's most well-known journalists that the objective of the campaign was to support Assad, a week before *Bloomberg* claimed that unnamed officials revealed this supposedly hidden aim (Document 31).

Putin's discussion regarding intervention and the air campaign itself highlighted the differences between the Kremlin's and Washington's military operations in terms of legality, the consequences of the West's cavalier attitude towards regime-change, and the need to respect sovereignty.

Russian Campaign Not like the West's

The Kremlin documents analyzed here set up a dichotomy between the Russian and Western air campaigns, namely by claiming that Russia's operation were legal and effective, while the West's were not. On October 12, for instance, Putin declared, " All other countries that have so far taken part in operations in Syria are acting unlawfully, because there is no UN Security Council resolution on these operations, and no official request from the Syrian authorities" (Document 31). Indeed, between September 28 and October 22, Putin sought to make the case for the legitimacy behind the Russian campaign by making a string of statements regarding Russian compliance with international law by acting "at the request of" the "legitimate" or "lawful" government in Syria. At the same time, however, Putin stated that the West was "acting unlawfully" (Document 31) and "in violation of international law"

(Document 56). For instance, on September 29, Putin opined, "in my opinion, provision of military support to illegal structures runs counter to the principles of modern international law and the United Nations Charter. We have been providing assistance to legitimate government entities only" (Document 19). The Putin Doctrine's insistence on supporting the government over rebels thus comes across clearly and often in the data body between June and early October.

But Putin also insists that unlike the West, Russia does not meddle in Syria's internal affairs and does not overthrow governments, as he stated for instance during an interview on *60 Minutes*: "At no time in the past, now or in the future has or will Russia take any part in actions aimed at overthrowing the legitimate government" (Document 19). Unlike Russia, however, the West had "exacerbated by unceremonious foreign intervention" the internal problems of countries like Libya, and now Syria (Document 21). And before the United Nations General Assembly, Putin went so far as to say:

> It seems, however, that instead of learning from other people's mistakes, some prefer to repeat them and continue to export revolutions, only now these are "democratic" revolutions. […] But what was the actual outcome? Instead of bringing about reforms, aggressive intervention rashly destroyed government institutions and the local way of life. Instead of democracy and progress, there is now violence, poverty, social disasters and total disregard for human rights, including even the right to life (Document 17).

Alongside this harkening to scholarly discussion of sovereign democracy, Putin emphasized on 18 occasions between June 19, 2015 and March 17, 2016, that the Syrian people should be left to decide their own affairs, often by specifically noting that any external intervention, even advice, was inappropriate or against international law: "It is only up to the Syrian people living in Syria to determine who, how and based on what principles should rule their country, and any external advice of such kind would be absolutely inappropriate, harmful and against international law" (Document 19).

Iraq, Libya and Ukraine

As Putin also made quite clear, the West's perchance for meddling and regime-change had produced a number of nightmare scenarios. Libya factored heavily into these references, being mentioned 15 times in relation to the anarchy and power vacuum the West had created there, but almost always-mentioned in tandem with Iraq and Saddam's overthrow (14). But Putin also included Ukraine as another example of Western regime change gone wrong on three occasions before strikes began, going so far as to label the situation a "coup d'etat" (Document 19). While these codes were less intense after mid-October, Putin was still making references to Libya and Iraq as late as February 22, specifying them as scenarios to avoid in Syria (Document 96). Furthermore, Putin also emphasized the need to build up, rather than tear down state capacity in countries like Libya and Syria. Indeed, the last spike in Putin Doctrine codes occurs during the drawdown, and emphasizes the success in building up the Syrian Army's military capacity.

