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The Ukrainian Crisis

A Disputed Past and Present



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Introduction

The protests in Ukraine as well as the Russian intervention in the country are events constantly in a state of flux. That said, they are also pertinent to American foreign policy as well as the relationship between "the West" and Russia. This paper seeks to examine the Crimean crisis up until this point, focusing more on the underlying tensions that have led to the crisis than on the day-to-day events. Writing on a conflict before it has ended is always an audacious task. Situations are fluid, and events can change rather quickly, nullifying entire pieces of writing. For that reason, we choose to use this analysis to focus on how the Ukrainian crisis fits into the broader framework of Russo-American relations. While some details of the crisis will be necessary, forecasting Ukraine's immediate future lies outside of the scope of this work. Rather, we will attempt to place the Ukrainian situation into an international context by examining Russia and Ukraine's special relationship, as well as the post-Cold War power dynamics between the US and its allies and the Russian Federation.

We will begin by laying out what has happened thus far in Ukraine during these turbulent times. This will be followed by an analysis of the current Russian regime and its relationship with Ukraine. Afterwards, we will discuss the historical underpinnings of the East/West tensions that underlie this conflict. Finally, we will address some possible places the conflict might lead, and we will offer suggestions for a broad strategy of engagement with the Russian Federation. Our hope is that readers will come away with a fuller understanding of the events that have transpired in Ukraine and the role these events play in the course of international relations.

We understand that by the time that this paper is published, changes will have transpired, protests will have occurred, and dynamics will have shifted. The situation is far from stable. For that reason, we have chosen to examine the underlying dynamics in hopes of shedding light upon Russo-American relations in the 21st century.

The Beginning: Removal of the Old Regime

The social and political unrest that led directly to the current situation in Ukraine began in November 2013, when mass protests began against then-president Viktor Yanukovich and his decision to abandon an agreement with the EU that would bring closer political and trade ties, and instead ally more closely with Russia. The protests were picked up by the international media when the Ukrainian police was dispatched to launch raids on the protesters, injuring and arresting many.¹

By January, the situation had steadily deteriorated in Kiev; in the middle of the month, the Ukrainian Parliament passed widely criticized anti-protest laws that incited more violent protest and international condemnation from the EU, as well as the United States. The Ukrainian police ultimately opened fire to quell protesters days after the passage of the law, killing two protesters in the first official casualties caused by the unrest since November.² Less than two weeks after the passage of the anti-protest law, the Ukrainian government quickly backpedaled in the face of extreme backlash and annulled the controversial law.³

That annulment marked the beginning of a wide retreat by the Ukrainian leadership. First, Prime Minister Azarov announced his resignation—and with him, much of the cabinet. The Parliament also announced that it would offer amnesty to protesters if they agreed to clear the barricades and leave occupied government buildings. Meanwhile, Yanukovich attempted to deescalate the situation by offering concessions to top leaders of the opposition. Between February 14th and 16th, Yanukovich released all 234 protesters who had been arrested since December.⁴

The peace did not last long; clashes between Ukrainian police and protesters erupted and within 48 hours, at least 88 people were killed in Kiev. The international media circulated images of uniformed snipers firing at the crowds as well as generally intensified police activity.⁵

On the 21st of February, President Yanukovich signed a compromise with the opposition leaders, and by the next day vanished from Kiev, even as Parliament voted to remove him from power, setting the date for a new presidential election to take place on May 25th. Parliament then installed Olexander Turchynov as the interim president.

When unrest began in Crimea in early March, the Russian parliament approved Putin's request to use force to protect Russian interests there. The interim Ukrainian government claims that Russia has informally launched a war against it.⁶

¹ "Ukraine Crisis Timeline," *BBC News*, April 23, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26248275>.

² "Ukraine Protests: Two Protesters Killed in Kiev Clashes," *BBC News*, January 22, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25838962>.

³ "Ukraine Crisis: Parliament Abolishes Anti-Protest Law," *BBC News*, January 28, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25923199>.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ "Ukraine Crisis Timeline," *BBC News*, April 23, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26248275>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

The Current Situation: Unrest in the East

Protests agitating for independence from Ukraine began in Eastern Ukraine, particularly in the eastern cities of Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kharkiv. In mid-April, amidst the exponential increase in occupations of official buildings, the interim government offered to compromise and to give more autonomy to the Eastern regions, a potential concession that went largely ignored by the protestors.

