# PURSUING (IN)SECURITY: IMPLICATIONS OF RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY IN UKRAINE

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## Abstract

This paper articulates the strategic goals that propelled Russian military intervention in the Crimean peninsula and eastern Ukraine, as well as their implications for international security. It argues that Russian military intervention proceeds from the intention of the Putin administration to recover the geopolitical assets lost by Russia upon the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Such a desire has become a core tenet of Russian grand strategy under the Putin administration, and represents a clear threat to the territorial integrity of all former Soviet countries. Finally, this paper characterizes the military confrontation in Ukraine as having reached a unstable equilibrium, as Russia has essentially failed to accomplish its strategic objectives in Ukraine. As a result, it predicts a further escalation of the conflict to be very likely.

## Keywords

Ukraine – Russia – Europe – Ukrainian conflict – NATO – European Union – international security

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# LA (IN)SEGURIDAD COMO OBJETIVO: IMPLICANCIAS DE LA POLÍTICA EXTERIOR RUSA EN UCRANIA


## Resumen

Este paper articula los objetivos estratégicos que persigue la intervención rusa en la península de Crimea y Ucrania del este, y también sus implicancias para la seguridad internacional. Se sostiene que la intervención miitar rusa proviene de la intención de la administración de Putin de recuperar los activos geopolíticos perdidos por Rusia tras la desintegración de la Unión Soviética. Este deseo se ha convertido en el núcleo de la estrategia global rusa bajo la administración de Putin, y representa una clara amenaza a la integridad territorial de todos los antiguos países soviéticos. Finalmente, este artículo señala que la confrontación militar en Ucrania ha alcanzado un equilibrio inestable, puesto que Rusia ha no ha logradocumplir sus objetivos estratégicos en Ucrania. Como resultado, se predice una escalada en el conflicto como muy probable.



## Palabras clave

Ucrania – Rusia – Europa – conflicto ucraniano – Organización del Tratado del Atlántico Norte – Unión Europea – seguridad internacional


## I. Introduction

As of early December 2014, Ukraine is a fragmented country. Some of its eastern territory and the peninsula of Crimea are no longer under the control of the central government; instead, they are *de facto* administered by Russia. The legality of such a takeover is disputed by Ukraine, its western allies and indeed a majority of countries represented at the UN General Assembly. While the ongoing territorial disintegration of Ukraine in itself is a tangible wound to international peace and security, it is also an indication that the current administration in Russia poses a significant threat to European peace and security. The purpose of this essay is to explain the strategic goals that inspired Russia to act, and how those same goals forebode further trouble for international order.

This essay is articulated in three parts. In the first part, I present a brief history of the conflict that emerged between the Ukrainian and the Russian military forces. My account reconstructs the political *status quo ante* in Ukraine and its foreign policy toward

the European Union and Russia; revisits the breakdown in the *status quo ante* that culminated in the so-called *Euromaidan* protests in February 2014; and finally examines the involvement of the Russian military in the tactical extension of the conflict to the Crimean and Donbass scenarios.

In the second part, I present a reasoned reconstruction of the Russian military and political objectives in Ukraine and examine how these strategic goals drove Russian actions in the evolving conflict. Later, I evaluate the effectiveness of Russian political and military involvement in Ukraine by comparing intended strategic goals and actual strategic outcomes of the conflict. Finally, I supplement my analysis with a brief examination of the aiding tactical tools that the Russian government deployed to sustain its intervention such as media representation of the events.

In the third part, I draw a parallel between the strategic goals that guided Russian military intervention in Ukraine and the grander strategic imperatives that inspire Russian national security. I argue that the strategic objectives of the Russian government in Ukraine are an accurate reflection of grander strategic imperatives on which the Putin administration has based its notion of national security. Therefore, the very pursuit of order and security for Russia represents a challenge to order and security in Europe at large.