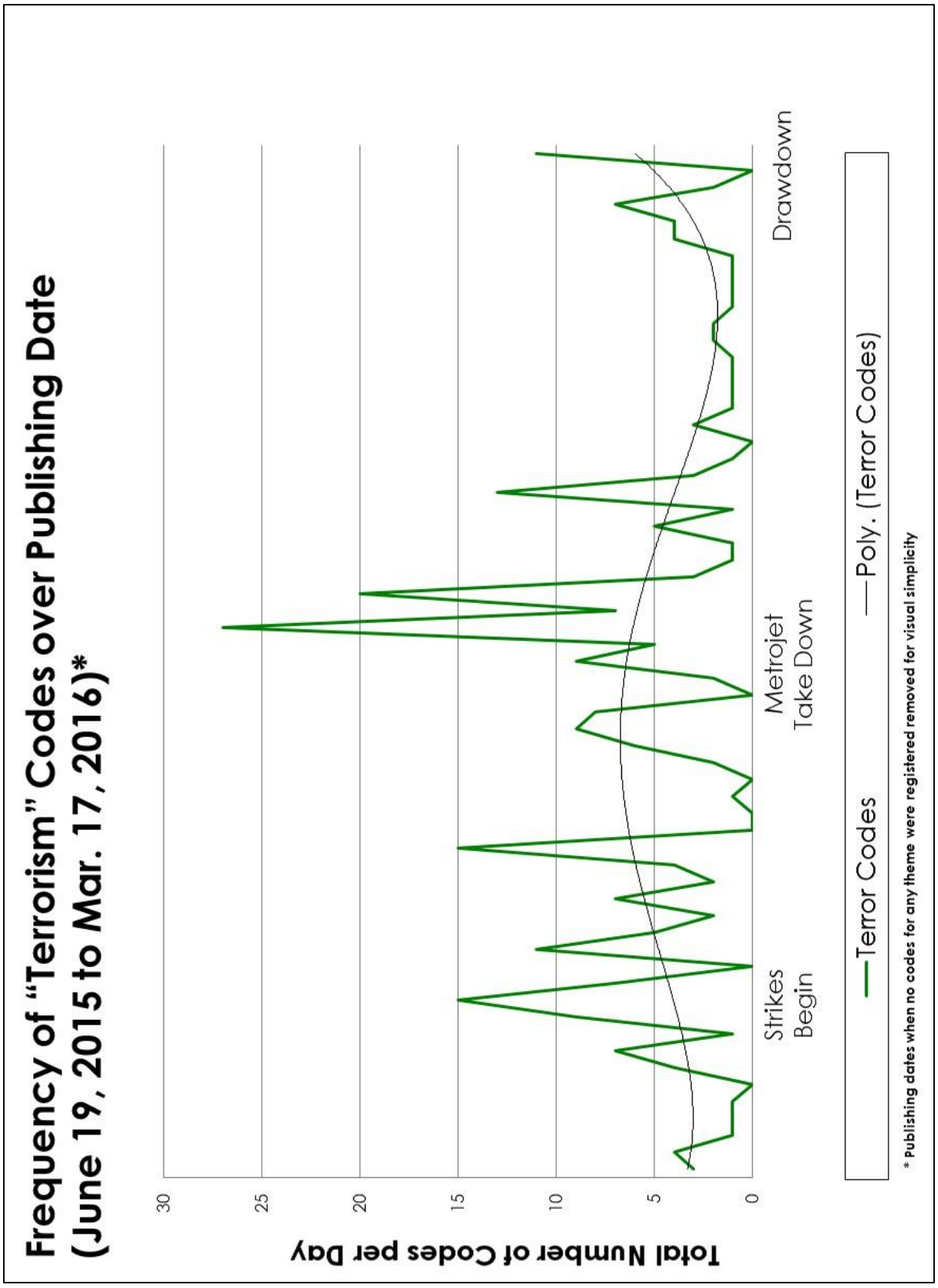
What is less clear from the data body is why the Putin Doctrine codes more or less cut out completely from Putin's statements past mid-October, although they had been on a gradual decline from their absolute peak immediately before strikes began. Any suggestion here is merely conjecture. But one bit of circumstantial evidence is that these codes drop off almost entirely after Putin is asked during a press conference whether Russia would be open to extending operations into Iraq, which Putin states, "We have no such plans and cannot have them because the Iraqi government has not made any such request of us" (Document 42). This may suggest that the regime was conscious of the rhetorical trap it could put itself into and the need to save face by noting on a number of occasions the limited nature of the campaign's mission (Documents 21, 31, 36, 42, 88), and insisting that ground forces were out of the question (Documents 19, 31). Whatever the reason for the drop off in Putin Doctrine codes, by

mid-October the discourse was recast and surged around terrorism following the events over the Sinai on October 31 and the downing of a Russian Sukhoi fighter-bomber by the Turks.

