Putin, Putinism, and the Domestic Determinants of Russian Foreign Policy

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When the Soviet Union collapsed, competition between the United States and Russia also ended, temporarily. Under the guidance of President Boris Yeltsin, the new leadership in Russia aspired to consolidate democracy and capitalism at home and championed integration into the liberal international order. Although the results of both agendas were mixed throughout the 1990s, ideological competition played little to no role in shaping Russia's relations with "the West,"[1] in general, and the United States, in particular.

Times have changed under President Vladimir Putin. Gradually over the last two decades and increasingly since 2014, when Putin annexed Crimea and intervened in eastern Ukraine, Russia and the United States, as well as Russia and the West, have clashed. Many politicians and analysts now compare

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1. "The West" appears in quotation marks because in the 1990s, this group of states was often treated as a monolithic actor, rooted in democracy, capitalism, and multilateral institutions. Today, "the West" does not have these same unifying properties. On this earlier conception of the liberal West, see Michael Mandelbaum, *The Ideas That Conquered the World: Peace, Democracy, and Free Markets in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2002); and Timothy Garton Ash, *Free World: America, Europe, and the Surprising Future of the West* (New York: Random House, 2004). Some Russian thinkers also have conceptualized "the West" as a unified actor, but with a negative connotation, in opposition to Russia. For reviews of this thinking, see Charles Clover, *Black Wind, White Snow: The Rise of Russia's New Nationalism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2016); Marlene Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Press/Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); and Martin Malia, *Russia under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1999).

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the current level of confrontation to the Cold War.[2] At the Munich Security Conference in 2016, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev referenced the Cuban missile crisis as a similar moment in bilateral tensions: "Speaking bluntly, we are rapidly rolling into a period of a new cold war. . . . I am sometimes confused: is this 2016 or 1962?"[3] Echoing Medvedev, Ernest Moniz and Sam Nunn wrote, "Not since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis has the risk of a U.S.-Russian confrontation been as high as it is today."[4] In April 2018, President Donald Trump declared on Twitter: "Our relationship with Russia is worse now than it has ever been, and that includes the Cold War."[5]

What happened? How did the United States and Russia move from cooperative ties, strategic partnerships, shared domestic goals, and international norms a few decades ago to a new era of conflict in U.S.-Russian relations and Russia's relationship with the West more generally?

One explanation—perhaps most widely held—is that cooperation was an interregnum driven by Russian weakness. After Russia's recovery from the dissolution of the Soviet Union, normal great power competition has returned.[6] The Soviet Union annexed territory, intervened militarily to prop up regimes, and even tried to influence elections in Western democracies. Upon regaining these capabilities, a rising Russia is "destined" to clash with the incumbent global superpower, just as China is currently doing as well.[7] Russia's

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2. On the renewed historical analogy, see Edward Lucas, *The New Cold War: Putin's Russia and the Threat to the West*, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's, 2014); and Robert Legvold, *Return to Cold War* (Malden, Mass.: Polity, 2016).
3. Dmitry Medvedev, "Munich Security Conference: Dmitry Medvedev's Speech at the Panel Discussion," *Russian Government*, February 13, 2016, http://government.ru/en/news/21784/.
4. Ernest J. Moniz and Sam Nunn, "The Return of Doomsday: The New Nuclear Arms Race—and How Washington and Moscow Can Stop It," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 98, No. 5 (September/October 2019), https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2019-08-06/return-doomsday.
5. Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), "Our relationship with Russia is worse now than it has ever been, and that includes the Cold War. There is no reason for this." Twitter, April 11, 2018, 7:37 a.m., https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/984032798821568513/.
6. John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 93, No. 5 (September/October 2014), pp. 77–89, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault; Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009); Jacek Wieclawski, "Contemporary Realism and the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation," *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (January 2011), pp. 170–179, http://ijbssnet.com/view.php?u=http://ijbssnet.com/journals/Vol._2_No._1;_January_2011/16.pdf; Sergei Karaganov, "2016—A Victory of Conservative Realism," *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 1 (January/March 2017), pp. 82–92, https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/2016-a-victory-of-conservative-realism/; and Stephen Kinzer, "Russia Acts Like Any Other Superpower," *Boston Globe*, May 11, 2014, https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2014/05/11/russia-acts-like-any-other-superpower/AJRSNiIUYQPAHRlLXcfIlJ/story.html.
7. Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap*? (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017). In explaining the clash between Great Britain and Germany in

negative reaction to U.S. unipolarity was inevitable, determined by the structure of the international system. For thousands of years, great powers have risen, fallen, and clashed. There is nothing new or peculiar about current clashes between Russia and the United States or between Russia and the West more generally, according to this perspective.

A second explanation of Russia's increasing confrontation with the West focuses on historical and cultural continuities in Russian international behavior. Whether Committee for State Security (KGB) agents, democrats, Communist Party general secretaries, or tsars sit in the Kremlin, Russian international conduct has remained largely consistent.[8] Well before the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917, Russian tsars annexed territory, intervened militarily to assist allies, and meddled in the domestic affairs of foes.[9] Russia, today, is acting like Russia has always acted, or so this argument contends. The Gorbachev and Yeltsin years were an aberration. Russia is back on its historical equilibrium path.

Both of these explanations allow no role for the agency of individual leaders and their ideas in the analysis. This article advances an alternative explanation that focuses on individuals, ideas, and domestic institutions as important factors shaping Russian international behavior. Russia was not destined to return to a confrontational relationship with the United States or the West because of the balance of power in the international system or historical and cultural determinants. Rather, President Putin chose this path. Despite consciously invoking realist rhetoric and historic traditions to justify his international behavior, Putin has demonstrated agency in the making of Russian

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the nineteenth century, Allison quotes the British Foreign Office's leading German expert, Eyre Crowe, who concluded "that Germany's intentions were irrelevant; its capabilities were what mattered." Ibid., p. 59. His sentence captures the essence of this structural argument.

8. Keir Giles, *Moscow Rules: What Drives Russia to Confront the West* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2019); Stephen Kotkin, "Russia's Perpetual Geopolitics: Putin Returns to the Historical Pattern," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 3 (May/June 2016), pp. 2–9, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2016-04-18/russias-perpetual-geopolitics; Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013); Julia Gurganus and Eugene Rumer, "Russia's Global Ambitions in Perspective" (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 20, 2019), https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/02/20/russia-s-global-ambitions-in-perspective-pub-78067; Thomas Graham Jr., "U.S.-Russian Relations in a New Era," *National Interest*, January 6, 2019, https://nationalinterest.org/feature/us-russian-relations-new-era-40637; and Sergey Lavrov, "Russia's Foreign Policy in a Historical Perspective," *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 2 (April/June 2016), pp. 8–19, http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Russias-Foreign-Policy-in-a-Historical-Perspective-18067.

9. Henry A. Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace, 1812–1822* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957).

foreign policy. Individuals matter.[10] A different Russian leader could have chosen a different path.[11]

Second, and closely related, ideas matter. If all leaders acted rationally and in the same way, it would be impossible to identify the unique causal impact of individual leaders in shaping foreign policy.[12] In the case of Russia, if Putin had defined his foreign policy agenda always through a realist lens, his individual impact on Russian foreign policy would be difficult to distinguish from realist theory explanations. Putin's behavior, however, has not always correlated with realist predictions. A second argument advanced in this article is that leaders have a menu of ideas from which to choose in seeking to explain the world and then act in it. Realist ideas offer one, but not the only, option. International factors, domestic institutions, and bureaucratic politics shape, but do not determine, individual decisions and actions. Different choices made by individuals regarding analytical frameworks produce variation in foreign policy outcomes even when other factors—the international balance of power, historical legacies, or regime type—are held constant. Putin selected a unique trajectory for Russian foreign policy because of a set of particular ideas that he developed about the nature of Russia, the United States, and international relations more broadly.[13] He embraced and propagated illiberal, conservative na-

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10. On this first-image approach versus other levels of analyses, the classic remains Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954). Waltz rejected first-image or individual-level theories, whereas this article embraces them. For other first-image analyses, see Elizabeth N. Saunders, *Leaders at War: How Presidents Shape Military Interventions* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011); Giacomo Chiozza and H.E. Goemans, *Leaders and International Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Michael C. Horowitz, Allan C. Stam, and Cali M. Ellis, *Why Leaders Fight* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, "Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Spring 2001), pp. 110–114, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3092135; Robert Jervis, *How Statesmen Think: The Psychology of International Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017); Valerie M. Hudson, "Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations," *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (March 2005), pp. 1–30, www.jstor.org/stable/24907278; H.E. Goemans, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Giacomo Chiozza, "Introducing Archigos: A Dataset of Political Leaders," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (March 2009), pp. 269–283, doi.org/10.1177/0022343308100719; and Yan Xuetong, *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2019).

11. On operational code analysis—one of the most widely used theoretical frameworks for examining how the characteristics of a political actor affect his or her state's foreign policy—see Nathan Constantin Leites, *The Operational Code of the Politburo* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 1951).

12. The assumption of rationality at the individual level of analysis has helped produce many powerful theories concerning the microfoundations of many political and economic phenomena. The much more modest argument advanced in this article is that not all interesting outcomes can be explained using this analytic framework.

13. On the causal impact of ideological distance on threat perceptions between leaders of great

tionalism to advance his definition of national interests. Putin also developed a particular theory about U.S. foreign policy, which he defines as hostile to Russian national interests and antithetical to Russian orthodox values.[14] Some analysts have labeled this set of ideas "Putinism,"[15] while others see Putin as part of a broader transnational ideological movement in support of autocracy.[16] In either instance, Putin's ideas play a causal role in the conduct of Russian foreign policy. Had Putin embraced a different theory of international politics or a different ideological framework—realism, liberalism, or even communism—Russia under his leadership would have behaved differently on the global stage. Regarding the three cases examined in this article, Putin's decisions to intervene in Ukraine in 2014, Syria in 2015, and the United States in 2016 reflect the triumph of his illiberal ideas over other analytic frameworks (i.e., realism or liberalism) in shaping Russian foreign policy. Different from a powerful state intervening in other states solely to maximize power, Putinism divides the world along ideological lines. These ideas both encourage certain interventions, including the cases discussed in this article, and constrain intervention in support of perceived liberal projects, including Libya in 2011 and Syria in 2012, that might have produced gains in Russian power and prestige.[17]

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powers, see especially Mark L. Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789–1989* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005).

14. Whether Putin's ideas were normatively justified, particularly in reaction to U.S. foreign policy actions, is orthogonal to the argument advanced in this article. Instead, I argue that Putin's ideas were not determined by the balance of power in the international system, historical legacies, or U.S. foreign policy. A different theory selected would have produced a different Russian foreign policy.

15. See especially Brian D. Taylor, *The Code of Putinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); M. Steven Fish, "The Kremlin Emboldened: What Is Putinism?" *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (October 2017), pp. 61–75, doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0066; Anne Applebaum, "Putinism: The Ideology," *Strategic Update*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (London: London School of Economics, 2013), http://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/Assets/Documents/updates/LSE-IDEAS-Putinism-The-Ideology.pdf; Walter Laqueur, *Putinism: Russia and Its Future with the West* (London: Thomas Dunne, 2015); and Marlene Laruelle, "Making Sense of Russia's Illiberalism," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (July 2020), pp. 115–129, https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/making-sense-of-russias-illiberalism/. Whether Putin's ideas deserve their own "ism" is a contested debate, irrelevant to the argument of this article. More modestly, I seek to show that Putin's ideas can be defined as autonomous from the regime, the state, or the international system, and that these ideas had an independent, causal impact on Russian foreign policy. That said, if "liberalism" is axiomatically considered an ideology, then Putin's "illiberalism" must also be considered an ideology, even if Putin himself is not the original author of these ideas.

16. Larry Diamond, *Ill Winds: Saving Democracy from Russian Rage, Chinese Ambition, and American Complacency* (New York: Penguin, 2019); and Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, and Christopher Walker, eds., *Authoritarianism Goes Global: The Challenge to Democracy* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016).

17. Imagine, as discussed further below, a counterfactual in which Russia mediated a political settlement in Syria between the ancien regime and the opposition, in which Assad departed, but many pro-Russian actors of the Assad regime stayed in the government and civil war was

Third, institutions matter. The Russian system of government became increasingly autocratic during Putin's two decades of rule, giving Putin more autonomy and more influence over Russian foreign policy. A more democratic system would have placed greater constraints on Putin's individual foreign policy decisions.[18]

Of course, power matters, too.[19] Without the capabilities to annex territory, conduct air strikes, or steal digital property, Putin could not have intervened in Ukraine in 2014, Syria in 2015, or the United States in 2016. A narrow focus on Russian power or the global balance of power, however, cannot fully explain these interventions. As Elizabeth Saunders argues, "Theories relying on relatively stable or slow-changing factors such as the structure of the international system or regime type cannot fully account for changes in a state's intervention choice over time. Moving the level of analysis to individual leaders can help to address this variation."[20] New Russian capabilities did not make these Russian interventions inevitable. Other options were available.[21] A different Russian leader, with different ideas, ruling in a different political system could have chosen to use Russian power in a different way.[22] Only by adding domestic-level and individual-level variables—leaders, ideas, and institutions—can a comprehensive explanation of Russian foreign policy be developed.

The argument advanced in this article is not that Putin and his illiberal ideas

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avoided. If the United States would have supported such an outcome, Russia would have kept access to its port, and the world would have celebrated Russian leadership.

18. New research blurring the lines between democracies and autocracies as constraining institutional arrangements on foreign policy makes this counterfactual claim less compelling, but as argued in the case studies below, still important. See a review of this literature by Susan D. Hyde and Elizabeth N. Saunders, "Recapturing Regime Type in International Relations: Leaders, Institutions, and Agency Space," *International Organization*, Vol. 74, No. 2 (Spring 2020), pp. 363–395, doi.org/10.1017/S0020818319000365.

19. On the utility of a "multilayered framework for analysis" for explaining Russian foreign policy, see Elias Götz, "Putin, the State, and War: The Causes of Russia's Near Abroad Assertion Revisited, *International Studies Review*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (June 2017), pp. 228–253, doi.org/10.1093/isr/viw009.

20. Elizabeth N. Saunders, "Transformative Choices: Leaders and the Origins of Intervention Strategy," *International Security*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Fall 2009), p. 120, doi.org/10.1162/isec.2009.34.2.119.