I conclude by noting that the present situation in eastern Ukraine remains highly volatile, and a flaming up of confrontation is an almost inevitable outcome. In addition, deterioration of the Russian economy suggests that the Putin administration's ability to play the long game is diminishing and as a result European order and security is at heightened risk.

### *A) Origins and Development of the Ukrainian conflict*

In order to properly understand the root causes of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, it is necessary to briefly revisit recent Ukrainian history. In this section, I will first present the long-standing attitude of the Ukrainian elites and the Ukrainian people toward the European Union and Russia, and the progressive deterioration of social cohesion that Ukraine experienced in 2004. Next, I will recount the crucial twelve-week period that marked the collapse of the Ukrainian government in 2013 and the breaking of hostilities between Russia and Ukraine. Finally, I will summarise the tactical evolution of the conflict

over the subsequent twelve months. This final section intends to establish a common knowledge base for people interested in understanding the conflict.

## II. EU Membership as a Foreign Policy Goal

Modern Ukraine, as territorially defined by its pre-conflict borders, was born following the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991. WOLCZUK (2003) notes that upon gaining political autonomy Ukraine modelled its foreign policy objectives after those of other east-central European States, and resolutely sought closer cooperation with the European Union ("EU"). In June 1994, it was the first Commonwealth of Independent States ("CIS") country to sign the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement ("PCA") with the EU, which abated trade barriers between the two markets through reciprocal accordance of Most Favoured Nation trading privileges (VAN DER KLUGT, 1993). The PCA thus "offered Ukraine a much-needed trade and economic path for convergence and political dialogue" (KOROSTELEVA, 2012), though the agreement contained no reference to EU membership yet.

As ratification of the PCA by all European partners neared completion, Ukraine formally announced its desire to join the EU. In 1996, the Ukrainian parliament declared EU membership to be a strategic objective (WOLCZUK, 2003). Upon ratification of the PCA in June 1998, then-President of Ukraine L. Kuchma signed a decree that encouraged a 'Strategy for Ukraine's Integration into the EU', by first establishing an "association" and eventually obtaining full membership (HARAN & ZOLKINA, 2014). Finally, the Kuchma administration approved in 2000 the more detailed 'Programme of Ukraine's Integration with the EU', which became the basis for institutional changes designed to facilitate integration (WOLCZUK, 2003).

The pursuit of EU membership by the governing elite broadly reflected the consensus among the Ukrainian people. A Ukrainian Centre for Economic and Political Studies ("UCEPS") survey on the Ukrainians' attitude toward EU membership revealed that 67% of the government officials and 61% of the people believed Ukraine should join the EU within 5-10 years (PASHKOV & CHALY, 2000). At the same time, the UCEPS survey was careful to point out that "integration with the EU [...] has yet yet failed to become a dominant priority in the population's foreign policy sympathies" as Ukrainians remained split on the immediate importance of foreign partnerships (PASHKOV & CHALY, 2000). 31% of the people believed co-operation with CIS States ought to be Ukraine's first foreign policy concern, 29%

reckoned precedence should be given to relations with EU countries and 27% instead preferred prioritizing ties with Russia (PASHKOV & CHALY, 2000).

As a result, Ukraine carefully cultivated friendly relations with its influential eastern neighbour. In 1997, Kuchma concluded a 'Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership' with the Russian government, which agreed to recognize Ukraine's modern borders in exchange for a long-term lease of its military facilities. In the 2004 Presidential elections, Kuchma also supported then-Prime-minister V. Yanukovich, whom he painted as "a great friend of Russia" (HARAN & ZOLKINA, 2014). Kuchma's Presidency was thus characteristically defined by its "multi-vector" diplomacy, which attempted to strengthen Ukraine's position by simultaneously appealing to the EU and Russia as a reliable partner (HARAN & ZOLKINA, 2014).