Terrorism

Figure 5 depicts the number of instances of the "Terrorism" codes over the same timeframe as Figure 4. The codes related to the fight against international terrorism were fairly consistent over the entire data body, though with a clear spike in late October and November.

Figure 5: Frequency of "Terrorism" Codes over Timeline



Given the insistence on the fight against terror being the main objective of the campaign, it is not surprising that some iteration of the phrase "fight international terrorism" is the largest single code in the data body. But despite this consistency, there is some evolution of this theme over the timeframe before and after late October, signifying a recasting of the intervention narrative after the initial period of airstrikes.

Fight Them There

The Kremlin began making references within the data body to the fact that Russian citizens were serving in ISIS on September 15. Putin quantifies this threat for the first time on September 29, stating "There are more than 2,000 militants in Syria from the former Soviet Union. So instead of waiting for them to return back home we should help President al-Assad fight them there, in Syria" (Document 19). By October 16, this estimate grew to 5,000-7,000 (Document 36), but dropped a few days later to 4,000 (Document 38). These individuals, and their ability to enter into Russia and Central Asia posed a clear threat to Russian security: "If we just stood by and let Syria get gobbled up, thousands of people running around there now with Kalashnikovs would end up on our territory" (Document 31). Putin aimed to defeat this evil, and would do so while it was still in Syria, rather than allowing it to enter Russia.

Interestingly, the threat pose terror and Putin Doctrine themes complement one another. For example, Putin highlights how Western toppling of governments creates vacuum that terrorists fill (Documents 12, 19). And alongside the illegality of American actions, Putin also highlights their ineffectiveness. Putin brought up more than once the failure of the United States to train elements of the Free Syrian Army (Documents 19, 31); the supply of weapons to the Iraqi Army that ultimately fell into ISIS hands (Document 1); and that despite 11 countries supplying planes for airstrikes, the "efficiency has not been very high" (Document 11), "effectiveness is low" (Document 19), it has produced "no real results" (Document 31), and that the US has no agenda (Document 35).

"Stabbed in the Back"

This official line of fighting terrorism continued until the end of the campaign. However, the terror theme spiked following the Metrojet incident and shoot down of the Russian Sukhoi fighter-bomber. Rather than representing the pre-intervention and immediate post-intervention narrative, this period signifies the recasting of the Kremlin narrative into a new phase. The key additions here were references to revenge; Russians killed by terrorists; the tragedy of Chechen terror attacks; the Metrojet incident itself; and then in conjunction with the Turkish shoot down references to being "stabbed in the back" (ten times between November 24 and December 17); Turkey as an Islamist state; and a renewed emphasis on perceived double standards over actions in Syria. Particularly interesting was the shift in targeting the alleged illicit oil trade between ISIS and Turkey, with the Kremlin going so far as to claim that ISIS had become a tool for NATO (Document 70), and that other actors in Syria were using ISIS to "to achieve their own political aims" (Document 72). However, after mid-December the intensity of these codes, and of all codes generally, dissipates.

The drawdown period from March 14-17 represents a final spike in codes emphasizing the achievements made in fighting terror. But it also raises questions about the sincerity of that aim, especially considering the metrics used for announcing "Mission Accomplished." On November 20, Defense Minister Shoigu lists the amount of infrastructure and targets destroyed down to specific numbers of fighters killed—up to 600 with one cruise missile strike alone (Document 65). Yet Putin responds that that "this is not yet enough to cleanse Syria of terrorists and fighters and protect Russia from possible terrorist attacks" (*Id*). On March 14, however, with over "2,000 criminals who have come from Russia" being killed in Syria, "including 17 field commanders," Putin states, "I feel that the objectives set before the Defence Ministry and the Russian Armed Forces in the Syrian Arab Republic have generally been fulfilled" in announcing a withdrawal of excess forces (Document 127). Considering the estimates made in

October, this would imply that over half of Russian/ Post-Soviet fighters still remain alive in Syria. And in ordering some forces to remain behind, Putin defines their mission as "to fulfil the highly important function of monitoring the ceasefire and creating conditions for the peace process" (*Id*.) For all intents and purposes then, the Kremlin appears to have framed the end of the campaign as having eliminated the terror threat, though ISIS remains very active in the region today, with Russian forces serving as peacekeeping function—thereby recasting the objective of the operation seemingly one last time to maintaining stability in Syria.