21. In other words, Putin's ideas were affecting policies "where there are no unique equilibria." Quoted from Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, "Ideas and Foreign Policy: An Analytical Framework," in Goldstein and Keohane, eds., *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 8.

22. Putin was a necessary condition for these interventions. As James Mahoney explains, a "necessary condition" conceptualization captures the intuition that a cause is something that, when counterfactually removed while holding all else constant, yields a different outcome. See Mahoney, "Process Tracing and Historical Explanation," *Security Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2015), p. 203, doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2015.1036610.

always shape Russian foreign policy behavior on every issue in ways inconsistent with realist and liberal theories or ideologies. Nevertheless, interventions in the domestic affairs of other countries offer a good test of this argument, given that such actions are rare and often costly.[23] This argument parallels many accounts of U.S. foreign policy in which realism explains some, but not all, international behavior.[24] Realist scholars have invoked the causal impact of liberal ideas—"the hell of good intentions" or "liberal dreams"—to explain U.S. foreign policy departures from realist predictions, especially regarding interventions in other states.[25] This article makes the same theoretical move, tracing the impact of Putin's illiberal ideas to understand specific Russian foreign policy actions that depart from realist predictions.

Explaining scientifically the causal relationship between individuals, ideas, and institutions, on the one hand, and Russian foreign policy, on the other, is challenging. To ignore the domestic determinants of contemporary Russian behavior in the world, however, is to oversimplify and distort the drivers of current tensions in U.S.-Russian relations: a danger for theorists and policymakers alike.

To develop this argument, this article proceeds in five parts. The first section examines in greater detail the domestic determinants of Russian foreign policy. The second section explains the causal impact of Putin and his ideas on the decision to annex Crimea and intervene in eastern Ukraine in 2014; the third sec-

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23. See Alexander B. Downes and Lindsey A. O'Rourke, "You Can't Always Get What You Want: Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Seldom Improves Interstate Relations," *International Security*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Fall 2016), pp. 43–89, doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00256.

24. Throughout its history, the United States has at times acted as a classic realist unitary actor in the pursuit of some security objectives, while simultaneously pursuing other foreign policies that can only be explained by adding to the analysis of interest group politics, ideology, leaders, or bureaucratic politics. See Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation: America's Foreign Policy from Its Earliest Days to the Dawn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Vintage, 2006). That some realist theorists object passionately to certain U.S. policies underscores this fact. See for instance, Stephen Krasner's focus on liberal ideas to explain departures from realism in American foreign policy, such as the intervention in Vietnam, in Krasner, *Defending the National Interest: Raw Materials Investments and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978). On nonrealist ideas playing a role in the U.S. decision to invade Iraq in 2002–03, see Fred Kaplan, *Daydream Believers: How a Few Grand Ideas Wrecked American Power* (New York: Wiley, 2008); James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York: Viking, 2004), pp. 332–358; and Peter Baker, *Days of Fire: Bush and Cheney in the White House* (New York: Anchor, 2014). John J. Mearsheimer also brings ideas—specifically "Liberalism as a Source of Trouble"—into his explanation of U.S. irrational, nonrealist behavior. See Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2018), pp. 152–187. Stephen Walt adds the U.S. foreign policy elite—the "blob"—to explain departures from realism in Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions: America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018).

25. Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions*; and Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion*.

tion does the same to explain Russia's intervention in Syria in 2015; and the fourth section repeats the exercise to explain its intervention in the U.S. presidential election in 2016. The fifth section concludes with a reevaluation of the explanatory power as well as limits of focusing on the role of individuals, ideas, and institutions for explaining Russian foreign policy today, and the behavior of states in the international system more generally.

Domestic Determinants of Russian Foreign Policy

Any explanation of a country's foreign policy must begin with an assessment of that state's power and the balance of power between states in the international system. Measuring capabilities, however, is not enough. To develop a complete explanation of state behavior in the international system requires adding to the analysis an assessment of the state's leader, their ideas, and regime type. After acknowledging the importance of power and the balance of power between states, this section explains why leaders, their ideas, and regime type must be added to the analysis to develop a complete account of Russian foreign policy today.

POWER MATTERS: RUSSIA AS A GREAT POWER

No theory seeking to explain state behavior in the international system is complete without some accounting of the power capabilities of individual states and the balance of power between them. Not all conflict or cooperation is shaped by great powers. Weak or failed states can lead to civil wars, which can then attract external intervention from great powers, and occasionally generate impactful outcomes for the entire system, including, for example, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Nevertheless, great powers play a more consequential role in international politics given their capacity to substantially influence events.

Although neither the greatest power nor the most prominent rising power, Russia is nonetheless a major actor in international politics today. Russia possesses military, economic, cyber, and ideational power to influence outcomes beyond its borders—capabilities that most other states lack. Although it has yet to (and perhaps never will) attain the superpower status of the Soviet Union, those who describe Russia today as a weak or declining power have not reviewed recent metrics.[26]

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26. For a deeper discussion of all dimensions of Russian power, see Kathryn E. Stoner, *Russia Resurrected: Its Power and Purpose in a New Global Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2021).

Regarding military power, Russia has substantially greater capabilities in 2020 compared to 1992 with its modernizing nuclear arsenal, new missile defense and space capabilities, and a vastly expanded conventional military budget.[27] Russian conventional military power in the European theatre is particularly threatening. As one of two nuclear superpowers, Russia far outpaces China, France, and the United Kingdom. Russian military doctrine also has modernized.[28] During the last two decades, its intelligence and cyber capabilities have grown immensely, positioning Russia as one of the world's top three countries in these domains.[29]

Despite trailing well behind the United States and China, Russia is currently the world's eleventh largest economy, and ranks sixth if using purchasing power party (PPP) numbers.[30] The state's role in the economy has grown considerably over the last two decades, giving Putin greater control over these resources compared to his Western counterparts.[31] Despite slow diversification and high dependence on energy exports, the Russian economy is less dependent on external actors today than it was during the 1990s. These economic capabilities and conditions are sufficient to enable the pursuit of ambitious foreign policy objectives.[32]

Current Russian resources for generating soft power are a shadow of the Soviet Union's ideological appeal. Nevertheless, Russia has reemerged as an influential ideational actor. Putin's orthodox illiberalism appeals to millions around the world, including heads of states, political parties, religious groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and individuals. The Kremlin has devoted extensive resources to improving access to government-owned or government-friendly television networks, radio, and media in the Russian-

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27. *Russia Military Power: Building a Military to Support Great Power Aspirations* (Washington, D.C.: Defense Intelligence Agency, 2017), https://www.dia.mil/portals/27/documents/news/military%20power%20publications/russia%20military%20power%20report%202017.pdf.
28. Valery Gerasimov, "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight: New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying Out Combat Operations," trans. Robert Coalson, *Military-Industrial Kurier*, February 27, 2013, https://jmc.msu.edu/50th/download/21-conflict.pdf; and Valery Gerasimov, "Po opytu Sirii" [From the Syrian experience], *Voenno-industrialnyy Kur'yer* [Military-Industrial Courier] (March 2016), http://vpk-news.ru/articles/29579.
29. James J. Wirtz, "Cyber War and Strategic Culture: The Russian Integration of Cyber Power into Grand Strategy," in Kenneth Geers, ed., *Cyber War in Perspective: Russian Aggression against Ukraine* (Tallinn: NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence, 2015), pp. 29–38.
30. World Bank, "GDP (current US$)," https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?most_recent_value_desc=true&year_high_desc=true.
31. Anders Åslund, *Russia's Crony Capitalism: The Path from Market Economy to Kleptocracy* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2019). Åslund argues that material gain motivates Putin and his "cronies," but a leader can pursue multiple goals simultaneously, including personal wealth and the promotion of illiberalism.
32. Chris Miller, *Putinomics: Power and Money in Resurgent Russia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

speaking world, particularly in countries that gained independence after the Soviet Union's collapse.[33] With an annual budget of more than $300 million,[34] RT claims to be the most-watched news channel on YouTube.[35] In 2014, Putin merged the radio broadcasting service Voice of Russia and the news agency Ria Novosti to create Sputnik International, a multimedia platform to provide "alternative news" to Western sources. The Russian state and its proxies have created numerous fake personages and organizations, including most famously the Internet Research Agency (IRA).[36] The Kremlin also has created numerous parastatal organizations such as Russia Houses, the Foundation for National Values Protection, the International Agency for Sovereign Development, and the Association for Free Research and International Cooperation, as well as cultivated direct contacts with NGOs, religious groups, and political parties around the world through scholarships, conferences, and sometimes direct financial assistance.[37] Russian consultants have studied U.S. democracy promotion strategies and organizations to mimic them in the promotion of illiberal, conservative values. In addition, Putin has courted like-minded leaders, including Prime Minister Andrej Babiš in the Czech Republic, Nigel Farage in the United Kingdom, Marine Le Pen in France, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Matteo Salvini in Italy, and Geert Wilders in the

33. Markos Kounalakis, *Spin Wars and Spy Games: Global Media and Intelligence Gathering* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 2018), pp. 125–152.
34. "RT's 2016 Budget Announced, Down from 2015, MSM Too Stumped to Spin?" *RT*, last updated October 5, 2015, https://www.rt.com/op-edge/318181-rt-budget-down-msm/.
35. Ibid. See also Robert W. Orttung and Elizabeth Nelson, "Russia Today's Strategy and Effectiveness on YouTube," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (March 2019), pp. 77–92, doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2018.1531650.
36. See "Indictment, Case 1:18-cr-00032-DLF Document 1 Filed 02/16/18," U.S. Department of Justice, https://www.justice.gov/file/1035477/download; Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Report of the Select Committee on Intelligence United States Senate on Russian Active Measures Campaigns and Interference in the 2016 U.S. Election*, Vol. 1*: Russian Efforts against Election Infrastructure with Additional Views*, 116th Cong., 1st sess., July 25, 2019, S. Rept. 116-XX, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Report_Volume1.pdf; Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Russian Active Measures Campaigns and Interference in the 2016 U.S. Election*, Vol. 2*: Russia's Use of Social Media with Additional Views*, 116th Cong., 1st sess., October 8, 2019, S. Rept. 116-XX, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Report_Volume2.pdf; and Shelby Grossman, Daniel Bush, and Renée DiResta, "Evidence of Russia-Linked Influence Operations in Africa" (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Internet Observatory, 2019), https://fsi-live.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/29oct2019_sio_-_russia_linked_influence_operations_in_africa.final_.pdf.
37. Suzanne Daley and Maïa de la Baume, "French Far Right Gets Helping Hand with Russian Loan," *New York Times*, December 1, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/02/world/europe/french-far-right-gets-helping-hand-with-russian-loan-.html; and Barbie Latza Nadeau, "An Italian Expose Documents Moscow Money Allegedly Funding Italy's Far-Right Salvini," *Daily Beast*, February 22, 2019, https://www.thedailybeast.com/an-italian-expose-documents-moscow-money-allegedly-funding-italys-far-right-salvini.

Netherlands.[38] Finally, Putin has employed coercive instruments to support ideological allies, including "little green men" (masked soldiers wearing unmarked green army uniforms in Ukraine whom Putin initially denied were Russian soldiers), hybrid warfare, and more conventional military intervention.[39]

Although far behind the United States and China on most measures, Russia currently demonstrates impressive power capabilities, providing Putin with the means to influence both international outcomes and domestic politics in other countries. This growing level of power has enabled Putin to reach beyond state survival or basic security objectives and to pursue ideological goals. Putin controls fewer power capabilities than Chinese President Xi Jinping, but has shown a willingness to deploy these resources to intervene in the domestic affairs of other countries in ways that Xi has not, including territorial annexation, military intervention to prop up an autocratic ally, and digital violation of U.S. sovereignty to influence the 2016 presidential election.

INDIVIDUALS AND IDEAS MATTER: PUTIN AND PUTINISM

Assessing power capabilities is a necessary but insufficient condition for explaining state behavior. Because power and the balance of power change slowly, tracing a direct causal impact between changes in power and changes in state behavior is difficult.[40] Moreover, just because Russia has the capability to influence outcomes in other countries does not mean that it will predictably do so.[41] Identifying the unique intentions of state leaders must be added to the analysis. Individuals and their ideas can play an independent, autonomous role in determining the foreign policy of states.[42] In Russia over the last several years, Putin and his ideas have played such a role.

If all leaders behaved identically in response to structural constraints, the

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38. Franklin Foer, "It's Putin's World," *Atlantic*, March 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/03/its-putins-world/513848/.

39. Kimberly Marten, "Russia's Use of Semi-State Security Forces: The Case of the Wagner Group," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 35. No. 3 (2019), pp. 181–204, doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2019.1591142.

40. Saunders, "Transformative Choices," p. 120.

41. Before Putin, President Boris Yeltsin had the power capabilities to annex Crimea, but did not. Putin today has the power to intervene in Moldova or Belarus, but has not chosen to. Assessments of power capabilities alone, therefore, do not offer an explanation or prediction about when Russia does or does not intervene.

42. For more on how ideology affects the foreign policy of great powers, see Nigel Gould-Davies, "Rethinking the Role of Ideology in International Politics during the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Winter 1999), pp. 90–109, doi.org/10.1162/15203970152521908; John M. Owen IV, *The Clash of Ideas in World Politics: Transnational Networks, States, and Regime Change, 1510–2010* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010); Mark L. Haas, *The Ideological Origins of*

pursuit to understand their unique role in shaping state behavior would be misplaced.[43] Leaders facing the same challenges and empowered by the same capabilities act, however, in different ways. To explain recent Russian interventions in other countries, leaders and their ideas must be added to the analysis.[44] A singular focus on power and the distribution of power cannot explain Russian interventions in Ukraine in 2014, Syria in 2015, or the United States in 2016. Instead, one leader and one set of ideas, Putin and Putinism, must be added to the equation. Putinism has guided Russian foreign policy along a unique path when more than one strategy was available.[45]

Determining the causal influence of leaders and their ideas on state behavior in the world is difficult; quantifiable data are scarce, and firsthand accounts of meetings at Putin's *dacha* or the White House Situation Room are few. Careful process-tracing and counterfactual reasoning are often the only methods available.[46] A focus on leaders, however, does allow for a "minimal rewrite" of counterfactual reasoning,[47] as imagining a different leader minimizes the number of historical factors that must be changed to construct a compelling counterfactual.

The best research design for measuring the role of leaders and their ideas is to compare case studies with different outcomes when power and regime type are held constant.[48] With frequent changes in leadership, democracies offer nu-

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Great Power Politics, 1789–1989 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005); and Fred Halliday, *The Making of the Second Cold War* (London: Verso, 1984).