"Multi-vector" diplomacy notwithstanding, Ukraine kept steady its commitment to European integration. In 2003, Prime Minister Yanukovich and his Party of Regions unanimously approved a 'Law on Fundamentals of National Security in Ukraine', which reaffirmed Ukraine's commitment to joining the EU (HARAN & ZOLKINA, 2014). That same law also envisaged future Ukrainian membership to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization ("NATO"), which had been under discussion since the establishment of the Ukraine-NATO Commission in 1997 (MFAU, a). Thus, the process of integration within existing regional organizations marched on.

### *A) Russian Opposition to EU Membership*

As the 2004 Presidential election approached, the country grew increasingly polarized. Residents of the western and central regions of Ukraine, who favoured opposition candidate V. Yushchenko over Kuchma's protégé Yanukovich, grew rankled as their leader miraculously escaped an assassination attempt. Whilst allegations of electoral fraud and voter intimidation tainted election day, demonstrators took to the streets and occupied Kiev's Independence Square in protest. Amid widespread objection to the electoral result, which had recognized Yanukovich as the next President of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Supreme Court nullified the results and ordered a repeat election. Buoyed by the vociferous support of Independence Square protesters and the claim that he had fallen prey to a politically-motivated act of violence, Yushchenko won the second round of voting.

Under Yushchenko's leadership, aggressive pursuit of deeper European integration took precedence over "multi-vector" diplomacy. Negotiations opened over the establishment of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area ("DCFTA") with the EU, which would have enabled "the progressive removal of of customs tariffs and quotas and […] extensive harmonisation of laws, norms and regulations in various trade-related sectors" (EU, 2013). In addition, the Yushchenko administration sought to enter into an Association Agreement ("AA") with the EU, which would have superseded the PCA signed in 1998 as the document governing EU-Ukrainian relations and deepened political cooperation between the two institutions. As a result of renewed focus on European integration, ties with Moscow deteriorated.

The recently installed administration of Russian President V. Putin wasted no time in imparting on Yushchenko its desire that Ukraine change its perceived 'anti-Russian' course. In 2008, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs formally complained that "rigid and massive administrative pressure" on the Russian language were creating a "tense atmosphere in society" (UNIAN, 2008a). Mayor of Moscow and vice-chairman of Pres. Putin's party "United Russia" Y. Luzhkov called for the termination of the Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation with Ukraine and the return of Crimea to Russia (UNIAN, 2008). Pres. Putin himself commented that Russia may have to target its missiles at Ukraine if the country proceeded with plans of NATO integration (BBC, 2008). Russian diplomatic pressure, which steadily depicted Yushchenko's rule as oppressive and antagonistic toward Russians, managed to further erode popular support for the government in the eastern regions of Ukraine. In the 2012 elections, Yushchenko's renewed bid for the Presidency faltered; former rival and "great friend of Russia" Yanukovich took office.

Under the Presidency of V. Yanukovich, Ukrainian foreign policy helplessly wavered between respecting its former commitments to European integration and placating Russian demands. Despite having formerly supported Ukrainian membership to both the EU and NATO, Yanukovich's Party of Regions first pushed through Parliament a new "Law on Fundamentals of National Security in Ukraine" that rejected NATO membership in favour of a policy of "non-alignment" aimed at appeasing the Kremlin (HARAN & ZOLKINA, 2014). Although the new law still maintained EU membership as a foreign policy objective, Parliament then teetered for two years over crucial legislative amendments that would have brought Ukrainian legal standards on par with those required by the body of EU law. At last, in November 2013 Yanukovich surprised both EU leaders and domestic public opinion by refusing to sign the long-awaited AA at a joint summit in Vilnius. In so doing, the Yanukovich administration unwittingly invited a new round of popular protests.