Material Interests?

Considerations regarding Russia's material or strategic interests in Syria beyond destroying ISIS arise infrequently throughout the data body. This lack of codes would comport with the view taken by scholars like Allison and Dannreuther that these material factors are not particularly crucial in factoring into the Kremlin's decision-making over Syria. Moreover, what few codes were recorded were often denials that these interests were motivations. Despite the fact that President Putin later went on to order that Russian forces remain at Tartus and the Khmeymim airbase during his March 14 drawdown announcement, he expressed his personal belief that Russia did not need to maintain or keep such installations, given the costs involved and the ability of Russian missiles to reach their targets in Syria from Russian territory (Document 88).

The Kremlin on occasions also emphasized the weapon systems in use in Syria and the effectiveness of Russian forces during the campaign. References are made to launches of Kalibr cruise missiles capable of crossing 1,500km [October 12, December 4, December 17, and March 17]; the launching of a Kalibr cruise missile, which "can be equipped either with conventional or special nuclear warheads," from a submarine for the first time [December 4]; and the use of various sophisticated weapon systems including satellites, Tupolev strategic bombers, and naval elements [November 17, November 20, and December 4]. Yet, as noted

above, Putin specifically downplays any role that the testing of these weapons played behind launching or continuing the air campaign (Document 85).

Beyond this, there is only a single reference to protecting Russian citizens abroad in the whole data body, though this not referencing any specific evacuation of Russian citizens and is not indicated as a motive for sending forces to Syria (Document 51). Likewise, there was not a single reference to either Russian arm sales or to business interests in Syria in any of the 132 documents analyzed here. While this does not necessarily mean these factors did not play any role in motivating action in Syria, the fact that they do not feature prominently in the discourse here does propose these issues were not of particular concern or value—unlike in Crimea where they were emphasized in the discourse—or considered counterproductive to outlining Russia's official justification, at least through Putin's statements. Furthermore, while there are several pronouncements to either protecting Russia (9 references) or defending Russian interests in Syria (9 references), these are made in conjunction with the discussion of fighting terrorism, particularly during Putin's remarks on the March 17, 2016 when these codes appear the most frequently.

Chapter 5: Implications

Given the reliance on and intensity of the Putin Doctrine codes at the onset of the campaign, the analysis submits that the ideational dimension discussed in the literature factored heavily into Russian thinking behind the intervention in Syria. This chapter discusses the implications of that finding.

An Ideational Shift in Russian Thinking on Military Intervention

First and foremost, the Syria intervention not only brings to an end Nikitina's assertion that Russia has never supported a friendly regime through intervention, but, given the intensity and occurrence of Putin Doctrine codes in the data body, provides evidence that the underlying, if not on occasion explicit, aim of the Russian intervention in Syria was to keep the regime afloat. This alone signifies the monumental shift that the air campaign represents in Russian thinking and policy on the use of force abroad, particularly in comparison to the stance Russia took five years earlier to not interfere in southern Kyrgyzstan. But, the analysis also confirms that the underlying thinking and statements regarding intervention in Syria in the lead up to the launch of strikes is comparable to an extent to what was expressed during the intervention in Crimea. While certainly not loaded with the same identity politics and nationalist rhetoric, the run-up to the Syria campaign made references to the concepts of regime security and sovereign democracy found in the Kremlin's discourse over the Arab Spring but also Ukraine. This could be seen in the unambiguous linking of Syria to the calamity that unfolded in Libya and Iraq, but also Ukraine, as well as the set up that the Syrian people should be left to decide their own internal affairs without illegal external intervention or advice, a la the anti-constitutionalist coup in Kiev.