43. There are compelling arguments as to why leaders might behave in similar ways, based on constraints, incentives, socialization, or the possibility that "all people who might come to power, at least in a particular country at a particular time, have roughly the same values and beliefs." See Robert Jervis, "Do Leaders Matter and How Would We Know?" *Security Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (May 2013), p. 155, doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2013.786909. This article makes a more contingent claim about the variable impact of leaders and their ideas.

44. This article does not focus on other domestic factors that might influence Russian foreign policy outcomes, such as bureaucratic politics, interest groups, or public opinion. The assumption is that these variables matter less in today's Russia than in other political systems, but this major assumption should be interrogated by future research. See Jessica L.P. Weeks, "Strongmen and Straw Men: Authoritarian Regimes and the Initiation of International Conflict," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 106, No. 2 (May 2012), pp. 326–347, doi.org/10.1017/S0003055412000111; and Alexander Dallin, "Soviet Foreign Policy and Domestic Politics: A Framework for Analysis," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (1969), pp. 250–265, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24356627.

45. Goldstein and Keohane, "Ideas and Foreign Policy," p. 17.

46. Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005); and James D. Fearon, "Counterfactuals and Hypothesis Testing in Political Science," *World Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (January 1991), pp. 169–195, doi.org/10.2307/2010470.

47. Philip E. Tetlock and Aaron Belkin, eds., *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics: Logical, Methodological, and Psychological Perspectives* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 23.

48. Saunders, "Transformative Choices," p. 121.

merous examples of identifiable shifts in foreign policy.[49] Different autocratic leaders—with power and regime type remaining constant—also have produced distinct foreign policy variations. The change from Mao Zedong to Deng Xiaoping sparked a major transformation in China's international behavior, as did the transitions from Joseph Stalin to Nikita Khrushchev and from Leonid Brezhnev to Mikhail Gorbachev for the Soviet Union.[50] More recently, the transition from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping has produced identifiable changes in Chinese foreign policy.[51] In the Libya/Syria case discussed in this article, the change in Russian policy under Medvedev versus Putin is clear. For the other two interventions discussed in this article, counterfactual analysis must be deployed.[52]

Vladimir Putin is an unlikely ideologue; he did not spend his youth poring over philosophy books or debating revolutionary ideas.[53] As a KGB officer, he aspired to preserve, not destroy, the status quo and keep elites in power, not overthrow them. In the first decades of his career, he was dedicated to defending communism, not conservative values. As communism began to fade, Putin exhibited attributes of an opportunist, not a populist nationalist. He could have joined Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, a nationalist party that achieved shocking electoral success in 1993. Or he could have aligned with the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, whose presidential candidate in 1996 almost won. Instead, Putin joined the new ruling elite, first as a deputy mayor in St. Petersburg (even before the Soviet Union collapsed) for one of Russia's most charismatic liberal reformers,

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49. John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Stephen Sestanovich, *Maximalist: America in the World from Truman to Obama* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014); and Ian Kershaw, *The Global Age: Europe 1950–2017* (New York: Viking, 2019). Most recently, the change in U.S. leadership from President Obama to Trump has added new, compelling evidence.

50. James M. Goldgeier, *Leadership Style and Soviet Foreign Policy: Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Gorbachev* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

51. Elizabeth C. Economy, *The Third Revolution: Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

52. Jervis, "Do Leaders Matter and How Would We Know?" p. 158.

53. For a detailed discussion of the evolution of Putin's ideas, see Brian D. Taylor, *The Code of Putinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Angela Stent, *Putin's World: Russia against the West and with the Rest* (New York: Twelve, 2019); Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013); Steven Lee Myers, *The New Tsar: The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015); Bobo Lo, *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2003); and Masha Gessen, *The Man without a Face: The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin* (New York: Riverhead, 2012). On the intellectual influences on Putinism, see Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America* (New York: Tim Duggan, 2018); Charles Clover, *Black Wind, White Snow: The Rise of Russia's New Nationalism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2016); and Arkady Ostrovsky, *The Invention of Russia: The Rise of Putin and the Age of Fake News* (New York: Viking, 2016).

Anatoly Sobchak, and later as a mid-level Kremlin official working for anti-communist, pro-Western President Boris Yeltsin.[54]

Putin became president almost accidentally. When Yeltsin anointed him as his successor and voters ratified Yeltsin's choice in 2000, few could articulate Putin's ideas about the polity, the economy, or the world.[55] Putin himself struggled.[56] Yeltsin did not select Putin to pivot Russia away from market economics and closer relations with the West. Instead, Yeltsin and his entourage picked Putin as a successor to maintain continuity with existing political and economic practices, including the protection of property rights of those who had become wealthy during the Yeltsin era. Similarly, Russian citizens at the time were not yearning for a return to autocracy or divergence from the West.[57] With time, however, Putin defined (or revealed) more clearly his philosophy about politics, economics, and international relations—a philosophy that represented an ideological departure from the previous leader and regime.

One of Putin's core ideas emerged right away—a clear commitment to weakening checks on executive power. Putin seized control of national television networks and enacted policies to weaken regional leaders, political parties, NGOs, and independent businesses, including the cancellation of direct elections for governors in 2004.[58] Since 2000 and especially after 2003, Russian elections have become less competitive and oftentimes marred by falsification. After winning a third term in 2012, Putin made demonstrations harder to organize, arrested journalists and opposition leaders, and pushed most independent media off the airwaves.[59] By criminalizing the receipt of for-

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54. On Yeltsin's ideological orientation, see Michael McFaul, *Russia's Unfinished Revolution: Political Change from Gorbachev to Putin* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001).
55. On Putin's "noncampaign" campaign in 2000, see Timothy J. Colton and Michael McFaul, *Popular Choice and Managed Democracy: The Russian Elections of 1999 and 2000* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), pp. 171–197.
56. Vladimir Putin et al., *First Person: An Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait by Russia's President Vladimir Putin* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2000).
57. Timothy J. Colton and Michael McFaul, "Are Russians Undemocratic?" *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (April/June 2002), pp. 91–121, doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2002.10641515; and Lev Gudkov, "Putin's Relapse into Totalitarianism," in Maria Lipman and Nikolay Petrov, eds., *The State of Russia: What Comes Next*? (London: Palgrave Pivot, 2015), pp. 86–109.
58. M. Steven Fish, *Democracy Derailed in Russia: The Failure of Open Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
59. Gleb Bryanski, "Russia's Putin Signs Anti-protest Law before Rally," Reuters, June 8, 2012, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-protests-idUSBRE8570ZH20120608; "Russian Liberal TV Channel Forced to Quit Premises," *BBC News*, December 8, 2014, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30374615; and Evan Gershkovich, "Arrest of Navalny Aide Highlights Latest Trend in Protest Clampdown in Russia," *Moscow Times*, June 17, 2019, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/06/17/arrest-of-navalny-aide-highlights-latest-trend-in-protest-clampdown-in-russia-a66022.

eign funds, the Kremlin forced the United States Agency for International Development and numerous other foreign organizations to terminate their operations in Russia.[60] Putin signed laws punishing the distribution of information that "exhibits blatant disrespect for the society, government, official government symbols, constitution or governmental bodies" and empowering prosecutors to block these sources prior to judicial review.[61] Similarly, Putin's "sovereign internet" law empowers the Kremlin to conduct online censorship.[62]

To sustain this level of repression, Putin has invested heavily in the coercive elements of the state, while expanding the role of intelligence officers throughout the government and the economy.[63] Analysts and academics quibble over the degree of Putin's dictatorship, but most agree that Russia is an autocracy.[64] This kind of political system has helped strengthen Putin's hand in Russian foreign policy.

Putin's views on economics changed more gradually. In December 2000, Putin sounded pro-market: "The state should ensure a maximum degree of economic freedom for individuals and legal entities."[65] A year into his presidency, Putin proclaimed, "We are building an economic system that is competitive. . . . Above all, we must protect property rights."[66] Initially, these

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60. Vladimir Fedorenko, "V stop-list NKO voshli Fond Sorosa i Vsemirnyy congress ukraintsev" [Soros Fund and Ukrainian World Congress are in the NGO stop-list], *Ria Novosti* [Ria News], July 7, 2015, https://ria.ru/society/20150707/1118850670.html.
61. Emily Tamkin, "With Putin's Signature, 'Fake News' Bill Becomes Law," *Washington Post*, March 18, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/03/18/with-putins-signature-fake-news-bill-becomes-law/.
62. Robert Coalson, "Explainer: Russia Takes a Big Step toward the 'Internyet'," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, November 1, 2019, https://www.rferl.org/a/explainer-russia-sovereign-internet-law-censorship-runet/30248442.html. More broadly, see Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan, *The Red Web: The Kremlin's Wars on the Internet* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2015).
63. Åslund, *Russia's Crony Capitalism*; Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan, *The New Nobility: The Restoration of Russia's Security State and the Enduring Legacy of the KGB* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2010); and Catherine Belton, *Putin's People: How the KGB Took Back Russia and Then Took on the West* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020).
64. Freedom House, "Russia: Freedom in the World, 2019," https://freedomhouse.org/country/russia/freedom-world/2019; and World Bank, "Worldwide Governance Indicators," https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=worldwide-governance-indicators. See also Timothy J. Colton, "Regimeness, Hybridity, and Russian System Building as an Educative Project," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (April 2018), pp. 455–473, doi.org/10.5129/001041518822704935; and M. Steven Fish, "What Has Russia Become?" *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (April 2018), pp. 327–346, www.jstor.org/stable/26532689. Fish defines this regime as a "conservative populist autocracy."
65. Vladimir Putin, "Interview with ORT and RTR TV Channels and the Nezavisimaya Gazeta Newspaper," *President of Russia*, December 25, 2000, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21149.
66. "Written Interview to the Austrian Newspaper Neue Kronen Zeitung," *President of Russia*, February 8, 2001, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21173.

rhetorical pledges were backed with liberal reforms, including a flat income tax of 13 percent and a reduced corporate tax.[67] Putin also appointed senior economic advisers committed to tight fiscal and monetary policies. Over time, however, Putin grew more suspicious of private economic actors, both foreign and domestic. He redistributed property rights away from the 1990s-era "oligarchs" and placed KGB loyalists and his St. Petersburg friends in the leadership of major state-owned enterprises.[68] Putin reduced the size of the private sector, expanded the role of the state, and further weakened the rule of law.[69] Increased state ownership, a redistribution of property rights guided by political motivation, and a system of patronage have resulted in economic stagnation. As an alibi for Russia's economic woes, Putin increasingly has blamed ideological enemies, at home and abroad.

Regarding foreign policy, as a former KGB officer, Putin unsurprisingly viewed the United States with suspicion, but was receptive initially to cooperation. As acting president, he even suggested Russia might join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).[70] In the first years of his presidency, Putin also supported close cooperation with the European Union (EU).[71] After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against the United States, Putin reached out to President George W. Bush, offering solidarity and assistance against a common enemy.

The U.S.-led invasion of Iraq created a new rift with the United States. More profoundly, "color revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine marked a more significant turning point in Putin's thinking about the United States, as the Russian leader blamed the Bush administration for fostering regime change in both countries.[72] Championing sovereignty became a central tenant of

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67. Miller, *Putinomics*, pp. 59–78.
68. Sergey Aleksashenko, *Putin's Counterrevolution* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2018); and Åslund, *Russia's Crony Capitalism*.
69. See Marco Arena et al., "Russian Federation: Selected Issues," Country Report No. 18/276 (Washington, D.C.: International Monetary Fund, September 2018), https://www.imf.org/~/media/Files/Publications/CR/2018/cr18276.ashx; and Apurva Sanghi, "Russia Monthly Economic Developments," May 2020, https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/russia/brief/monthly-economic-developments.
70. David Hoffman, "Putin Says 'Why Not?' to Russia Joining NATO," *Washington Post*, March 6, 2000, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2000/03/06/putin-says-why-not-to-russia-joining-nato/c1973032-c10f-4bff-9174-8cae673790cd/.
71. Vladimir Putin, "Russia–EU Partnership Crucial for United, Prosperous Europe," *President of Russia*, November 23, 2006, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23918.
72. Vladimir Putin, "Direct Line with Vladimir Putin," *President of Russia*, April 17, 2014, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20796; and Clifford J. Levy, "Putin Suggests U.S. Provocation in Georgia Clash," *New York Times*, August 28, 2008, https://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/29/world/europe/29putin.html.

Putinism. At the Munich Security Conference in 2007, Putin lamented, "First and foremost the United States, has overstepped its national borders in every way. This is visible in the economic, political, cultural, and educational policies it imposes on other nations. Well, who likes this? Who is happy about this?"[73] By 2014, Putin's anti-American language was even more strident: "A unilateral diktat and imposing one's own models produces the opposite result. Instead of settling conflicts it leads to their escalation, instead of sovereign and stable states we see the growing spread of chaos, and instead of democracy there is support for . . . open neo-fascists to Islamic radicals."[74] According to Putin's theory of American foreign policy, U.S. presidents frequently violate national sovereignty and undermine regimes that they dislike, be it the Soviet Union in 1991, Serbia in 2000, Iraq in 2003, Georgia in 2003, Ukraine in 2004 and again in 2013–14, the Middle East in 2011, or Russia in 2011–12.[75]

Putin has sought to mobilize other heads of state and populist movements in an effort to impede this alleged American imperialism.[76] He now seeks to liberate Europeans from the U.S.-controlled NATO, and to weaken the EU.[77] Under the guise of championing sovereignty, Putin has defended autocracy abroad and rejected Western democracy promotion.

A related component of Putin's worldview that developed over time is illiberal conservativism. Putin has sought to support foreign actors who share not only his notion of sovereignty, but also his orthodox, illiberal values.[78]

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73. "Putin's Prepared Remarks at 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy," *Washington Post*, February 12, 2007, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/12/AR2007021200555.html.

74. Vladimir Putin, "Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club," *President of Russia*, October 24, 2014, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46860.

75. Vladimir Putin, "Expanded Session of the Interior Ministry Board," *President of Russia*, March 4, 2015, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47776. See also Karoun Demirjian and Michael Birnbaum, "Russia's Putin Blames U.S. for Destabilizing World Order," *Washington Post*, October 24, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/russias-putin-blames-us-for-destabilizing-world-order/2014/10/24/1c2e684f-6c00-41a0-8458-03533d644657_story.html; and Maria Lipman, "Putin's 'Besieged Fortress' and Its Ideological Arms," in Lipman and Petrov, *The State of Russia*, pp. 110–136.