The Ukrainian government then prepared to send in armed “anti-terrorist” force to quell the unrest, but was quickly stalled when pro-Russian militants seized six Ukrainian tanks.^{7 8} Russia called Ukraine inept at quelling domestic unrest and threatened violence should any Russian-speakers be harmed. The Ukrainian interim President maintains that they are fighting an “Eastern enemy” rather than true domestic dissidents in East Ukraine.⁹

After talks between the EU, US, Ukraine and Russia in Geneva in late April, Ukraine had temporarily put its military action on hold until it could discern whether or not Russia was complying with the Geneva agreement.¹⁰ However, on April 22nd after the discovery of tortured corpses near Slaviansk, the interim President called for a renewal of military force.¹¹ He claimed that this crime had undoubtedly had Russian support. For its part, Russia has used the incident to claim that Ukraine has not held up its end of the Geneva agreement, by not effectively preventing further unrest and violence within its borders.¹²

The interim Ukrainian government asked that the UK and U.S. help stop Russian aggression in the region. The Ukrainian Parliament has voted to create a National Guard of 60,000 to push back Russian and pro-Russian forces in East Ukraine.¹³

The Ukrainian government’s response to the current situation in Ukraine has been an uphill challenge against geographically dispersed protestors, first in western Ukraine in Kiev, later in Crimea, and now in Eastern Ukraine. The Ukrainian government is heavily reliant on foreign aid from the EU and the U.S. at this point, as it cannot stabilize domestic unrest alone.

⁷ Ukraine Prepares Armed Response as City Seized by Pro-Russia Forces,” *Haaretz*, April 13, 2014, <http://www.haaretz.com/mobile/1.585256?v=2FA0FB074F42B2E9A856B13A3CA7D052>.

⁸ “Ukraine Crisis: Military Column ‘Seized’ in Kramatorsk,” *BBC News*, April 16, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27053500>.

⁹ “Kiev, Pro-Russian Forces Flex Muscle as NATO Vows New Deployment,” *The Globe and Mail*, April 16, 2014, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/armed-pro-russian-separatists-seize-donetsk-council-building/article18036410/>.

¹⁰ Julian E. Barnes, “U.S. to Move Troops to Allies Near Russia as Tensions Flare in Eastern Ukraine,” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 22, 2014, <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304049904579516974286772640?tesla=y&mg=reno64-wsj>.

¹¹ Laura Smith-Spark and Gul Tuysuz, “Ukraine Calls for Renewal of Anti-Terror Measures,” *CNN World*, April 22, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/04/22/world/europe/ukraine-crisis/>.

¹² “Russia says Kiev ‘Breaking Geneva Accord’ on Ukraine,” *BBC News*, April 21, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27100749>.

¹³ “Ukraine’s New National Guard Raises Fears in Country’s East,” *RT*, March 20, 2014, <http://rt.com/news/ukraine-national-guard-training-937/>.

Russian forces invaded Crimea on the 27th of February. Since then, Russian forces have taken over bases across the region. The Russian military action largely avoided violence, although warning shots have been fired and at least one Ukrainian officer has been killed.¹⁴ Some Ukrainian troops have volunteered to defect to Russia, and others have been sent to their barracks or homes to pack in preparation to leave Crimea.¹⁵ On March 25th, Interim Ukrainian President Oleksandr Turchynov ordered the withdrawal of all Ukrainian military forces from Crimea after the last of the 189 Ukrainian military bases there had been taken over by Russian forces on March 23rd.^{16 17}

On March 16th, a referendum was held in Crimea as to whether Crimea should be part of Russia instead of Ukraine. Russian President Vladimir Putin has since announced that the elections were supervised by Russian military forces.¹⁸ This referendum has been derided by the international community as illegitimate due both to its low turnout and due to Russia's influence over the vote's results.¹⁹ Despite this perceived illegitimacy, Russia has used this referendum as its justification for continuing to rule Crimea.²⁰