This suggests that rather than Crimea being an abrogation or an exception in Russian thinking, as perhaps the 2008 Georgia War was once perceived according to Allison and

Nikitina, these two very operationally distinct interventions share a very similar ideational basis. Therefore, the seeming precedent begun in Crimea has been expanded in Syria, now meaning that this rationale or doctrine is not geographically bound or constrained to the Post-Soviet space only. While it is still too early to know whether this Putin Doctrine will manifest anywhere else, the Syria operation at least establishes some plausibility and credibility to any future Kremlin claims that it is willing to use force abroad to support a standing regime, flying in the face of almost 25 years of Post-Soviet precedent to the contrary. Russian policy on the use of military force has clearly changed, necessitating greater study not only of this new precedent but also the ideological considerations underlying it.

Consequences for Syria

Moreover, the finding of this thesis has at least one major consequence for the resolution of the Syrian crisis. Given that the Putin Doctrine theme is premised around the Russian elites' anxieties over regime change and distrust of Western motives for democracy promotion and humanitarian intervention, any future calls for airstrikes against Assad or his ousting will only likely antagonize and reinforce the Kremlin's preconceptions and beliefs in this regard. This makes the June 16, 2016 reporting by *The Wall Street Journal* that over 50 U.S. State Department officials signed and sent a confidential cable, now leaked, to the Obama Administration calling for airstrikes against Assad and allegedly "urging regime change" all the more damaging (Abi-Habib 2016). If the Putin Doctrine was indeed driving Kremlin thinking behind intervention, the Kremlin will not likely let Assad go easily, if at all, and the West must decide whether it is willing to escalate—potentially increasing the likelihood of further accidents or miscommunication like what happened on November 24, 2015—or to permit Assad; both particularly unpalatable options at the moment.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to explore why the Kremlin was motivated to intervene militarily in Syria on September 30, 2015. In conducting a thematic analysis of a data body consisting of all those materials published by the Kremlin online between June 19, 2015 and March 17, 2016, this thesis provided evidence that the Kremlin's discourse before and directly after strikes began was dominated by and represented the peak of codes related to the so-called Putin Doctrine, representing a collection of codes related to a nascent ideology opposed to the Western conception of democracy and state legitimacy. While some experts had made such claims to this effect before, the systematic approach taken here revealed just how intense the Kremlin's reliance on such references was in the lead up to actually launching strikes, strongly suggesting it as a potential driver and influencing factor in Russian thinking on military intervention, despite some insistence to the contrary on Putin's part.

This thesis, however, marks only a beginning, having just scratched the surface. The discursive map started here must be expanded to uncover whether the language of the Putin Doctrine here is found elsewhere, starting with other key institutions like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Ministry of Defense. Are these agencies sending out concurrent and parallel signaling to international and domestic audiences, highlighting the same codes and themes that President Putin does? Or do these institutions emphasize a different set of codes, or even themes? Not only would such research produce a much wider and more representative picture of the official discourse over the Russian air campaign in Syria, but it may also prove critical in visualizing how decision-making and the development of discourse over military intervention in Russia diffuses and evolves, as well as where any divisions in the Kremlin elite over foreign policy considerations might exist or are forming.

But dissecting Putin's words, or the statements of any number of Russian institutions and actors, is not a precise recipe for knowing when, where and why the Kremlin will do what it will abroad—likely the questions weighing heavily on the minds of many analysts since September 30, 2015. Perhaps later records and juicy tidbits from memoirs will paint a different picture than the one presented here of the potential Russian motivations and thinking behind the Syria campaign. But this analysis was only meant as a snapshot of the discourse produced and published by the Kremlin today, at the same time revealing the potential value of actually delving into this kind of material. The need now, to test whether the findings here can be corroborated elsewhere, is clear, especially given the findings. If Russian policy on the use of force abroad is seemingly driven by ideological concerns, Western governments and Russia experts must begin to unravel this Putin Doctrine today, to avoid any future "surprises."