76. In the framework of Haas, ideological distance grew between Putin and Western leaders over time, which in turn fueled Putin's perception of threats from the West. See Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789–1989*, pp. 211–212.

77. Vladimir Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation," *President of Russia*, March 18, 2014, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603; Owen Matthews, "The Plot against Europe: Putin, Hungary, and Russia's New Iron Curtain," *Newsweek*, April 19, 2018, https://www.newsweek.com/2018/04/27/putin-kremlin-russia-trump-orban-bannon-nationalism-iron-curtain-eu-891843.html; and Michael Schwirtz, "Top Secret Russian Unit Seeks to Destabilize Europe, Security Officials Say," *New York Times*, October 8, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/08/world/europe/unit-29155-russia-gru.html.

78. Vladimir Putin, "Gathering in Honor of the 10th Anniversary of the Russian Orthodox Church

In 2014, he commented, "So-called conservative values are acquiring a new significance . . . Viktor Orban in Hungary, the success of the conservative forces in the latest election there, the success of Marine Le Pen . . . the growth of such trends in other countries is obvious . . . [and] associated with the desire to strengthen national sovereignty."[79] For Putin, traditional values are central to Russian identity: "Without the values embedded in Christianity people will inevitably lose their human dignity," and therefore, "we consider it natural and right to defend these values."[80] Increasingly unapologetic in his militancy, Putin has expressed a particular disdain for homosexuality, and he has linked what he calls "deviant" sexual behavior directly to political decay.[81]

Early in his presidency, Putin focused on restoring, in his view, sovereignty and conservative values within Russia. His lieutenants called it a campaign of "sovereign democracy" against domestic opposition leaders, NGOs, private-sector critics, and grassroots movements supported by foreigners. More recently, in the last decade, Putin has sought to export his ideas. Putin adviser Vladislav Surkov remarked that Putinism is "an ideology of the future" with "significant export potential; there is already demand on it and on some of its components; its experience is already being examined and adopted; both people in power and opposition groups in many countries imitate it."[82] Around the world, not just in Russia, Putin has declared, "The liberal idea has become obsolete. It has come into conflict with the interests of the overwhelming majority of the population."[83] Putin conceptualizes a competition between liberalism and his brand of conservative values—a contest that takes place both between states and within them.[84] Despite a rhetorical commitment to sover-

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Local Council and the Patriarch's Enthronement," *President of Russia*, January 31, 2019, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59757. On the intellectual origins of some of these conservative, orthodox ideas, see Timothy Snyder, "Ivan Ilyin, Putin's Philosopher of Russian Fascism," *New York Review of Books*, April 5, 2018, https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/03/16/ivan-ilyin-putins-philosopher-of-russian-fascism/; and Anton Barbashin and Hannah Thoburn, "Putin's Brain: Alexander Dugin and the Philosophy Behind Putin's Invasion of Crimea," *Foreign Affairs*, March 31, 2014, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-03-31/putins-brain.

79. Putin, "Direct Line with Vladimir Putin," April 17, 2014.

80. Vladimir Putin, "Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club," *President of Russia*, September 19, 2013, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19243.

81. Ibid. See also Putin's comments in an interview of Vladimir Putin by Lionel Barber, Henry Foy, and Alex Barker, "Vladimir Putin Says Liberalism Has 'Become Obsolete'," *Financial Times*, June 27, 2019, https://www.ft.com/content/670039ec-98f3-11e9-9573-ee5cbb98ed36.

82. Vladislav Surkov, "Dolgoye gosudarstvo Putina" [Putin's long state], *Nyezavisimaya Gazyeta* [Independent Newspaper], February 2, 2019, http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2019-02-11/5_7503_surkov.html?print=Y.

83. Barker, "Vladimir Putin Says Liberalism Has 'Become Obsolete'."

84. Brian Whitmore, "Vladimir Putin, Conservative Icon," *Atlantic*, December 20, 2013, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/12/vladimir-putin-conservative-icon/282572/;

eignty, Putin promotes his ideas inside targeted countries and has won over believers even within democratic countries allied to the United States. Marine Le Pen's view is illustrative of many now: "The model that is defended by Vladimir Putin is radically different to that of Mr. Obama. . . . The model of that is defended by Vladimir Putin, which is one of reasoned protectionism, looking after the interests of his own country, defending his identity, is one that I like."[85] In almost every European country, as well as the United States, there exists a political movement that leans more toward illiberal Putinism than toward Western liberalism.[86]

The scope of Putin's investment in propagating his ideas underscores the ideological nature of his foreign policy. You do not devote resources to propaganda instruments unless you are seeking to propagate ideas. Putin's efforts to spread conservative, autocratic ideas, his focus on cultivating ideological allies within states, and most dramatically, his willingness to intervene in sovereign states demonstrate his commitment to his illiberal ideas. When deciding to intervene in Ukraine, Syria, and the United States, Putin was not motivated solely by state survival or expanding power.[87] Nor did his interventions produce outcomes that necessarily advanced material security or economic interests. Incomplete information about the costs and benefits of these actions also cannot be blamed; Putin knew the potential costs and proceeded anyway. His ideologically motivated policies produced significant costs to the Russian state that could have been avoided by a different Russian leader motivated by different ideas.

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and Artyom Krechetnikov, "Putin opredelilsya s ideologiyey–on konservator" [Putin has decided on ideology–he is a conservative], *BBC News*, December 12, 2013, https://www.bbc.com/russian/russia/2013/12/131212_putin_address_analysis.shtml.

85. Quoted in Ronald Brownstein, "Putin and the Populists," *Atlantic*, January 6, 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/01/putin-trump-le-pen-hungary-france-populist-bannon/512303/.

86. Fans of Putinism are most prominent in Europe, but exist in the United States as well. See Adam Taylor, "The Americans Who Think Vladimir Putin Isn't So Bad," *Washington Post*, July 28, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/07/28/the-americans-who-think-vladimir-putin-isnt-so-bad/; and Casey Michel, "The Rise of the 'Traditionalist International': How the American Right Learned to Love Moscow in the Era of Trump," *Right Wing Watch: In Focus*, March 2017, https://www.rightwingwatch.org/report/the-rise-of-the-traditionalist-international-how-the-american-right-learned-to-love-moscow-in-the-era-of-trump/.

87. Realism is both a theory and an ideology. In arguing that realism is a prescriptive theory that leaders should follow to be successful, however, realist scholars are undermining one of the major hypotheses about realism as a theory—that leaders and their ideas or anything within the black box of the unitary state do not matter. On offensive realism not just an explanatory theory, but also a prescriptive theory for how a state ought to behave, see John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014), p. 11.

RUSSIAN AUTOCRACY AS AN ENABLER OF PUTIN AND PUTINISM

A rich academic literature has identified a causal role for regime type in determining the behavior of states in the international system.[88] The Soviet/Russia case provides ample evidence that change in regime type has contributed to changes in foreign policy. For most of the twentieth century, a communist party ruled the Soviet Union as a stable form of dictatorship.[89] During this period, notwithstanding a brief interregnum from 1941 to 1945, the Soviet state maintained an antagonistic relationship with the world's most powerful democracy. While power mattered, differences in regime type were a defining component of this Cold War competition.

Change in regime type—first under Gorbachev and then during Yeltsin's presidency—helped change Moscow's foreign policy.[90] As the Soviet Union and then an independent Russia became increasingly democratic, Kremlin leaders and their domestic allies sought greater cooperation with democratic countries and deeper integration into the liberal world order.[91] In response, democratic countries changed their policies from containment to engagement with Moscow.[92] At the peak of this cooperative era, President Bill Clinton

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88. Hyde and Saunders, "Recapturing Regime Type in International Relations." The most important finding from this vast literature is that democracies do not go to war with each other, but others have traced how changes in regime type can produce conflict between states. On democratic peace, see Michael W. Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs," *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Summer 1983), pp. 205–235, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2265298; Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post–Cold War World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993); John M. Owen, "How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Fall 1994), pp. 87–125, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2539197; and Michael R. Tomz and Jessica L.P. Weeks, "Public Opinion and the Democratic Peace," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 107, No. 4 (November 2013), pp. 849–865, doi.org/10.1017/S0003055413000488. On autocracies, see Weeks, "Strongmen and Straw Men." On democratization as a cause of interstate war, see Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder, "Democratization and War," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 74, No. 3 (May/June 1995), pp. 79–97, www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/1995-05-01/democratization-and-war. These studies all share a focus on individual and domestic level variables as a driver of state behavior.

89. On different forms of autocracy and their durability, see Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz, *How Dictatorships Work: Power, Personalization, and Collapse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

90. Similar to the complicated relationship between changes in power, ideas, and regime type in explaining Putin's interventions after 2014, the relationship between these factors in explaining the end of the Cold War is complex. For a review of this immense literature, see Stephen G. Books and William C. Wohlforth, "Power, Globalization, and the End of the Cold War: Reevaluating a Landmark Case for Ideas," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Winter 2000/01), pp. 5–53, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2626705.

91. Andrei Kozyrev, *The Firebird: The Elusive Fate of Russian Democracy* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019); and Tom Bjorkman, "Russian Democracy and American Foreign Policy" (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, July 1, 2001), https://www.brookings.edu/research/russian-democracy-and-american-foreign-policy/.

92. Mark L. Haas, "The United States and the End of the Cold War: Reactions to Shifts in Soviet

echoed the democratic peace theory in believing that a democratic Russia would make conflict between Russia and the West obsolete.[93] Russian weakness created the permissive conditions for some U.S.-led actions in the 1990s—NATO expansion or the bombing of Serbia—that most likely would not have been undertaken in the presence of a powerful Soviet Union.[94] Nevertheless, the degree and speed of the West's embrace of a democratizing Soviet Union and then Russia during this period cannot be explained solely by changes in the balance of power.

The return to Russian autocracy correlates closely with escalating tensions between Russia and the West. Because Russian autocracy deepened in parallel with Putin's rise and his KGB comrades, it is difficult to untangle the independent casual role of individuals versus political institutions.[95] During this time period, Russia's political institutions should not be understood as a completely independent factor, but rather as outcomes of Putin and his ideas as well. History, culture, interest groups, or societal preferences did not compel Russia to become an autocracy in the twenty-first century; Putin and Putinism did.[96]

The more consolidated Russian autocratic institutions became, the more influence Putin wielded individually on foreign policy. Early in his presidency, Putin was more constrained. For instance, major private Russian companies with international interests exercised more influence on Russian foreign policy in the early 2000s than they do today.[97] By the time Putin chose to take the risk-

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Power, Policies, or Domestic Politics?" *International Organization*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (January 2007), pp. 145–179, doi.org/10.1017/S002081830707004X.

93. President Bill Clinton, "A Strategic Alliance with Russian Reform," in *U.S. Department of State Dispatch*, Vol. 4 (April 1993), as quoted in James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose: U.S. Policy toward Russia after the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), pp. 90, 94.

94. On the relationship between power and ideas during this period, including on NATO expansion and the Serbian war, see Goldgeier and McFaul, *Power and Purpose*.

95. On the relationship between Putin's rise and Russian regime change, see Michael McFaul, "Choosing Autocracy: Actors, Institutions, and Revolution in the Erosion of Russian Democracy," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (Spring 2018), pp. 305–325, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26532688. On the ideological preferences of Putin's intelligence officer colleagues now holding Russian leadership, see Sharon Werning Rivera and David W. Rivera, "Are *Siloviki* Still Undemocratic? Elite Support for Political Pluralism during Putin's Third Presidential Term," *Russian Politics*, Vol 4, No. 4 (November 2019), pp. 499–519, doi.org/10.1163/2451-8921-00404004; and Tatiana Stanovaya, "The Putin Regime Cracks" (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, May 2020), https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Stanovaya_Putin_Elite-Final.pdf.

96. One might even conceptualize Putin, Putinism, and Russian autocracy as simply three expressions of a single variable—Putin's leadership.

97. Olga Oliker et al., *Russian Foreign Policy: Sources and Implications* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2009), https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG768.pdf; and Michael McFaul, "A Precarious Peace: Domestic Politics in the Making of

iest of decisions regarding interventions in Ukraine, Syria, and the United States, the Russian system had become much more autocratic. Putin did not act alone; although difficult to trace, domestic politics, interest group lobbying, and bureaucratic competition occur in autocracies, too. By the time of the decision to invade Ukraine, those closest to the Russian president—the *siloviki* or hard-liners primarily from the intelligence services—had been empowered, while more liberal individuals and interest groups were marginalized.[98] Time in office also mattered; Putin listened less to advisers in 2014 than in 2000.

To summarize, the arguments advanced in this article about the influence of Putin and Putinism on Russian international behavior suggest several ex ante predictions about Russian reaction to international events that contrast with structural theories of international relations or other domestic-level explanations. First, Putin and his ideas have an independent causal impact on the conduct of Russian foreign policy. His foreign policy is determined not by the global balance of power, Russian historical legacies, or bureaucratic politics. Evidence that Putin is behaving like (1) any leader of any great power, (2) Russian rulers in the past, or (3) a constrained agent of the KGB or oligarchs would undermine the argument advanced in this article. Second, Putin and Putinism compel Russia to look for allies and enemies not just among states, as realist theories contend, but within them. Who rules other states, what ideas these leaders embrace, and what political institutions shape their behavior matter for advocates of Putinism. Evidence showing Russian indifference to the internal organization of states or the ideological orientation of their leaders would weaken the theoretical claims of this article. Third, a Russia ruled by Putin and Putinism will embrace ideological leaders and movements committed to illiberal values at home and abroad. Examples of Russian foreign policy that promote liberal democracy or strengthen liberal institutionalism would undermine the analytic claims advanced in this article. Fourth, because the United States remains the most powerful liberal state in the international system, a theory assigning a causal role to Putin and Putinism predicts tension between these two countries. This theory also suggests how U.S.-Russian relations could improve in the future—a change in leaders in either country with ideological views more consistent with the other leader; that is, a Russian leader more committed to liberalism and democracy, or a U.S. leader who em-

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Russian Foreign Policy," *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Winter 1997/98), pp. 5–35, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2539356.

98. Catherine Belton, *Putin's People: How the KGB Took Back Russia and Then Took On the West* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020).

braces illiberal, orthodox, anti-multilateral values.[99] Cooperation between the United States and Russia without a change in leadership or regime type in Russia also would undermine the theoretical claims advanced in this article.