## III. The February Revolution

It is important to notice that, while the refusal to sign the AA was essentially a foreign policy decision, a significant segment of the public viewed it as a foundational milestone for Ukrainian domestic politics. VACHUDOVA (2001) aptly notes that "EU membership is a foreign policy goal… [that affects] every aspect of domestic policymaking in an applicant state" in that it entails "massive [...], non-negotiable [...]" amendments to domestic legislation and submission to "intrusive verification procedures". Indeed, "EU leverage helped remove rent-seeking [politicians] from office by tarnishing their Westernizing image and by supplying […] "Europe" as a convincing electoral platform" for opposition parties. In other words, the prospective of EU membership acted as a catalyst for important renovation of Ukrainian politics itself.

Despite having coalesced around the label '*Euromaidan',* the protests that erupted in November 2013 originated precisely from a sentiment of distrust toward established political elites. Ukrainian protesters had grown wary of an "entire political system [...] based on mis-governance, rent-seeking and corruption" (ECFR, a) and welcomed the adoption of the AA as a precursor to greater political transparency and accountability. They reckoned the agreement granted the EU sufficient leverage to implement solid legislative provisions against corruption and in favour of the rule of law that domestic forces alone had not yet been able to achieve (NEE, 2014). As a result, the protesters shared fierce animosity against what they perceived as a corrupt government that had failed to reform itself, rather than a specific foreign policy agenda *per se*.

The Yanukovich administration responded by ordering the police and *Berkut* special forces to crack down hard on dissenters; by February 20th 2014, more than 100 civilians had died in the ensuing clashes (BLACK *et al*., 2014). Such a strong-handed response only hardened the protesters. Tens of thousands of Ukrainians marched against police brutality in over a dozen Ukrainian cities. On February 22nd, Pres. Yanukovich fled Kiev without notice, leaving the government in disarray and the protesters firmly in control of the capital.

## IV. Russian Military Intervention

The Russian military intervention in Ukraine silently began a few days later. On February 27th, unidentified gunmen broke into the Parliament building in Crimea and hoisted a Russian flag on its roof. Within the next two days, maniples of armed men clad in

dark green, insignia-less military outfits occupied the Sevastopol and Simferopol airports in Crimea (DE CARBONNEL & PRENTICE, 2014), while *Berkut* units set up check points on the narrow isthmus that connected Crimea to the mainland (SONNE, 2014). More armed units surrounded Ukrainian military bases in Crimea, and either compelled their personnel to surrender or stormed their positions by force.[1] Both the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Russian President V. Putin himself later identified the occupying forces, who had previously been labelled "little green men" due to their unclear origin, as units of the Russian special forces (RT, 2014).

Over the followign two weeks, "masked men in army fatigues and bulletproof vests" stormed local offices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and municipal government buildings in the eastern Ukrainian cities of Slovyansk, Donetsk and Luhansk (RACHKEVYCH, 2014). Soon after, they broke into local police stations and raided avilable weapons caches (OLIPHANT, 2014). Fearing another episode of armed separatism, the Ukrainian government promptly launched a "large-scale anti-terrorist operation" to re-establish control over contested territory on April 13th (TWP, 2014b). In the resulting confrontation, the Ukrainian army laboriously contained the armed insurgency within its original hotbed and subsequently encircled the rebel stronghold of Slovyansk, leading to its capitulation on July 5th (BBC, 2014b). By mid-July, the military position of the rebels had slowly grown so precarious that it put the whole separatist cause at risk.

At this point, Russian military support for the rebels increased dramatically. Russian heavy artillery was filmed shelling Ukrainian army positions from Russian territory (WEISS & MILLER, 2014). *The Guardian* reporters offered definitive proof of Russian mechanized armour and tanks long rumored to be crossing the border into Ukraine (WALKER, 2014). The shooting down of several Ukrainian military aircraft and a Malaysian civilian airliner over separatist territory further confirmed that local militias had access to advanced anti-aircraft missiles (BENDER, 2014). Finally, personal accounts of Russian citizens who had been sent to fight in Ukraine (TAVERNISE, 2014) and reports of secret military funerals for Russian paratroopers (BBC, 2014a) indicated that Russian military personnel was engaged in direct confrontation with the Ukrainian army. Thanks to extensive support from the Russian

1 REUTERS (2014) "Shots fired as Russian troops force their way into Ukrainian base in Crimea". Disponible en [http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/22/us-ukraine-crisis-crimea-airbase-idUSBREA2L0BN20140322].

military, separatist militias were able to cement control over their remaining territory and drive the conflict to a stall, which has persisted till December 2014.