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Appendix

IDENTIFIER	Title in Russian ***Official Kremlin Translation in English***	Date of Publication
Document 1	Пленарное заседание Петербургского международного экономического форума *Plenary session of the 19th St Petersburg International Economic Forum*	19-Jun-15
Document 2	Встреча с главой МИД Сирии Валидом Муаллемом *Meeting with Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem*	29-Jun-15
Document 3	Стенограмма заседания Совета глав государств – участников Шанхайской организации сотрудничества в расширенном составе *Speech at expanded-format meeting at the summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Council of Heads of State*	10-Jul-15
Document 4	Телефонный разговор с премьер-министром Италии Маттео Ренци *Telephone conversation with Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi*	17-Jul-15
Document 5	Телефонный разговор с Президентом Турции Реджепом Тайипом Эрдоганом *Telephone conversation with President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan*	26-Jul-15
Document 6	Совещание с постоянными членами Совета Безопасности *Meeting with permanent members of the Security Council*	28-Jul-15
Document 7	Состоится встреча Владимира Путина с Королём Иордании Абдаллой II *Vladimir Putin will meet with King Abdullah II of Jordan*	24-Aug-15
Document 8	Встреча с Королём Иордании Абдаллой II *Meeting with King of Jordan Abdullah II*	25-Aug-15
Document 9	Заявления для прессы по завершении российско-египетских переговоров *Press statements following Russian-Egyptian talks*	26-Aug-15

Document 10	Интервью информационным агентствам ТАСС и «Синьхуа» *Interview to TASS and Xinhua news agencies*	1-Sep-15
Document 11	Владимир Путин ответил на вопросы российских журналистов *Vladimir Putin answered Russian journalists' questions*	4-Sep-15
Document 12	Саммит ОДКБ *CSTO Summit*	15-Sep-15
Document 13	Встреча с Премьер-министром Израиля Биньямином Нетаньяху *Meeting with Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu*	21-Sep-15
Document 14	Встреча с Президентом Государства Палестина Махмудом Аббасом *Meeting with President of the State of Palestine Mahmoud Abbas*	22-Sep-15
Document 15	Совещание с постоянными членами Совета Безопасности *Meeting with permanent members of the Security Council*	25-Sep-15
Document 16	Телефонный разговор с Королём Саудовской Аравии Сальманом Бен Абдель Азизом Аль Саудом *Telephone conversation with King of Saudi Arabia Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud*	26-Sep-15
Document 17	70-я сессия Генеральной Ассамблеи ООН *70th session of the UN General Assembly*	28-Sep-15
Document 18	Встреча с Генеральным секретарём ООН Пан Ги Муном *Meeting with UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon*	28-Sep-15
Document 19	Интервью американскому журналисту Чарли Роузу для телеканалов CBS и PBS *Interview to American TV channel CBS and PBS*	29-Sep-15
Document 20	Ответы на вопросы журналистов *Answers to journalists' questions*	29-Sep-15
Document 21	Совещание с членами Правительства *Meeting with Government members*	30-Sep-15

Document 22	Заседание Совета по развитию гражданского общества и правам человека *Meeting of Council for Civil Society and Human Rights*	1-Oct-15
Document 23	Встреча с Президентом Франции Франсуа Олландом *Meeting with President of France Francois Hollande*	2-Oct-15
Document 24	Встреча с канцлером Германии Ангелой Меркель *Meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel*	2-Oct-15
Document 25	Встреча с Премьер-министром Люксембурга Ксавье Беттелем *Meeting with Prime Minister of Luxembourg Xavier Bettel*	6-Oct-15
Document 26	Встреча с главой Минобороны Сергеем Шойгу *Meeting with Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu*	7-Oct-15
Document 27	Телефонный разговор с Президентом Финляндии Саули Ниинистё *Telephone conversation with Finnish President Sauli Niinistö*	9-Oct-15
Document 28	Заседание Совета по взаимодействию с религиозными объединениями *Meeting of the Council for Cooperation with Religious Organisations*	9-Oct-15
Document 29	Совещание с постоянными членами Совета Безопасности *Meeting with permanent members of the Security Council*	10-Oct-15
Document 30	Встреча с Наследным принцем Абу-Даби Мухаммедом Аль Нахайяном *Meeting with Crown Prince of Abu-Dhabi Mohammed Al Nahyan*	11-Oct-15
Document 31	Интервью Владимиру Соловьёву *Interview to Vladimir Solovyov*	12-Oct-15
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Document 34	Совещание с членами Правительства *Meeting with Government members*	13-Oct-15
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Document 48	Продолжают поступать соболезнования глав государств и правительств зарубежных стран в связи с авиакатастрофой *Heads of state and government continue to send condolences following plane crash*	2-Nov-15
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Document 51	Всемирный конгресс соотечественников *World Congress of Compatriots*	5-Nov-15
Document 52	Совещание с постоянными членами Совета Безопасности *Meeting with permanent members of the Security Council*	6-Nov-15
Document 53	Встреча с главой Адыгеи Асланом Тхакушиновым *Meeting with Head of Adygeya Aslan Tkhakushinov*	6-Nov-15
Document 54	Совещание по вопросам развития Вооружённых Сил *Meeting on Armed Forces development*	9-Nov-15