To assess how Putin and his ideas, enabled by autocracy, have influenced Russian foreign policy, this article examines three recent case studies of Russian intervention in the domestic affairs of sovereign states: Ukraine in 2014, Syria in 2015, and the United States in 2016.

Putin's Decision to Intervene in Ukraine in 2014

The 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine represented a serious setback for Putin's foreign policy goals. During the 2004 presidential election in Ukraine, Putin invested heavily in his preferred candidate, Viktor Yanukovych.[100] After a falsified vote sparked mass mobilization and a new election that the pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko won, Ukraine pivoted toward greater democratic governance and closer relations the West. Because Putin believes that Ukrainians and Russians are "fundamentally a single people,"[101] Slavs practicing democracy and looking West rather than adhering to Putin's system of government and looking East was unacceptable. Although Russian organizations and media devoted substantial resources to influencing Ukrainian voters, Putin blamed the West and the United States for meddling in Ukrainian internal affairs.[102]

Rather than basing his policies on an assessment of Ukrainian state power or the balance of power between Russia and Ukraine, Putin took a keen interest in Ukrainian domestic politics and institutions. He redoubled support for Yanukovych as a presidential candidate in 2010 and this time succeeded. Initially, President Yanukovych pivoted toward Russia; Ukraine's power

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99. The argument advanced in this article is that individuals, ideas, and institutions influence the behavior of all states, not just Russia. Space constraints, however, do not permit an analysis of how these factors may have influenced U.S. policy toward Russia in the cases discussed. This article traces how Putin and his ideas shaped his perceptions of U.S. actions, but does not evaluate whether these perceptions were accurate or normatively just.

100. Nikolai Petrov and Andrei Ryabov, "Russia's Role in the Orange Revolution," in Ånders Aslund and Michael McFaul, eds., *Revolution in Orange: The Origins of Ukraine's Democratic Breakthrough* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), pp. 145–164.

101. Vladimir Putin, "Press Statement and Answers to Journalists' Questions Following the APEC Leaders' Meeting," *President of Russia*, March 8, 2013, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/19382.

102. Western organizations were involved. See Michael McFaul, "Ukraine Imports Democracy: External Influences on the Orange Revolution," *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Fall 2007), pp. 45–83, doi.org/10.1162/isec.2007.32.2.45.

and regime type remained relatively constant, but this change in leadership produced a dramatic shift in Ukrainian foreign policy. Discussions of NATO membership were replaced by negotiations over accession to Putin's Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), a top Putin priority.[103] Ukraine's membership into this multilateral organization was central for its success because Russian exporters and investors wanted improved access to tens of millions of Ukrainian consumers.

Later in his term, Yanukovych began to flirt with the idea of closer ties to the EU, and started negotiations over an Association Agreement with Brussels in parallel to deliberations over EEU membership with Moscow. Putin rejected the notion that Ukraine could join both organizations. One of his economic advisers bluntly threatened, "Ukrainian authorities make a huge mistake if they think that the Russian reaction will become neutral in a few years from now."[104] To sweeten the deal for joining his club, Putin offered Ukraine an additional $15 billion.[105] Yanukovych acquiesced. Despite plans for a signing ceremony, Yanukovych ultimately postponed initialing the EU Association Agreement.[106] For a moment, it appeared that Putin had won. At the time, Russian officials most certainly thought so.[107]

In 2013, Ukraine was a democracy, however weak and fragmented. This regime type allowed Ukrainian citizens to express an alternative point of view to Yanukovych's foreign policy, and express they did in the form of giant crowds in Kyiv's main square. After months of confrontation and negotiation between the government and the protestors, the standoff turned violent.[108] European diplomats tried to negotiate a compromise agreement and appeared to have achieved success on February 21, 2014.[109] Hours later, however, Yanukovych fled Ukraine. The Ukrainian parliament impeached their de-

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103. Michael McFaul, *From Cold War to Hot Peace: An American Ambassador in Putin's Russia* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018), pp. 393–395.
104. Sergey Glaziev, as quoted in Shaun Walker, "Ukraine's EU Trade Deal Will Be Catastrophic, Says Russia," *Guardian*, September 22, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/22/ukraine-european-union-trade-russia.
105. Shaun Walker, "Vladimir Putin Offers Ukraine Financial Incentive to Stick with Russia," *Guardian*, December 18, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/17/ukraine-russia-leaders-talks-kremlin-loan-deal.
106. "Ukraine Protests after Yanukovych EU Deal Rejection," *BBC News*, November 30, 2013, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25162563.
107. McFaul, *From Cold War to Hot Peace*, p. 396.
108. "Ukraine Crisis: Police Storm Main Kiev 'Maidan' Protest Camp," *BBC News*, February 19, 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26249330.
109. "Agreement on the Settlement of Crisis in Ukraine–Full Text," *Guardian*, February 21, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/21/agreement-on-the-settlement-of-crisis-in-ukraine-full-text.

parted president, and in May 2014, Ukrainians elected a new pro-Western president, Petro Poroshenko.

Ukrainian domestic politics triggered Putin's decision to annex Crimea and intervene in eastern Ukraine. Putin labeled the fall of the Yanukovych regime a "coup d'état . . . something that we cannot accept. Such a growth of extreme nationalism is inadmissible."[110] Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity could have been construed as a threat to Russian national security interests.[111] Some Russians speculated that Poroshenko and his allies might abrogate the extended lease for Russia's naval base in Sevastopol, home to its Black Sea Fleet.[112] Kremlin-controlled media outlets worried about state-sponsored violence against ethnic Russians in Ukraine.[113] Putin expressed fear that Ukrainian revolutionaries, if successful, would push Ukraine to join NATO.[114] These potential security threats, however, were hypothetical; none occurred before Putin invaded Ukraine.

Moreover, it is unclear that annexation and military intervention was the most efficient or effective strategy at the time for defending Russian national security interests regarding Ukraine. In response to the Orange Revolution in 2004, Russia did not invade Ukraine or annex Ukrainian territory, despite having the capabilities to do.[115] That decision not to invade produced tangible positive results for Moscow. Russia maintained its naval base in Crimea in accordance with the Partition Treaty on the Status and Conditions of the Black Sea Fleet, which was extended with the Kharkiv Pact until 2042. Ukraine did not join NATO. Ethnic Russians were not slaughtered. Only a few years after the alleged democratic breakthrough in 2004, the new Ukrainian regime failed to consolidate liberal democracy. Russian influence grew in Ukraine, and six

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110. Vladimir Putin, "Direct Line with Vladimir Putin," *President of Russia*, April 16, 2015, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/49261.
111. "Putin ne mog pozvolit' Krymu stat' chast'yu NATO" [Putin could not allow for Crimea to become part of Ukraine], *Vesti*, July 4, 2014, https://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=1653269&cid=9.
112. Daniel Treisman, "Why Putin Took Crimea: The Gambler in the Kremlin," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 3 (May/June 2016), pp. 47–54, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2016-04-18/why-russian-president-putin-took-crimea-from-ukraine.
113. Putin, "Direct Line with Vladimir Putin," April 17, 2014; and "Sobytiya na Ukrainye nakhodyatsya pod pristal'nym vnimaniyem vsekh mirovykh lidyerov" [Events in Ukraine are under close scrutiny of world leaders], *Pyervyy Kanal* [Channel One], March 4, 2014, https://www.1tv.ru/news/2014-03-04/45137-sobytiya_na_ukraine_nahodyatsya_pod_pristalnym_vnimaniem_vseh_mirovyh_liderov.
114. "Putin ne mog pozvolit' Krymu stat' chast'yu NATO" [Putin could not allow for Crimea to become part of Ukraine], July 4, 2014.
115. In other words, we have a real world "experiment" to compare the impact on Russian national interests of nonintervention versus intervention.

years later, Ukrainians voted into office a pro-Russian president.[116] In 2014, Putin could have pursued a similar strategy with possibly similar results.

This time, however, Putin chose a different strategy: to strike back at the alleged Nazi-friendly coup plotters, in his view supported by the United States. Putin first ordered Russian troops to seize Crimea.[117] When that military operation unfolded relatively peacefully and easily, he intervened in eastern Ukraine, supplying weapons, financial assistance, and soldiers to secessionist movements in the Donbass. He even hinted that Russia might try to seize Novorossiya, a large chunk of Ukrainian territory stretching all the way to Odessa.[118] Today, Russia still occupies Crimea, while a military stalemate in eastern Ukraine endures at a terrible cost: roughly 14,000 deaths and the displacement of nearly two million people.

In deciding to annex Crimea and intervene in eastern Ukraine, Putin was motivated by a particular set of ideological beliefs distinct from realpolitik calculations. He perceived the new government in Kyiv as an ideological foe.[119] Before Yanukovych fled, Putin never articulated a rationale for why Crimea should belong to Russia. On the contrary, in 2008, Putin stated: "Crimea is not a disputed territory. . . . Russia has long recognized the borders of modern-day Ukraine."[120] New rationalizations came after annexation. Even ministry of defense preparations seemed thin, and "many details that at first seem to indicate careful Russian preparation actually point to the absence of any long-held plan."[121] Almost no one in Russia or in the West—neither realists nor historical institutionalists—predicted this military intervention.

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116. As Andrew Wilson wrote, "Revolutions always disappoint; but few have disappointed more comprehensively than Ukraine's once-famous 'Orange Revolution' of 2004." There was no reason to think that the Revolution of Dignity would have fared any better, and many reasons to believe, because of the constitutional irregularities in 2014 were greater than in 2004, that it might have provided greater opportunities for Putin had he not invaded. See Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 38.

117. Edward Lucas and Peter Pomeranzev, "Winning the Information War: Techniques and Counter-strategies to Russian Propaganda in Central and Eastern Europe" (Washington, D.C.: Center for European Policy Analysis, August 2016), pp. 15–20. See also "Ukraine Conflict: Turning Up the TV Heat," *BBC News*, August 11, 2014, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28706461; Peter Leonard, "Russian Propaganda War in Full Swing over Ukraine," Associated Press, March 15, 2014, https://web.archive.org/web/20140512223230/http://bigstory.ap.org/article/russian-propaganda-war-full-swing-over-ukraine; and Roman Olearchyk, Jan Cienski, and Neil Buckley, "Russia Wages Propaganda War over Ukraine," *Financial Times*, March 3, 2014, https://www.ft.com/content/0b88656a-a2fb-11e3-9685-00144feab7de?siteedition=uk.

118. "Agreement on the Settlement of Crisis in Ukraine–Full Text," February 21, 2014.

119. Vladimir Putin, "Conference of Russian Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives," *President of Russia*, July 1, 2014, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46131.

120. "Vladimir Putin, Is That You?" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 7, 2015, https://www.rferl.org/a/vladimir-putin-defends-ukraine-borders/26942991.html.

121. Treisman, "Why Putin Took Crimea."

Domestic events inside Ukraine, not a change in the global balance of power, shaped Putin's decisionmaking. Without the Revolution of Dignity, there would have been no Russian annexation or support for separatists. Had those who came to power in Kyiv in 2014 expressed ideological affinity with Putin, Russia would not have annexed Crimea or sparked a war in eastern Ukraine. Putin's unique response was shaped by his particular obsession with alleged U.S. hegemonic liberalism and fear of democracy on Russia's border practiced by people with a shared culture and history.[122] If Slavs succeeded in consolidating democracy in Ukraine, Putin's theory about the Slavic need for a strong, autocratic ruler with orthodox conservative values would be weakened. A different leader in the Kremlin, animated by different ideas, could have reacted differently. It is hard to imagine, for instance, that the liberal-minded Boris Nemtsov—Yeltsin's chosen heir apparent in 1997 before his pivot to Putin—would have invaded Ukraine in response to these domestic developments.[123] As an opposition figure, Nemtsov supported the Revolution of Dignity and denounced Putin's intervention.[124] Most likely, Gorbachev and Yeltsin also would have pursued alternative strategies.

Putin's intervention boosted his domestic popularity, temporarily.[125] It is hard to make the case, however, that intervening in Ukraine has strengthened Russia's long-term national interests or power in the international system.[126] The West imposed comprehensive economic sanctions on numerous Russian individuals and companies. Starting in the third quarter of 2014, the Russian economy contracted for nine consecutive quarters.[127] Estimates suggest that sanctions were responsible for 1.5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) contraction in 2014,[128] and as much as 2–2.5 percent for several years af-

122. Vladimir Putin, "Meeting with Members of Holy Synod of Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate," *President of Russia*, July 27, 2013, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/18960.
123. On Yeltsin's plan, see Vladimir Kara-Murza, "Nemtsov: A Film by Vladimir Kara-Murza, YouTube video, 1:06:15, Institute of Modern Russia, February 27, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2E3YbT9KTA.
124. Sergey Aleksashenko et al., "Nyezavisimyy ekspertnyy doklad 'PUTIN. VOYNA" [Independent expert report: Putin. War], *Otkrytaya Rossiya* [Open Russia], May 2015, https://openrussia.org/post/view/4803/.
125. By March 2020, his popularity has settled back to preinvasion levels. See "Putin's Approval Rating" (Moscow: Levada Center), accessed on April 10, 2020, https://www.levada.ru/en/ratings/.
126. Samuel Charap and Timothy J. Colton aptly captured the costs of intervention in the title of their book, *Everyone Loses: The Ukraine Crisis and the Ruinous Contest for Post-Soviet Russia* (London: Routledge, 2017).
127. World Bank Group, "Modest Growth Ahead: Russia Economic Report," No. 39, May 24, 2018, http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/162681527086868170/RER-39-Eng.pdf.
128. "Russian Economy Shrinks 2% As Sanctions Bite—Medvedev," *BBC News*, April 21, 2015,

ter Russia's intervention.[129] Hardest hit were Russian companies and banks seeking to raise capital on international markets. Morgan Stanley left Russia altogether.[130] In turn, according to economist Sergei Guriev, "Russia's inability to borrow has led to a dramatic depreciation of the ruble and a fall in real incomes and wages."[131] Following years of stability, capital outflows accelerated, jumping from $61 billion in 2013 to $151.5 billion in 2014, and foreign direct investment slowed.[132] Future investment plans were canceled, including most dramatically ExxonMobil's suspension of joint projects with Rosneft, at one time estimated to eventually be worth $500 billion. Other potential investments that did not occur are harder to estimate—it is hard to measure nonevents—but Western investors and companies operating in Russia have stated that uncertainty about future sanctions has squelched interest in attracting new investors.[133]

Putin's intervention in Ukraine also triggered new spending and deployments within NATO. In June 2014, President Obama announced the European Reassurance Initiative, a multibillion-dollar project to increase the United States' military presence in Europe, which the Trump administration expanded.[134] In subsequent summits, NATO has taken significant steps to en-

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https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32396792; and "Russian Federation: 2015 Article IV Consultation—Press Release; and Staff Report," Country Report No. 15/211 (Washington, D.C.: International Monetary Fund, August 2015), https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2015/cr15211.pdf.