East Ukraine is seen as Russia's next target after Crimea because it shares a number of features similar to Crimea that make it an attractive potential addition for Russia. In some areas of East Ukraine, over 75% of the populations speak Russian as their native language, and at least 25% of the population of East Ukraine does in general.²¹ Additionally, East Ukraine tends to vote for politically conservative and pro-Russian candidates in elections, with over 75% in some regions and at least 50% in general. The regions of East Ukraine in which individuals speak the most Russian and are the most politically conservative are geographically closest to Russia. And like Crimea, East Ukraine is geographically accessible to Russia. After Crimea was taken over by Russian forces, East Ukraine has experienced increasing destabilization by pro-Russian forces, both civilian and military. Pro-Russian forces have occupied some government buildings in East Ukraine and have established control there more broadly through the construction of roadblocks, prompting Ukraine's acting president Oleksandr Turchynov to announce an anti-terrorist effort specifically aimed at eliminating Pro-Russian militant forces.²² Thus

¹⁴ "The New York Times: Ukrainian Officer is Killed Near Base in Crimea," *KyivPost*, April 7, 2014, <https://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine-abroad/the-new-york-times-ukrainian-officer-is-killed-near-base-in-crimea-342348.html>.

¹⁵ David M. Herszenhorn, Patrick Reevell, and Noah Sneider, "Russian Forces Take Over One of the Last Ukrainian Bases in Crimea," *The New York Times*, March 22, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/23/world/europe/ukraine.html>.

¹⁶ Frank Forrester, "Moscow Troops Grab Crimea, US Sanctions Target Workers," *The Militant*, 78(13), accessed May 1, 2014. <http://www.themilitant.com/2014/7813/781302.html>.

¹⁷ Marie-Louise Gumuchian and Victoria Butenko, "Ukraine orders Crimea Troop Withdrawal as Russia Seizes Naval Base," *CNN World*, March 25, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/03/24/world/europe/ukraine-crisis/>.

¹⁸ "Putin: Russian Troops Oversaw Security During Crimean Referendum," *ITAR-TASS*, April 17, 2014, <http://en.itar-tass.com/russia/728373>.

¹⁹ Ilya Somin, "Russian Government Agency Reveals Fraudulent Nature of the Crimean Referendum Results," *The Washington Post*, May 6, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2014/05/06/russian-government-agency-reveals-fraudulent-nature-of-the-crimean-referendum-results/>.

²⁰ Tom Cohen, "Legal or Not, Crimean Referendum will Shape Ukraine Crisis," *CNN*, March 15, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/03/13/politics/crimea-referendum-explainer/>.

²¹ "A Divided Ukraine," *CNN World*, March 3, 2014, http://www.cnn.com/interactive/2014/02/world/ukraine-divided/?iid=article_sidebar.

²² Ralph Ellis, Laura Smith-Spark, and Tim Lister, "Ukraine Military Push Appears to Lose Momentum in the East," *CNN World*, April 17, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/04/16/world/europe/ukraine-crisis/>.

far, these efforts have proven mostly ineffective and a number of Ukrainian forces have been disarmed or captured. The situation in East Ukraine has remained largely non-violent; the highest death toll was an incident at a Ukrainian base in which three pro-Russian militants were killed and 13 were wounded.²³ The U.S. State Department "strongly suspects" Russia to have organized and initiated the actions of pro-Russian military groups in East Ukraine.²⁴ Some Ukrainian military units in East Ukraine that have defected to Russia have taken to driving military vehicles outfitted with Russian flags.²⁵

Paramilitary pro-Russian forces in East Ukraine are at minimum assisted by agents of the Russian government. Although Russian assistance of those pro-Russian forces has been suspected by various commentators, it is only recently that evidence has confirmed these suspicions. In an intercepted phone call in early May obtained by the Ukraine Security Service (SBU), an envoy of the Russian government named Vladimir Lukin issued instructions to a leader of paramilitary pro-Russian forces in East Ukraine named Colonel Igor Girkin.²⁶ During this phone call, Col. Girkin explained that he had been instructed to cooperate only with Russian representatives and Lukin, as opposed to other envoys that had also convened to negotiate the release of several non-Ukrainian hostages.²⁷

US and NATO Involvement

The United States has taken a very limited role in the Ukrainian conflict thus far. The most direct action that the U.S. has publically taken thus far has been to announce plans to provide over \$18 million in non-lethal security assistance.²⁸ Aside from this specific aid package, the U.S. has also pledged to provide \$50 million in aid for Ukraine that will go toward alleviating its \$2.2 billion Russian debt that has accrued over natural gas.²⁹ No major international organizations such as the United Nations or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has as yet called for U.S. intervention in Ukraine, and military intervention could incur severe diplomatic costs for the war-weary U.S.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has shown no signs that it will militarily intervene in Crimea. NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said Moscow must pull back troops from the Ukrainian border.³⁰ In a press conference on April 8th, the Secretary General said that Russian intervention would, "have grave consequences

²³ "Deadly Clashes At Ukraine Port Base As Leaders Meet," *BBC News Europe*, April 17, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27059321>.