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Document 59	Телефонный разговор с Президентом Франции Франсуа Олландом *Telephone conversation with President of France Francois Hollande*	17-Nov-15
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Document 61	Совещание о действиях Вооружённых Сил России в Сирии *Meeting on Russia's Armed Forces actions in Syria*	17-Nov-15
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Document 87	Встреча с госсекретарём США Джоном Керри и Министром иностранных дел России Сергеем Лавровым *Meeting with US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov*	15-Dec-15
Document 88	Большая пресс-конференция Владимира Путина *Vladimir Putin's annual news conference*	17-Dec-15
Document 89	Совещание с постоянными членами Совета Безопасности *Meeting with permanent members of the Security Council*	18-Dec-15
Document 90	Торжественный вечер, посвящённый Дню работника органов безопасности *Vladimir Putin attended gala reception to mark Security Agency Worker's Day*	19-Dec-15
Document 91	Встреча с Президентом Казахстана Нурсултаном Назарбаевым *Meeting with President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev*	21-Dec-15
Document 92	Телефонный разговор с Премьер-министром Израиля Биньямином Нетаньяху *Telephone conversation with Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu*	22-Dec-15
Document 93	Заявления для прессы по итогам российско-индийских переговоров *Statement for the press following Russian-Indian talks*	24-Dec-15
Document 94	Совещание с постоянными членами Совета Безопасности *Meeting with permanent members of the Security Council*	25-Dec-15
Document 95	Телефонный разговор с премьер-министром Италии Маттео Ренци *Telephone conversation with Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi*	8-Jan-16
Document 96	Интервью немецкому изданию Bild. Часть 2 *Interview to German newspaper Bild. Part 2*	12-Jan-16

Document 97	Телефонный разговор с Президентом США Бараком Обамой *Telephone conversation with US President Barack Obama*	13-Jan-16
Document 98	Телефонный разговор с Королём Иордании Абдаллой II *Telephone conversation with King Abdullah II of Jordan*	14-Jan-16
Document 99	Встреча с Президентом Греции Прокописом Павлопулосом *Meeting with President of Greece Prokopis Pavlopoulos*	15-Jan-16
Document 100	Встреча с членами Исполнительного комитета Европейского еврейского конгресса *Meeting with European Jewish Congress Executive Committee*	19-Jan-16
Document 101	Телефонный разговор с Премьер-министром Японии Синдзо Абэ *Telephone conversation with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe*	22-Jan-16
Document 102	Заседание межрегионального форума ОНФ *Meeting of the Russian Popular Front's (ONF) interregional forum*	25-Jan-16
Document 103	Посещение Северо-Кавказского федерального университета *Visit to the North Caucasus Federal University*	25-Jan-16
Document 104	Совещание с постоянными членами Совета Безопасности *Meeting with permanent members of the Security Council*	28-Jan-16
Document 105	Встреча с премьер-министром Баварии Хорстом Зеехофером *Meeting with Prime Minister of Bavaria Horst Seehofer*	3-Feb-16
Document 106	Поздравление сотрудникам и ветеранам МИД России с Днём дипломатического работника *Congratulations to current and former Foreign Ministry employees on Diplomats' Day*	10-Feb-16