129. Evsey Gurvich, "Kak pravil'no i kak nyepravil'no otvyechat' na sanktsyi" [What are the right and what are the wrong ways to respond to sanctions], *Vedomosti*, May 16, 2018, https://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2018/05/16/769605-otvechat-sanktsii; Nigel Gould-Davies, "Economic Effects and Political Impacts: Assessing Western Sanctions on Russia," Policy Brief No. 8 (Helsinki: Bank of Finland, Institute for Economies in Transition, August 9, 2018), https://helda.helsinki.fi/bof/bitstream/handle/123456789/15832/bpb0818.pdf?; and Natasha Doff, "Russia Still Paying Price for Crimea Five Years after Annexation," Bloomberg, March 17, 2019, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-03-17/russia-still-paying-price-for-crimea-five-years-after-annexation.

130. Tatiana Voronova, Maria Tsvetkova, and Jan Harvey, "Morgan Stanley to Shut Down Its Russian Banking Business in First Quarter 2020," Reuters, May 6, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-banks-morgan-stanley/morgan-stanley-to-shut-down-its-russian-banking-business-in-first-quarter-2020-idUSKCN1SC1R9.

131. Sergei Guriev, "Russia's Constrained Economy: How the Kremlin Can Spur Growth," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 3 (May/June 2016), pp. 18–22, https://www.jstor.org/stable/43946853.

132. Jason Bush and Alexander Winning, "UPDATE 1–Russia's Capital Outflows Reach Record $151.5 Bln in 2014 as Sanctions, Oil Slump Hit," Reuters, January 16, 2015, https://www.reuters.com/article/russia-capital-outflows-idUSL6N0UV3S320150116.

133. Henny Sender and Anne-Sylvaine Chassany, "Blackstone to Pull Out of Russia," *Financial Times*, September 21, 2014, https://www.ft.com/content/77e200ca-3da8-11e4-b782-00144feabdc0; and Liz Alderman, "Western Businesses in Russia, Watchful and Wary," *New York Times*, March 7, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/08/business/international/western-businesses-in-russia-are-watchful-and-wary.html/.

134. "FACT SHEET: European Reassurance Initiative and Other U.S. Efforts in Support of NATO Allies and Partners" (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Press Secretary, White House, June 3, 2014),

hance deterrence, including at the 2014 Wales summit, a pledge to spend 2 percent of GDP on defense, and at the 2016 Warsaw summit, the decision to deploy new battalions in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland.[135] None of these Western actions serve Russian national interests.

Western economic, political, and military assistance to Ukraine also expanded significantly, including new lethal assistance approved by the Trump administration. In 2020, U.S. military assistance to Ukraine totaled roughly $1.5 billion.[136] In 2014, the Group of Eight became the Group of Seven once again after Russia was ousted. The costs of integrating Crimea are estimated to be $3 billion annually.[137] Putin's intervention also undermined one of his most important foreign policy objectives—a successful EEU. Without Ukrainian consumers, benefits to Russia have decreased considerably. The absence of Crimean and Donbass voters from Ukrainian elections has shifted the country in a decidedly pro-European, anti-Russian direction. In 2010, Yanukovych won as a result of major support from these regions, but a politician with his pro-Russian orientation is unlikely ever to achieve a similar result. In April 2019, pro-Western President Volodymyr Zelenskyy won in a landslide over the pro-Russian candidate. His first foreign visit was to Brussels, not Moscow.

Putin did not advance Russian security, power, or economic and political interests by invading Ukraine. Just the opposite. But because Putin believed he was advancing his ideological agenda against ideological foes in Ukraine and the West, he was prepared to risk a great amount.

Putin's Decision to Intervene in Syria in 2015

Like the Orange Revolution in 2004, the Arab Spring in 2011 horrified Putin. Behind these uprisings, Putin again saw a sinister U.S. hand.[138] Most of the popular uprisings took place in countries more closely aligned to the United

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https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/03/fact-sheet-european-reassurance-initiative-and-other-us-efforts-support-; and Mark F. Cancian and Lisa Sawyer Samp, "The European Reassurance Initiative" (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 9, 2016), https://www.csis.org/analysis/european-reassurance-initiative-0.

135. "Warsaw Summit Key Decisions" (Brussels: North Atlantic Treaty Organization, February 2017), https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2017_02/20170206_1702-factsheet-warsaw-summit-key-en.pdf.

136. "Ukraine: Background, Conflict with Russia, and U.S. Policy" (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, updated April 29, 2020), https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45008.

137. Dmitriy Butrin et al., "Raskhdonyy poluostrov. Skol'ko zaplatit Rossiya za prisoyedineniye Kryma" [Expendable peninsula: How much will Russia pay for Crimea], *Kommersant* [The Businessman], March 7, 2014, https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2425287.

138. Vladimir Putin, "Plenary Session of St Petersburg International Economic Forum," *President of Russia*, June 17, 2016, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/52178.

States. A zero-sum, Machiavellian thinker might have calculated that these events damaged U.S. interests and therefore benefited Russia. Putin, however, did not frame these uprisings in such realpolitik terms. His reaction was shaped not purely by rational national interests or structural factors in the international system, but in part by specific ideas about external threats emerging from within these countries in the Middle East.

Initially, Moscow did little in response to the Arab Spring. Even in Syria, Russian leaders limited their involvement to engaging in international diplomacy and providing marginal military assistance to the Bashar al-Assad regime. A large-scale military intervention was not Putin's original plan.[139] Only when conditions inside Syria changed in favor of Putin's ideological foes did Russia's strategy also shift toward direct military intervention in 2015 to prevent Assad's downfall and what Putin perceived as Western-backed regime change.[140]

The positive implications for Russian national interests of military intervention in Syria were not obvious at the time. Russia generally has desired greater influence in the Middle East. To achieve that end, defending Assad was not an obvious move, given that most countries in the Arab League opposed the Syrian leader at the time. Prior to 2015, Moscow's more limited support for Damascus had elicited negative reactions in terms of business partnerships, protests in front of Russian embassies, and souring public opinion about Russia in several Arab countries.[141] The benefits of intervention for Russia's foreign policy interests emerged only much later and would have been difficult to predict in 2015. Putin was not thinking only about security or economic interests, however, when calculating the costs and benefits of military intervention in Syria. Ideological concerns also shaped his thinking.

As already discussed, well before 2011, Putin had developed a theory about U.S. leaders' proclivities to overthrow regimes that they disliked. In his view, the revolutionary movements in the Middle East threatened autocratic regimes, a fear that grew after massive demonstrations erupted against his own government in December 2011.[142] When domestic threats developed against Assad, Putin had a menu of policy options, such as working with the United Nations Security Council to broker a peaceful settlement between the regime

139. Samuel Charap, Elina Treyger, and Edward Geist, "Understanding Russia's Intervention in Syria" (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2019), p. 4, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR3180.html.
140. Ibid.
141. Ibid, p. 8.
142. "Plenary Session of St Petersburg International Economic Forum," June 17, 2016.

and the Syrian opposition, an outcome that most certainly would have preserved Russia's naval base in Syria as well as economic ties. Active Russian diplomacy to secure a peace settlement in Syria also would have enhanced Russia's image as a great power, not just in the Middle East but also around the world. Instead, Putin chose the riskiest option: military intervention in a civil war. Putin's unique operational code—his particular theory about international politics—framed his thinking about the uprisings and shaped Russian actions in the region, including most dramatically in Syria.[143]

Putin's analysis and subsequent policy responses to Syria were shaped primarily by domestic events inside Syria and perceived U.S. involvement in these events. His explanation of the U.S intervention in Libya shaped his perceptions of U.S. intentions in Syria, which eventually compelled him to intervene militarily. A different Russian leader with a different set of beliefs about both domestic politics in the Middle East and the nature of U.S. power might have acted differently.

THE LIBYA PRELUDE

When the Arab Spring reached Libya in 2011, popular mobilization turned violent quickly. Libyan leader Muammar al-Gaddafi pivoted almost immediately to authorizing violent suppression and promised to annihilate civilians in the rebel stronghold city of Benghazi.[144]

After a divisive policy debate within his administration, President Obama concurred with British and French counterparts that the international community had to try to prevent genocide in Benghazi. Obama, however, was prepared to use force only if the Security Council—namely, Russia—approved.[145] In a radical departure from long-standing Soviet and Russian positions, President Medvedev surprised the world and instructed Russia's UN ambassador to abstain from voting on United Nations Security Council resolutions

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143. On the idea of cognitive beliefs bounding but not determining leaders' decisions, see Alexander L. George, *The "Operational Code": A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-making*, Memorandum RM-5427-PR (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, September 1967), p. 15, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_memoranda/2008/RM5427.pdf.

144. Maria Golovnina and Patrick Worsnip, "UN Approves Military Force; Gaddafi Threatens Rebels," Reuters, March 17, 2011, http://in.reuters.com/article/2011/03/18/idINIndia-55674620110318.

145. On this internal debate, see Samantha Power, *The Education of an Idealist: A Memoir* (New York: Dey Street, 2019); Susan Rice, *Tough Love: My Story of the Things Worth Fighting For* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2019); and Derek Chollet, *The Long Game: How Obama Defied Washington and Redefined America's Role in the World* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2016).

1970 and 1973, thereby authorizing external actors to intervene militarily in Libya.[146]

Putin, then prime minister, had a different conception of Russian national interests in Libya. In a shocking first, Putin made his disagreement with Medvedev public, calling the Security Council resolution "flawed and inadequate,"[147] and lambasting the mission as "a medieval appeal for a crusade."[148] Seeing continuity with previous U.S. interventions, Putin explained, "And now, it's Libya's turn—under the pretext of protecting civilians."[149] He concluded, "By using air power in the name of humanitarian support, a number of countries did away with the Libyan regime. The revolting slaughter of Muammar Qaddafi . . . was the embodiment of these actions."[150]

In another unprecedented turn of events in this Russian domestic drama, Medvedev publicly rebutted Putin, stating that "Russia did not exercise [the veto power] for one reason: I do not consider this resolution to be wrong. Moreover, I believe that this resolution generally reflects our understanding of what is going on in Libya."[151] Medvedev blamed Gaddafi, explaining that "everything that is happening in Libya is a result of the Libyan leadership's absolutely intolerable behavior and the crimes that they have committed."[152] He specifically rejected Putin's analytic framing, arguing, "It is inadmissible to say anything that could lead to a clash of civilizations, talk of 'crusades' and so on. This is unacceptable."[153] Medvedev believed that the "reset" with the United States was more important than trying to save the Libyan leader.[154] Putin held a different view. Two leaders from the same country were analyzing threats and defining national interests in radically different ways. Russia's power and regime type remained constant, but the change in leadership produced differ-

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146. William J. Burns, *The Back Channel: A Memoir of American Diplomacy and the Case for Its Renewal* (New York: Random House, 2019), p. 317; and Rice, *Tough Love*, p. 285.
147. "Putin nazval ryezolyutsiyu SB OON po Livii ushchyerbnoy" [Putin called the resolution of UNSC flawed], *Interfax*, March 21, 2011, https://www.interfax.ru/russia/182239.
148. Putin, as quoted in Gleb Bryanski, "Putin Likens U.N. Libya Resolution to Crusades," Reuters, March 21, 2011, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-russia-idUSTRE72K3JR20110321.
149. Putin, as quoted in Jill Dougherty, "Putin and Medvedev Spar over Libya," *CNN*, March 23, 2011, http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/europe/03/21/russia.leaders.libya/index.html.
150. Vladimir Putin, "Rossiya i menyayushchiysya mir" [Russia and the changing world], *Moskovskiye Novosti* [Moscow News], February 27, 2012, http://www.mn.ru/politics/78738.
151. Ibid.
152. "Zayavleniye Prezidenta Rossii v svyazi s situatsiyey v Livii" [Statement by the President of Russia on the situation in Libya], *President of Russia*, March 21, 2011, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/10701.
153. Ibid.
154. The differences between Medvedev and Putin regarding bilateral relations with the United States are explored in detail in McFaul, *From Cold War to Hot Peace*.

ent Russian responses to Libya in the spring of 2011. Had Putin been president at the time, it is hard to imagine that Russia would have abstained on the same Security Council resolutions. Leaders matter.

INTERVENING TO PRESERVE AUTOCRACY IN SYRIA

In response to the tragic civil war in Syria, the international community tried to intervene again, though in this case with diplomacy. In a series of conferences and negotiations, the international community pursued a peace agreement to be followed by a negotiated transition to a coalition government. The Obama administration hoped that an interim government could be constituted with representatives from both the Assad government and the opposition, even if Assad himself had to "step aside."[155] The administration assessed that the opposition would never join a transitional government that kept Assad in power, but it did not press for a fundamental change in the Syrian state or institutions. Peace—not regime change—was the goal. Furthermore, the administration argued that the longer Assad stayed in power, the more violent the war would become.