### *A) Russian Strategy in Ukraine*

Having reconstructed the anatomy of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict is necessary, yet not sufficient to developing a firm grasp of its character. In order to do that, one must clearly articulate the strategic goals that have inspired the Russian government to undertake military action, and show how these goals have led to the present state of affairs. A truly comprehensive analysis of the conflict would also examine the separate strategic goals of the Ukrainian government and of each individual partisan groups that fought on either side. Then, it would use the resulting admixture of competing strategic objectives to explain the dynamic evolution of the conflict. Since this paper is exclusively concerned with Russian foreign policy objectives in Ukraine and their implications for international order and stability, it will leave such a detailed examination to future scholarship, and limit itself to investigating Russian strategic objectives in Ukraine.

#### *i. The Crimean Scenario*

Establishing control over Ukraine was such a high-priority goal that Russian military planners never excluded resorting to armed intervention. Former high-level Ukrainian and Russian officials have publicly expressed the view that plans for a military takeover of Ukraine had been under development for well over a decade. Russian economist and former economic policy advisor to Pres. Putin, A. Illarionov, shared with the audience of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Vilnius in May 2014 that "this war was carefully planned and prepared for many years" (ILLARIONOV, 2014). Two months later, Deputy Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council ("NSDC") of Ukraine M. Koval confirmed on a televised interview that "the Russian general staff started preparing its Crimea and Donbass operations at least eight years ago".[2]

The Crimean peninsula simply happened to be the most naturally advantageous place to begin such a complex military action. Since the adoption of the aforementioned

2 "Эта война готовилась давно. Это мощная спецоперация, которая проводится именно в этом году на территории нашего государства, которая в Генеральном штабе Вооруженных сил РФ была задумана как минимум лет 8 назад" (ZN,UA, 2014)

Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership in 1997, the Russian navy had shared access to former Soviet military facilities scattered across Crimea along with the Ukrainian Navy. It enjoyed control over local stores of weapon and machinery, as well as military bases on the peninsula. As a result, it was not too difficult for local Russian units, supported by special forces flown in from the Russian mainland, to swiftly seize Crimean communication nodes, neutralize local Ukrainian Navy units and take over local government offices. In all these tasks, Russian units were aided by their thorough knowledge of the area, ubiquitous presence and availability of supplies.

On the other hand, Crimea was a disappointing prize in itself. The peninsula has always been wholly dependent on its connection to Ukraine to sustain the local economy: its two million residents import roughly 90% of their clean water, 80% of their electricity and 65% of their heating gas from other regions of Ukraine (SOARES, 2014). A lack of infrastructure prohibits the import of utilities from Russia. In addition, 70% of the Crimean regional budget is directly subsidized from Kiev, as local industry never generated sufficient tax receipts to fund all necessary expenditure. Finally, while Crimea boasts some minor oil and natural gas deposits underneath the nearby Sea of Azov, it lacks the infrastructure to extract them. Overall, Crimea remains a region largely dependent on external help, and annexation shifted the burden onto the Russian federal budget.

Overall, the annexation of Crimea appears to have been a dubious strategic gain. Russian business daily Vedomosti reports that as of August 2014, "the annexation of Crimea has already absorbed nearly $4.5 billion from Russia's federal budget" (VEDEMOSTI, 2014), which had been projected to total $390 billion in 2014. The draft budget for the period 2015-2017 estimates that the maintenance of Crimea will cost in excess of $2.5 billion per year, excluding the approved $8.5 billion in additional investment out the $22.5 billion required to modernize local infrastructure and establish links to the Russian mainland (PRIME, 2014). Considering that Russian conventional forces already enjoyed a conspicuous presence on the peninsula as well as unfettered access to its most significant military bases and ports; and further, that the Putin administration had previously secured the right to extend its lease of Crimean bases until 2042, the annexation of Crimea shows little upside. As a result, the seizure of Crimea could not help be the opening move in a dangerous military gambit, which required the Russian government to wrest control of several other regions away from the Ukrainian government in quick succession.