Document 107	Телефонный разговор с Президентом США Бараком Обамой *Telephone conversation with President of the United States Barack Obama*	14-Feb-16
Document 108	Пресс-конференция по завершении российско-венгерских переговоров *News conference following Russian-Hungarian talks*	17-Feb-16
Document 109	Телефонный разговор с Королём Саудовской Аравии Сальманом Бен Абдель Азизом Аль Саудом *Telephone conversation with King of Saudi Arabia Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud*	19-Feb-16
Document 110	Совещание с постоянными членами Совета Безопасности *Meeting with permanent members of the Security Council*	19-Feb-16
Document 111	Торжественный вечер, посвящённый Дню защитника Отечества *Gala evening dedicated to the Day of Defender of the Fatherland*	20-Feb-16
Document 112	Обращение Владимира Путина в связи с принятием совместного заявления России и США по Сирии *Vladimir Putin's address following adoption of a joint statement by Russia and US on Syria*	22-Feb-16
Document 113	Телефонный разговор с Президентом Сирии Башаром Асадом *Telephone conversation with President of Syria Bashar Asad*	24-Feb-16
Document 114	Совещание с постоянными членами Совета Безопасности *Meeting with permanent members of the Security Council*	24-Feb-16
Document 115	Телефонный разговор с Президентом Ирана Хасаном Рухани *Telephone conversation with President of Iran Hassan Rouhani*	24-Feb-16
Document 116	Телефонный разговор с Королём Саудовской Аравии Сальманом Бен Абдель Азизом Аль Саудом *Telephone conversation with King of Saudi Arabia Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud*	24-Feb-16

Document 117	Телефонный разговор с Президентом Азербайджана Ильхамом Алиевым *Telephone conversation with President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev*	25-Feb-16
Document 118	Заседание коллегии Федеральной службы безопасности *Meeting of the Federal Security Service board*	26-Feb-16
Document 119	Телефонная конференция с Дэвидом Кэмероном, Ангелой Меркель, Франсуа Олландом и Маттео Ренци *Telephone conference with David Cameron, Francois Hollande, Angela Merkel and Matteo Renzi*	4-Mar-16
Document 120	Телефонный разговор с Президентом Египта Абдельфаттахом Сиси *Telephone conversation with President of Egypt Abdel Fattah el-Sisi*	7-Mar-16
Document 121	Встреча с главой Росфинмониторинга Юрием Чиханчиным *Meeting with Head of Rosfinmonitoring Yury Chikhanchin*	9-Mar-16
Document 122	Телефонный разговор с Премьер-министром Греции Алексисом Ципрасом *Telephone conversation with Prime Minister of Greece Alexis Tsipras*	10-Mar-16
Document 123	Встреча с Президентом Армении Сержем Саргсяном *Meeting with President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan*	10-Mar-16
Document 124	Единый день приёмки военной продукции *Unified military goods commissioning day*	11-Mar
Document 125	15 марта Владимир Путин встретится с Королём Марокко Мухаммедом VI *Vladimir Putin will meet with King Mohammed VI of Morocco on March 15*	11-Mar-16
Document 126	Телефонный разговор с Президентом Сирии Башаром Асадом *Telephone conversation with President of Syria Bashar al-Assad*	14-Mar-16
Document 127	Встреча с Сергеем Лавровым и Сергеем Шойгу *Meeting with Sergei Lavrov and Sergei Shoigu*	14-Mar-15

Document 128	Телефонный разговор с Президентом США Бараком Обамой *Telephone conversation with US President Barack Obama*	15-Mar-16
Document 129	17 марта Владимир Путин встретится с военнослужащими Вооружённых Сил России *Vladimir Putin will meet with Russian Armed Forces service personnel on March 17*	16-Mar-16
Document 130	Совещание с постоянными членами Совета Безопасности *Meeting with permanent members of the Security Council*	17-Mar-16
Document 131	Вручение знамени Воздушно-космических сил *Presenting the banner of the Aerospace Forces*	17-Mar-16
Document 132	Встреча с военнослужащими Вооружённых Сил России *Meeting with Russian Armed Forces service personnel*	17-Mar-16