Putin embraced a different theory. He believed that the only way to restore peace and stability was by keeping Assad in power by all means necessary. Achieving this objective might require an escalation of violence, but those were costs worth bearing. Above all else, Putin wanted to prevent alleged regime change orchestrated by the United States.[156] He assessed that the Syrian opposition held beliefs antithetical to Russian national interests (as defined by him). Eventually, the Obama administration did arm the rebels, but argued that this assistance aimed only to create a stalemate on the battlefield, a necessary condition for a negotiated power-sharing agreement.[157] After Assad used chemical weapons in the summer of 2013 against Syrian citizens and Obama considered using force to uphold the international norm against the use of such weapons, Putin again framed the U.S. military threat as a case of regime change: "It is alarming that military intervention in internal conflicts in foreign countries has become commonplace for the United States."[158] Putin

155. "Statement by President Obama on the Situation in Syria" (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Press Secretary, White House, August 18, 2011), https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/08/18/statement-president-obama-situation-syria.
156. Mark Landler, *Alter Egos: Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and the Twilight Struggle over American Power* (New York: Random House, 2016), p. 281.
157. Aamer Madhani, Jim Michaels, and Tom Vanden Brook, "Source: Obama Approves Arming Syrian Rebels," *USA Today*, last updated June 14, 2013, https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2013/06/13/us-confirms-chemical-weapons-syria/2420763/.
158. Vladimir Putin, "A Plea for Caution from Russia," *New York Times*, September 11, 2013, https://

suggested that another U.S. war for regime change was irrational, arguing, "Is it in America's long-term interest? I doubt it."[159] Kremlin-controlled media similarly described the United States' strategy as "controlled chaos" in service of its ideological aims.[160]

In contrast to Medvedev's decision on Libya, Putin instructed Russia's UN ambassador to block every Security Council resolution that even hinted at authorizing the use of force against the Assad regime, obstruction that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton described as "despicable."[161] Russia initially participated in diplomatic efforts, led by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, to negotiate an end to the civil war.[162] Episodically, especially for a brief moment in Geneva in June 2012, it looked like the United States and Russia might work together to craft a negotiated end to the Syrian civil war.[163] But after Annan released the Action Group for Syria Final Communiqué, which articulated a road map for ending the war and negotiating a "Syrian-led" political transition,[164] Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Secretary of State Clinton read out the results of their negotiations in Geneva in almost antithetical terms. Clinton described the road map as a "a blueprint for Assad's departure."[165] Lavrov berated Clinton's interpretation, warning, "There are no prior conditions to the transfer process and no attempt to exclude any group."[166] The United States still sought change in the head of the Syrian regime, and that was unacceptable for Putin. These confrontational dynamics contin-

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www.nytimes.com/2013/09/12/opinion/putin-plea-for-caution-from-russia-on-syria.html; and Max Fisher, "Vladimir Putin's New York Times Op-ed, Annotated and Fact-Checked," *Washington Post*, September 12, 2013, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2013/09/12/vladimir-putins-new-york-times-op-ed-annotated-and-fact-checked/.

159. Putin, "A Plea for Caution from Russia."

160. "Arabskaya vesna. Igry Prestolov" [Arab Spring. Games of Thrones], *Rossiya 1* [Russia 1], September 1, 2014, https://russia.tv/brand/show/brand_id/58388/.

161. "Syria: Hillary Clinton Calls Russia and China 'Despicable' for Opposing UN Resolution," *Telegraph*, February 25, 2012, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9105470/Syria-Hillary-Clinton-calls-Russia-and-China-despicable-for-opposing-UN-resolution.html.

162. "Six-Point Proposal of the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States," *United Nations Peacemaker*, April 2012, https://peacemaker.un.org/syria-six-point-plan2012.

163. "Lavrov-Clinton Talks: 'Very Good Chance' of Progress on Syria in Geneva," *RT*, June 29, 2012, https://www.rt.com/news/clinton-lavrov-syria-talks-103/.

164. Nick Meo, "Geneva Meeting Agrees 'Transition Plan' to Syria Unity Government," *Telegraph*, June 30, 2012, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9367330/Geneva-meeting-agrees-transition-plan-to-Syria-unity-government.html.

165. Hillary Rodham Clinton, *Hard Choices* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), p. 459.

166. "Geneva Decisions on Syria Already Being Distorted–Lavrov," *RT*, July 3, 2012, https://www.rt.com/politics/russia-us-syria-geneva-talks-282/.

ued throughout subsequent negotiations, "settling into," as Clinton recalls, "a running argument between me and Lavrov."[167]

After Obama's reelection, Secretary of State John Kerry tried to reinvigorate the negotiations.[168] While visiting Moscow in May 2013, Kerry never stated explicitly that Assad must go, but affirmed, "We believe that full implementation of the Geneva communiqué calls for a transition governing body . . . formed by mutual consent with the support of the international community and enjoying full executive authority . . . to run and manage the government."[169] The Syrian opposition would never agree to Assad remaining in power, so "mutual consent" meant there could be no deal without Assad stepping aside. Lavrov confirmed Russia's prior position.[170] This fundamental disagreement was never reconciled.

After Assad ordered the use of chemical weapons against innocent civilians in 2013, Putin did work with Obama for their surrender, and nearly 98 percent of Syria's declared stockpile was destroyed by 2014.[171] Still, Putin was never ready to engage in an attempt to remove his fellow autocrat from power.

As predicted by the Obama administration, Syria's sustained civil war with Assad in power weakened moderate opposition groups, strengthened violent extremists, and attracted foreign terrorists.[172] In 2014, anti-Assad forces achieved several victories in western Syria. In eastern Syria, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) established a caliphate, further weakening Assad's grip on power. By the fall of 2015, therefore, Putin decided to intervene to save Assad. In a move rubberstamped by the Russian parliament, he launched Russia's largest military operation in the Middle East since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russia provided air power to facilitate ground operations conducted by the Syrian army, Iranian paramilitary groups sponsored by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and Hezbollah.

Putin and his proxies limited their operations to western Syria, leaving the

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167. Clinton, *Hard Choices*, p. 386.
168. John Kerry, *Every Day Is Extra* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018).
169. "Remarks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov," *U.S. Department of State*, May 7, 2013, https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/05/209117.htm.
170. "Speech of and Answers to Questions by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov during Joint Press Conference Surrounding the Results of Negotiations with US Secretary of State John Kerry, Moscow, 7 May 2013," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, May 7, 2013, http://www.mid.ru/en/vistupleniya_ministra/-/asset_publisher/MCZ7HQuMdqBY/content/id/111326.
171. Paul F. Walker, "Syrian Chemical Weapons Destruction: Taking Stock and Looking Ahead" (Washington, D.C.: Arms Control Association, December 2014), https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2014-12/features/syrian-chemical-weapons-destruction-taking-stock-looking-ahead.
172. McFaul, *From Cold War to Hot Peace*, p. 344.

fight against ISIL to the United States and its coalition partners. In 2014, the United States finally did intervene in Syria, not to overthrow Assad, but to destroy ISIL. Operation Inherent Resolve continued under President Trump until the ISIL capital of Raqqa fell, and the caliphate collapsed.[173] In October 2019, U.S. special forces killed ISIL leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Trump then ordered the withdrawal of American forces (though some now still remain in the country) and abandoned the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces; Russia and Turkey moved in to fill the military vacuum.

In retrospect, Putin's decision to intervene in Syria seems partially successful.[174] So far, Putin has achieved his main goal—the preservation of Assad and his regime. At the time, however, this move was both risky and unprecedented, so much so that few even predicted the intervention.[175] The last time Moscow intervened in foreign country to prop up an autocratic ideological ally fighting a civil war—Afghanistan in 1979—ended in complete disaster: a miscalculation so big that it helped to unravel the Soviet Union itself, with some predicting a similar fate regarding the Syrian intervention.[176] Unlike Ukraine, Putin's war in Syria was unpopular; the government-controlled press deliberately limited reporting on the intervention.[177] Putin did not make realist arguments for his decision, such as preserving access to the naval base in Tartus or securing vital natural resources, of which Syria provides few. Instead, his rationale focused on domestic politics within Syria and the defense of Syrian sovereignty against imperial powers and global terrorism (framed by

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173. Margaret Coker and Falih Hassan, "Iraq Prime Minister Declares Victory over ISIS," *New York Times*, December 9, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/09/world/middleeast/iraq-isis-haider-al-abadi.html.

174. Whether Assad will assume complete control over a peaceful Syria is hard to predict, as Putin may become embroiled in a protracted military fight against a decentralized insurgency.

175. Angela Stent wrote at the time, "Once again, Washington has been caught off-guard, just as it was in March 2014, when Russian annexed Crimea and began supporting pro-Russian separatists fighting Ukrainian forces in eastern Ukraine." Stent, "Putin's Power Play in Syria: How to Respond to Russia's Intervention," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 1 (January/February 2016), p. 106, https://www.jstor.org/stable/43946630. Rational actions should be easier to predict than irrational acts, yet few observers predicted any of these three cases discussed in this article.

176. On Afghanistan, see Sarah E. Mendelson, *Change Course: Ideas, Politics, and the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998). On Syria, see Julian Borger, "Russia Risks a Repeat of Doomed Afghan War in Syria, Says EU Foreign Policy Chief," *Guardian*, October 28, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/28/russia-risks-repeat-doomed-afghanistan-soviet-war-syria/.

177. "Fewer Than Half of Russians Support Syria Campaign, Poll Says," *Moscow Times*, May 6, 2019, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/05/06/fewer-than-half-of-russians-support-syria-campaign-poll-says-a65494; Denis Volkov, "Do Russians Support Putin's War in Syria?" December 10, 2015, https://carnegie.ru/commentary/61583; and Chicago Council on Global Affairs, "Poll: Russian Public Opinion Is at Odds with Putin's Foreign Policy in Syria," January 16, 2018, https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/press-release/poll-russian-public-opinion-odds-putins-foreign-policy-syria.

Putin as supported by the United States). As Putin explained at the United Nations just days before the intervention, "Instead of learning from other people's mistakes, some prefer to repeat them and continue to export revolutions, only now these are 'democratic' revolutions. . . . Instead of bringing about reforms, aggressive intervention rashly destroyed government institutions and the local way of life."[178] Putin justified Russia's military intervention as a campaign against terrorists, supported by external actors seeking to overthrow the legitimate Syrian government.[179] Putin's particular set of cognitive beliefs for interpreting the civil war compelled him to perceive all Syrians opposing Assad as ideological enemies and terrorists. Because the United States supported these groups, Putin designated them as Russia's enemies.[180] Even while fighting ISIL in the east, the United States was allegedly supporting terrorists in the west. Putin drew parallels between U.S. regime change efforts in Ukraine and in the Middle East.[181]

Disaggregating Putin's ideational motivations from other objectives in this case is more difficult than the other two interventions examined in this article, and made even more complex because of Russia's perceived victory. In retrospect, Putin's decision to intervene seems rational, because he achieved his objective of backing Assad and allegedly generated tangible benefits for Russian power in the Middle East.[182] At the time of Russia's intervention, however, many observers perceived the decision as reckless and costly. As Obama himself asked reportedly, "What is it that Russia thinks it gains if it gets a country that has been completely destroyed as an ally, that it now has to perpetually spend billions of dollars to prop up?"[183] Aside from Iran, Russian relations with other countries in the region were strained. Russian society did not support intervention. The genius of Putin's decision was assigned only years later; some argue that it is still too early to judge the result.[184]

The argument advanced in this article, however, is not that Putin and his

178. Vladimir Putin, "70th Session of the UN General Assembly," *President of Russia*, September 28, 2015, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50385.
179. Vladimir Putin, "Meeting with Government Members," *President of Russia*, September 30, 2015, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50401.
180. Vladimir Putin, "Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club," *President of Russia*, October 27, 2016, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53151.
181. Vladimir Putin, "The Arctic: Territory of Dialogue International Forum," *President of Russia*, March 30, 2017, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/54149.
182. The sense of contingency in a historical moment is lost once the outcome is known. Putin's intervention seemed more reckless in 2015 than it did five years later, when the outcome to the civil war became understood. See Jack S. Levy, "Counterfactuals, Causal Inference, and Historical Analysis," *Security Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (September 2015), p. 384, doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2015.1070602.
183. Chollet, *The Long Game*, pp. 172–173.
184. Henry Meyer and Ilya Arkhipov, "Putin Has a Syria 'Headache' and the Kremlin's Blaming

ideas are always counter to realist or liberal claims about state behavior. More modestly, the hypothesis is that Putin as a leader and Putinism as an analytic framework played an identifiable causal role in the Russian decision to intervene in Syria. Putin's disdain for regime change and his support for autocrats compelled him to intervene militarily. Putin had other options to realize Russia's more traditional, realist objectives in Syria. For instance, he could have supported a political transition that removed Assad but preserved the old regime, thereby maintaining access to Russia's naval base and avoiding a disruption of weapons sales. The Obama administration would have supported such an outcome. After regime change in Serbia in 2000, Ukraine in 2004, Kyrgyzstan in 2010, and Armenia in 2018, Putin managed to maintain basic Russian security and economic interests. The new Syrian generals empowered by a negotiated transition would likely have remained loyal to Moscow. Conversely, the fall of Assad, the emergence of a failed state, and the deepening of a civil war on the borders of countries allied with the United States also could have served Russian interests in the region, by entangling the United States into an unwinnable civil war, with a potential for conflict with a NATO ally, Turkey. Instead, Putin has inherited all of these problems.

Putin was not compelled to intervene; he had other options. He also was not motivated solely by security interests, balance of power calculations, or Russian historical traditions regarding the Middle East. Recognizing himself as the leader of the pro-sovereignty, anti-multilateral world, Putin opposed allowing another ally to fall at the hands of his ideological foe. What happened inside Syria mattered to Putin, as did what kind of leader and regime governed. A different Russian leader—Gorbachev, Yeltsin, or even Medvedev—would have behaved differently. That a Russia with the same power capabilities, the same regime, but a different president reacted so differently to the Libyan and Syrian civil wars underscores the crucial role that leaders and their ideas play in the formulation of foreign policy.

Putin's Decision to Intervene in the United States in 2016

Both Gorbachev and Yeltsin saw their U.S. counterparts as ideological partners in pursuing domestic economic and political reform. Gorbachev rarely blamed the United States for Soviet economic or political problems, including the collapse of the Soviet Union.[185] Yeltsin embraced with vigor, at least rhetorically,

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Assad," Bloomberg, April 27, 2020, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-28/putin-has-a-syria-headache-and-the-kremlin-s-blaming-assad.
185. Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1996).

To marginalize these protestors, Putin and his surrogates framed this domestic confrontation as a struggle between his patriotic base and U.S.-funded traitors.[193] Kremlin-controlled media asserted that the United States was funding demonstrators to foment revolution and drew comparisons to the Arab Spring. Putin assessed, "We are required to protect our sovereignty. . . . We will have to think about strengthening the law and holding more responsible those who carry out the task of a foreign government to influence internal political processes."[194] Throughout this era of increased political repression, Putin's government placed new constraints on media organizations, NGOs, and foreign foundations.