*ii. The Donbas scenario*

Some of the heavy costs associated with the annexation of Crimea derived from its dependence on infrastructure that binds it to the Ukrainian mainland; these costs could effectively be neutralized by re-establishing a direct land connection to the peninsula. In order to accomplish this, the regions that span Ukraine between its border with Russia on the east and the Black Sea on the south had to be brought under the control of Moscow. Such a move would have secured a land bridge to Crimea, facilitating the import of foodstuff and other consumables from the mainland, allowing the re-establishment of stable water, electricity, and heating gas supply from nearby Ukrainian plants and permitting the redeployment of Russian military units stationed on the peninsula. In addition, it would have secured Russian control over some of the most heavily industrialized regions of Ukraine and saved tens of billions in planned infrastructural development in Crimea, thus significantly easing the economic burden on the Russian federal budget.

In addition to economic considerations, there were two compelling reasons to advance the annexation of south-eastern Ukraine, also referred to as 'Novorossiya'. First, several companies that produce industrial components key to the Russian military have their plants in 'Novorossiya'. Gears necessary to the functioning of Russia's planned new warships are produced in the southern city of Mykolaiyv; the engines necessary to power Russian military transport aircraft, attack helicopters and some attack aircraft are assembled and serviced by the Motor Sich company in Zaporozhye; the guiding systems to Russia's strategic intercontinental ballistic missiles and strategic missile are designed and produced respectively in Dnipropetrovsk and Kharkiv (TWP, 2014a). Gaining control over the region would have safeguarded Russian military forces against the severe effects of supply disruption.

Second, the annexation of 'Novorossiya' would have granted the Kremlin control over the Kharkiv-Zaporozhye-Horlivka pipeline that winds from Russia across Ukraine to Romania. The pipeline is one of the final ramifications of the vestigial “Soyuz” (“Union”) pipeline, which in the 1970s used to service Soviet satellite States and nowadays provides as much as 23% of the total gas consumed every year in Europe (NoU, 2015). The pipeline is designed to transport 26 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas a year (NoU, 2012), which is equivalent to roughly half the capacity of the newly proposed Russian “South Stream” pipeline (South Stream, a). Securing ownership of the Kharkiv-Zaporozhye-Horlivka route would improve Russia’s ability to deliver natural gas to Europe while bypasing Ukrainian territory; in addition, it may well make the “South Stream” redundant and save the federal

budget the $7.5 billion required for its construction (GAZPROM, 2011). Overall then, the annexation of 'Novorossiya' would have accomplished the following three strategic goals: restoring a land bridge to Crimea while avoiding onerous infrastructural investment; securing the supply of vital military hardware; and multiply available natural gas export routes to Europe that circumvented Ukrainian territory.

### *iii. Russian Gambit*

In order to accomplish the takeover of the Ukrainian south-east, however, the Russian military could count on none of the advantages that had aided its units in the blitz seizure of Crimea. No Russian bases existed at the time in 'Novorossiya', so Russian soldiers enjoyed no established presence in the region. No local caches of food, fuel or ammunition were locally available. In addition, soldiers were not personally acquainted with the terrain. Most importantly, 'Novorossiya' strecthed over a vast and uninterrupted plain that made conventional ground occupation a disproportionately onerous task for the Russian military stationed on Ukraine's borders.