For Putin, the 2016 U.S. presidential election was an opportunity for payback. Putin, his intelligence officers, and his surrogates went on the offensive against candidate Clinton and against the U.S. democratic system more generally. As the Mueller report summarized, "The Russian government interfered in the 2016 presidential election in sweeping and systematic fashion."[195]

The Kremlin deployed multiple means to interfere in the domestic affairs of the United States in 2016.[196] The theft and publication of electronic property—doxing—was most impactful. Russian agents from the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) stole hundreds of thousands of emails and documents from the Democratic National Committee, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, and the Clinton campaign, and then facilitated their widespread publication through fictitious online personas and third-party websites such as WikiLeaks.[197]

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193. McFaul, *From Cold War to Hot Peace*, pp. 239–264.
194. Elder, "Vladimir Putin Accuses Hillary Clinton of Encouraging Russian Protests."
195. Special Counsel Robert S. Mueller III, *Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election: Volume I* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, March 2019), p. 1. Hereafter referred to as the *Mueller Report*.
196. For greater elaboration of all these methods, including ones not discussed in the Mueller report, see Michael McFaul and Bronte Kass, "Understanding Putin's Intentions and Actions in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election," in Michael McFaul, ed., *Securing American Elections: Prescriptions for Enhancing the Integrity and Independence of the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election and Beyond* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Cyber Policy Center and Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University, June 2019), pp. 1–16. Russia also has deployed similar methods to influence elections in other democracies. For an accounting, see the "The Authoritarian Interference Tracker," The Alliance for Securing Democracy, https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/toolbox/authoritarian-interference-tracker/; and Samantha Bradshaw and Philip N. Howard, *Troops, Trolls and Troublemakers: A Global Inventory of Organized Social Media Manipulation*, working paper no. 2017.12 (Oxford: Computational Propaganda Research Project, 2018), http://blogs.oii.ox.ac.uk/politicalbots/wp-content/uploads/sites/89/2017/07/Troops-Trolls-and-Troublemakers.pdf.
197. The Special Counsel Office charged twelve GRU officers for crimes arising from the hacking of these computers, principally with conspiring to commit computer intrusions, in violation of 18 U.S.C. §§1030 and 371.

The Kremlin also directed broadcast, print, and social media campaigns to exacerbate polarization in American society. Through traditional broadcasting, RT and Sputnik produced anti-Clinton, pro-Trump content, which was circulated on multiple platforms.[198] To increase the disruptive effect of this content, the Kremlin-loyal IRA purchased political advertisements, amplified digital messages through fake accounts and bots, and staged political rallies inside the United States.[199] Facebook uncovered 470 IRA-controlled accounts responsible for 80,000 posts between January 2015 and August 2017, reaching an estimated 126 million individuals, and approximately 170 IRA-controlled Instagram accounts that posted 120,000 pieces of content.[200] Twitter identified more than 3,800 IRA-controlled accounts that interacted with approximately 1.4 million individuals.[201]

Furthermore, Kremlin surrogates reached out directly to the Trump campaign. In June 2016, Donald Trump Jr., campaign chairman Paul Manafort, and senior campaign adviser Jared Kushner met a visiting delegation headed by the Russian lawyer Natalia Veselnitskaya, who promised to provide dirt on presidential candidate Clinton and who had coordinated talking points with senior officials in the Russian government.[202] Russian officials and intermediaries continued to hold meetings with senior Trump advisers throughout the campaign and transition period.[203]

Finally, Kremlin-affiliated cyber agents directly probed the United States'

198. Pepe Escobar, "What Does It Take to Bring Hillary Clinton to Justice?" *RT*, last updated November 4, 2016, https://www.rt.com/op-edge/365204-clinton-us-investigation-justice/.
199. *Mueller Report*, p. 4.
200. See testimony of Colin Stretch, general counsel, Facebook, "Hearing before the United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence," November 1, 2017, pp. 5–6, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/os-cstretch-110117.pdf.
201. Eli Rosenberg, "Twitter to Tell 677,000 Users They Were Had by the Russians. Some Signs Show the Problem Continues," *Washington Post*, January 19, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2018/01/19/twitter-to-tell-677000-users-they-were-had-by-the-russians-some-signs-show-the-problem-continues/; and "Update on Twitter's Review of the 2016 US Election," *Twitter Public Policy* blog, last updated January 31, 2018, https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2018/2016-election-update.html. Twitter reported identifying 50,258 Kremlin-connected accounts, responsible for more than 1 million tweets in the ten weeks before the election.
202. Natasha Bertrand, "New Memo Suggests Russian Lawyer at Trump Tower Meeting Was Acting 'As an Agent of the Kremlin,'" *Business Insider*, October 16, 2017, http://www.businessinsider.com/veselnitskaya-memo-trump-tower-russia-meeting-2017-10.
203. See Karen Yourish and Larry Buchanan, "Mueller Report Shows Depth of Connections between Trump Campaign and Russians," *New York Times*, updated April 19, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/01/26/us/politics/trump-contacts-russians-wikileaks.html; and Abigail Abrams, "The Attorney General Said There Was 'No Collusion,' but Trump Associates Still Interacted with Russians More Than 100 Times," *Time*, April 18, 2019, https://time.com/5572821/donald-trump-russia-contacts/.

electoral infrastructure. In June 2017, senior officials from the Department of Homeland Security testified that election-related networks in twenty-one states were potentially targeted by Russian actors.[204] In 2019, the Senate Intelligence Committee published two reports that confirmed Russian targeting of systems in all fifty states.[205] Putin decided not to disrupt the voting process on Election Day.[206] That they were prepared to do so nevertheless underscores the audacity of this intervention.

The central aim of Putin's intervention was clear—help Trump. He himself said as much in July 2018: "Yes. I wanted him to win."[207] Putin supported Trump personally because of a perception of shared values and interests. Ideologically, Trump and Putin embraced many common illiberal beliefs. Candidate Trump espoused many foreign policy positions that served Russian national interests (as defined by Putin). On the campaign trail, Trump pledged to look into recognizing Crimea as part of Russia and lifting sanctions on Russian companies and individuals.[208] He criticized NATO, said little about democracy and human rights, and praised Putin without equivocation. Clinton espoused opposite views on all of these issues. Putin's interventions also aimed more generally to disrupt and undermine the legitimacy of the U.S. election, as well as amplify divisions between opposing political forces in American society.[209]

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204. "Written Testimony of I&A Cyber Division Acting Director Dr. Samuel Liles, and NPPD Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Cybersecurity and Communications Jeanette Manfra for a Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Hearing Titled 'Russian Interference in the 2016 U.S. Elections'" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, last updated March 27, 2018), https://www.dhs.gov/news/2017/06/21/written-testimony-ia-cyber-division-acting-director-dr-samuel-liles-and-nppd-acting.

205. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Report of the Select Committee on Intelligence United States Senate on Russian Active Measures Campaigns and Interference in the 2016 U.S. Election*, Vol. 1; and Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Report of the Select Committee on Intelligence United States Senate on Russian Active Measures Campaigns and Interference in the 2016 U.S. Election*, Vol. 2.

206. President Obama warned Putin of the consequences of such an Election Day attack. Deterrence may have worked. For a comprehensive account, see Greg Miller, *The Apprentice: Trump, Mueller, and the Subversion of American Democracy* (New York: HarperCollins, 2018).

207. "Press-konferentsyya po itogam peregovorov presidentov Rossii i SSHA" [News conference following talks of the presidents of Russia and the United States], *Prezident Rossii* [President of Russia], July 16, 2018, http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58017.

208. Tyler Pager, "Trump to Look at Recognizing Crimea as Russian Territory, Lifting Sanctions," *Politico*, July 27, 2016, https://www.politico.com/story/2016/07/trump-crimea-sanctions-russia-226292.

209. Yevgeniy Golovchenko et al., "Cross-Platform State Propaganda: Russian Trolls on Twitter and YouTube during the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election," *International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 25, No. 3, (April 2020) pp. 357–389, doi.org/10.1177/1940161220912682; Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Report of the Select Committee on Intelligence United States Senate on Russian Active Measures Campaigns and Interference in the 2016 U.S. Election: Russia's Use of Social Media with Additional Views*, Vol. 2; Renee DiResta et al., *The Tactics and Tropes of the Internet Research Agency*, New

Even on Election Day, few predicted a Trump victory. After extensive efforts to undermine and discredit her, Putin thus faced the prospect of a Clinton presidency. That Putin went ahead with an unprecedented, risky intervention anyway underscores his commitment to ideological convictions, rather than more narrowly defined Russian security or economic interests.

Whether Russian actions did help Trump appreciably is unknown. Tracing the impact of Putin's intervention in the United States in 2016 is much more difficult than measuring the impact of his interventions in Ukraine in 2014 or Syria in 2015. Polling data in October 2016 suggest that the Russian operation may have helped to undermine Clinton's reputation.[210] But in the vast sea of variables influencing voter preferences, precisely measuring the independent causal influence of Russia's efforts during the 2016 U.S. presidential election is impossible.[211] This uncertainty about causation only underscores the boldness and riskiness of Putin's decision to intervene in the world's most powerful country.

Even though Putin's preferred candidate won, the blowback in American society to Putin's violation of U.S. sovereignty was substantial. In 2017, the U.S. Congress passed the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act.[212] The Trump administration sanctioned numerous Russian oligarchs, companies, government officials, and a state-owned weapons trading company and its subsidiary in 2018.[213] In addition, negative reactions both inside the Trump administration and within American society overall have

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Knowledge, December 17, 2018, https://disinformationreport.blob.core.windows.net/disinformation-report/NewKnowledge-Disinformation-Report-Whitepaper.pdf; Philip N. Howard et al., "Social Media, News and Political Information during the U.S. Election: Was Polarizing Content Concentrated in Swing States?" The Project on Computational Propaganda Data Memo 2017.8 (Oxford: Oxford Internet Institute, Oxford University, September 28, 2017), https://arxiv.org/ftp/arxiv/papers/1802/1802.03573.pdf; and more generally, Nathalie Maréchal, "Networked Authoritarianism and the Geopolitics of Information: Understanding Russian Internet Policy," *Media and Communication*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2017), pp. 29–41, doi.org/10.17645/mac.v5i1.808.

210. Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Cyber-War: How Russian Hackers and Trolls Helped Elect a President: What We Don't, Can't, and Do Know* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

211. See Regina G. Lawrence, book review, "Cyberwar: How Russian Hackers and Trolls Helped Elect a President—What We Don't, Can't, and Do Know," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 83, No. 1 (Spring 2019), pp. 159–168, doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfy050. More generally, attempts to trace the campaign effects of political advertising have yielded limited results. See Joshua L. Kalla and David E. Brockman, "The Minimal Persuasive Effects of Campaign Contact in General Elections: Evidence from 49 Field Experiments," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 112, No. 1 (February 2018), pp. 148–166, doi.org/10.1017/S0003055417000363.

212. *H.R.3364–Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act*, 115th Cong., 2017–2018, Library of Congress, https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/3364/text.

213. Ivan Gutterman, Wojtek Grojec, and RFE/RL's Current Time, "A Timeline of All Russia-Related Sanctions," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, updated September 19, 2018, https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-sanctions-timeline/29477179.html.

limited Trump's ability to deliver on campaign promises favorable to Putin. In some issue areas, such as lethal assistance to Ukraine, the Trump administration has been tougher on Russia than the Obama administration. Although Trump may have benefited Putin by serving as a disruptive force in American society and international politics, the tangible, realpolitik payoffs of this intervention are unclear.

Because Putin was motivated in part by ideological objectives rather than material or security interests, he may have a different assessment of the costs and benefits of his intervention. His passionate disdain of Clinton likely influenced his decisionmaking. As Clinton assessed, "Our relationship has been sour for a long time."[214] Putin sought an ideological soulmate for promoting nationalist, conservative ideas, similar to his friends, Orbán, Le Pen, and Farage.[215] Trump has praised these same European leaders and directly, publicly, and consistently expressed his admiration for Putin as well.[216] The short-term costs of Russia's intervention therefore might be outweighed by the long-term ideological gains of having a kindred spirit in the White House if Trump wins reelection.

Conclusion

The power of individual countries and the balance of power between them remain central determinants of state behavior in the international system. Theories of international relations must begin with power. Assessments of capabilities cannot explain all state behavior, however. To understand a subset of outcomes in international politics, individuals, ideas, and institutions must be added to the analysis.

When seeking to explain the riskiest Russian behavior in the world today—intervention in the domestic affairs of sovereign countries—Vladimir Putin, his ideas, and the political institutions empowering him must be factored into the equation. Because autocracy in contemporary Russia was caused in part by Putin and his ideas, isolating the independent causal effect of regime type

214. Hillary Rodham Clinton, *What Happened* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017), p. 327.
215. See Joanna Kakissis, "In Trump, Hungary's Viktor Orban Has a Rare Ally In the Oval Office," *NPR*, May 13, 2019, https://www.npr.org/2019/05/13/722620996/in-trump-hungarys-viktor-orban-has-a-rare-ally-in-the-oval-office; Aidan Quigley, "Trump Expresses Support for French Candidate Le Pen," *Politico*, April 21, 2017, https://www.politico.com/story/2017/04/21/trump-supports-marine-le-pen-237464; and "Donald Trump: Nigel Farage Would Be Great UK Ambassador," *BBC News*, November 22, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-38060434.
216. Jeremy Diamond, "Timeline: Donald Trump's Praise for Vladimir Putin," *CNN*, July 29, 2016, http://www.cnn.com/2016/07/28/politics/donald-trump-vladimir-putin-quotes/index.html.

from Putin and Putinism is difficult. But whether individuals, ideas, and institutions are considered three expressions of one variable or three independent factors, Putin, his ideas, and Russia's autocratic system of government, shaped in large measure by him, have produced a distinct, identifiable impact on Russian foreign policy. In all three cases discussed in this article, Putin's ideas about illiberalism, orthodoxy, sovereignty, and the West shaped his decision-making in unique ways. A different Russian leader with different ideas governing in a different regime could have—and probably would have—behaved differently. For example, a Russian leader animated by either realist or liberal ideas about international relations would have made different decisions regarding intervention in Ukraine in 2014, Syria in 2015, or the United States in 2016. In fact, different Russian leaders embracing different ideas did make different decisions—Gorbachev did not annex the territory of a sovereign neighbor; Medvedev supported the international intervention to save lives in Libya; and Yeltsin never tried to influence U.S. elections.

Ideological motivations do not animate every Russian foreign policy action in the world today. Russia pursues security and economic interests in parallel to ideological aims. Sometimes these multiple objectives complement each other. At other times, they clash. Risky and costly actions—the annexation of Crimea, military intervention in Syria, and interference in the U.S. 2016 presidential election—can only be fully explained by accounting for the causal influence of one leader, his ideas, and his political institutions.