As a result, the Putin administration relied instead on enticing popular fear of the Ukrainian government, in an attempt to convince the inhabitants of eastern Ukraine to shift their allegiance. In accordance with this strategy, Russian media repeatedly broadcast news bites that "[portrayed] the interim government in Kiev […] as illegitimate" and contrasted "purported Kremlin benevolence […] with […] neo-Nazis, intent on subordinating or exterminating ethnic Russians in Ukraine and beyond" (SCHRAD, 2014). Simultaneously, this strategy of engineered civil dissent relied on the inability of the national government in Kiev to mount a credible information and military counter-offensive. Unfortunately for the military planners at the Kremlin, both conditions failed to materialise; civil unrest successfully broke out in only three eastern cities, and the Ukrainian government quickly endeavoured to restore control over its territory through force of arms. The Russian gambit floundered.

Overall, the forceful annexation of Ukrainian territory has had limited success in reaching Russian strategic goals in Ukraine. While the operation has achieved the objective of establishing military and administrative control over Crimea, it has failed to achieve a similar result in south-eastern Ukraine. As a direct result, the all-important factories that provide crucial hardware components to the Russian armed forces and maintenance to Russian missile systems, as well as the profitable Kharkiv-Dnipropetrovsk-Mykolaiyv gas

pipeline remain well out of the Kremlin's reach. Meanwhile, the annexation of the Crimean exclave has saddled the Russian federal budget with significant monetary costs. On top of it all, the relative weakness of insurgent Ukrainian militias has tied down the Russian military in a simmering undeclared conflict with the Ukrainian national defence forces.

## V. Implications for International Order and Stability

The importance of the Russian military intervention in Ukraine has far-reaching implications for order and security in Europe. In this section, I introduce the concept of grand strategy, which is the purposeful coordination of all means available to a State to achieve national security. Grand strategy guides national security thought in that it defines the narrow strategic goals that drive military conflict. I argue that the Russian military intervention in Ukraine is a living testimony to the Russian grand strategy principles held by the Putin administration, and that such principles are inherently incompatible with the contemporary European order and security paradigm.

### *A) Regional Hegemony*

As a former Soviet Socialist Republic, Ukraine falls neatly within the so-called "sphere of privileged interests" that the Putin administration has repeatedly invoked since 2008 to define former USSR territory (GS, a). All countries within this sphere are viewed by the Kremlin as being historically indivisible from Russia itself, and therefore lacking any real claim to sovereignty of their own; Pres. Putin famously attempted to convey such a view to U.S. Pres. G. W. Bush at the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008 when he told him: "You have to understand, George, that Ukraine is not even a country" (STENT, 2014). As recently as 2014, Pres. Putin made similar comments about Kazakhstan while giving a speech to a supportive political youth camp at Lake Sliger near Moscow; he said current President of Kazakhstan N. Nazarbayev has "creaed a state on a territory that never had a state. […] Kazakhs never had any statehood, he has created it" (DOLGOV, 2014).

The perception that the historical trajectory of these territories is indivisible from that of Russia itself has in turn underpinned one the overarching strategic objectives of the Putin administration, namely the "recovery of economic, political and geostrategic assets lost by the Soviet State in 1991" (ARON, 2013). In what has become known as the "Putin Doctrine", the Kremlin has persistently sought the "political, economic, military and cultural reintegration of the former Soviet bloc under Russian leadership" (ARON, 2013). Hence, the

recovery and integration of the industrial-economic assets of former Soviet Republics has become a central tenet of Russian grand strategy, and that is exactly what military intervention in Ukraine hoped to achieve.

Clearly, a strategic imperative to recover 'economic, political and geostrategic assets' now under control of other States represents a direct threat to the security and stability of those countries. The Russian air force has underscored such a threat by carrying out 68 distinct violations of Lithuanian air space and over 150 violations of Latvian air space by Russian military aircraft in nine months. In addition, Russian security services have abducted an Estonian security service operative in September, and taken him to Moscow to face espionage charges (FREAR *et al.*, 2014). Such incidents have forced NATO forces to maintain high alert in the Baltic. The threatening implications of Russia's grand strategy are not lost on Moscow's allies, either. Belarusian President Lukashenko openly "criticized separatists referendums in Ukraine and warned Russia not to take any more ex-Soviet territory" (AP, 2014). The "Putin doctrine" thus poses a fundamental hazard to order and security in Europe.

### *B) Playing the Long Game*

In spite of limited strategic accomplishments on the ground, the invasion of Ukraine still has the potential to turn into a Russian grand strategic victory. Ukraine is a financially dilapidate country, and its economy is rapidly shrinking. The Ukrainian Central Bank estimates that Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is going to shrink by 4.3% in 2015, on top of the 7.5% contraction it already experienced in 2014.[3] The simultaneous depreciation of the Ukrainian national currency *Hryvnia* against the US dollar has made servicing payments on foreign debt even more burdensome, and led some investors to sell off Ukrainian government bonds in anticipation of a possible default (WIGGLESWORTH, 2015). Therefore, the Ukrainian government's ability to finance meaningful military operations against the Russian armed forces or effectively combat separatist militias is increasingly hampered. The eventual collapse of the Ukrainian economy will inevitably lead to a resolution of the conflict on terms favourable to Russia, and thus the Putin administration may still be able to accomplish a grand strategic victory in spite of any military setback.

3 REUTERS (2014) "Ukraine central bank chief sees economy shrinking by 4.3 pct in 2015". Disponible en [http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/11/20/ukraine-crisis-gdp-idUSL6N0TA13K20141120].

On the other hand, western economic sanctions on Russia and slumping oil prices have independently weakened the Kremlin's ability to bide its time. In response to the Russian military invasion of Ukraine, the EU, the United States, Canada, Japan and Australia have all barred national financial institutions from offering loans to large Russian banks and oil companies in September (ROBERTS, 2014). Meanwhile, a decline in the price of crude oil has diminished Russian tax revenue on oil exports and led to a significant depreciation of the rouble, which closely follow the *Hryvnia* as the worst-performing national currency in 2014 (GILBERT, 2014). Much like Ukraine, the Russian economy now faces significant hurdles in repaying foreign currency-denominated debt, and the expected 4.5% GDP contraction in 2015 is only going to exacerbate the problem. Taken together, all factors are contributing to place increasing strain on the Russian federal budget. It remains unclear whether the Russian economy will prove more resilient than that of Ukraine over the next two years.

## VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, the strategic goals that propelled Russian military intervention in the Crimean peninsula and eastern Ukraine spring from the stated intention of the Putin administration to recover the geopolitical assets Russia lost upon the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, this intention comprises a pillar of contemporary Russian grand strategy, which stakes out Russian strategic posture for the foreseeable future. As a result, Russian grand strategy poses a fundamental security challenge to all countries which fall into the Kremlin's so-called “sphere of privileged interests”, and it will continue to do so in the foreseeable future.

The military confrontation in Ukraine similarly remains an active threat to Ukrainian security, as the present stand-off is inherently unstable. the Russian government retains administrative control over (and responsibility for) the Crimean peninsula but it lacks any meaningful way of actually providing the economic support the peninsula needs. At the same time, Russian servicemen are tied down in an engagement with the Ukrainian military to prevent the complete collapse of the eastern Ukrainian separatist cause, without the full acknowledgement of the Russian public. Far from being a frozen conflict, chances are high that further military action will be undertaken to restore a land bridge to Crimea and to break the stall in the Donbass.

Such an outcome is likely to be quickened by the increasingly dismal forecasts of the Russian economy. The ability of the Kremlin to stall in search for a diplomatic resolution on

favorable terms is progressively undermined by plummeting tax receipt revenues on oil exports, which put significant strain on the Russian federal budget. It remains to be seen whether the accelerating collapse of Russian state revenues vis-à-vis the ongoing unraveling of the Ukrainian economy will force the Putin administration into a more conciliatory stance.

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