²⁴ "Evidence of Russian Support for Destabilization of Ukraine," *U.S. Department of State*, April 13, 2014, <http://m.state.gov/md224762.htm>.

²⁵ Per Liljas, "Armored Vehicles Flying Russian Flags Appear in Eastern Ukraine," *TIME*, April 16, 2014, <http://time.com/64518/ukraine-military-advance-russia-kramatorsk/>.

²⁶ "Intercepted Phone Calls Show Putin Called the Shots on European Hostages in Ukraine," *Forbes*, May 4, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/paulroderickgregory/2014/05/04/intercepted-phone-calls-show-putin-called-shots-on-international-hostages/>.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ "Russia's Destabilization of Ukraine," *U.S. Department of State*, May 8, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2014/may/225773.htm>.

²⁹ Joe Carroll, Nicole Gaouette, and Julianna Goldman, "Ukraine's Unpaid Russian Gas Bills Dwarf U.S. Aid Offer," *Bloomberg*, April 23, 2014, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-04-22/ukraine-s-unpaid-gas-bills-dwarf-u-s-aid-offer.html>.

³⁰ "Ukraine Crisis: NATO Warns Russia Against Further Intervention," *BBC News Europe*, April 8, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26941799>.

for our relationship with Russia and it would further isolate Russia internationally.”³¹ Although NATO has 13,000 high-readiness troops provided by the allies, deployment of the troops would require consensus amongst the 28 independent member countries of NATO.³² Such action is highly unlikely, especially in light of the military intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq. As the research consultant on NATO at Chatham House, an independent policy institute based out of London, said that “there is a feeling that the use of force isn’t necessarily the best way to resolve conflict.”³³ Moreover, even if NATO desired to use force, its legal justification would not be without controversy. Article 5 of the Washington Treaty states that any armed attack against a single member organization of NATO would be considered an attack against all members.³⁴ Given that Ukraine is not one of the 28 member states of NATO, however, Russia’s intervening into Crimea would not be considered an attack on a member state and NATO’s guiding principles would not require, nor suggest, action.

The Conflict’s Future

It is difficult to determine whether Russia seeks to escalate the Ukrainian crisis militarily due to the fluid nature of events on the ground. Russia has publicly denied wanting to become more involved in the crisis, and, on April 17, Russia and Ukraine signed a deal in Geneva aimed at deescalating the conflict. In exchange for Ukraine offering amnesty to pro-Russian protesters in eastern Ukraine and providing constitutional reforms, Russia promised to disarm pro-Russian militants and call for illegally occupied public places to be returned to authorities.³⁵

Though this step initially seemed promising and seemed to indicate that Russia wanted to cool the crisis, the situation has recently been unraveling and has done little to quell violence. Both pro-Russian militants and ultra-nationalist Ukrainians have rejected the agreement, and violent encounters have continued.³⁶ On April 20, a shootout between Ukrainian nationalists and Russian militants near the town of Slavyansk left 3 dead.³⁷ Two days later, on April 22, tensions again rose after the discovery of the body of a pro-Ukrainian politician with signs of torture near the same city prompted Ukrainian forces to resume “anti-terrorist” operations and Ukraine reported that one of its military aircraft had been struck by gunfire.³⁸ Both countries have lobbed accusations of breaking the Geneva peace deal at each other.

³¹ “Press Conference,” *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, April 8, 2014,

http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_108933.htm?selectedLocale=en.

³² “The NATO Response Force,” *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49755.htm

³³ Alastair Jamieson and Alexander Smith, “Ukraine Crisis: Storyline,” *NBC News*,

<http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/ukraine-crisis/how-toothless-nato-over-russia-crimea-n55896>.

³⁴ “What is Article 5?,” *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, <http://www.nato.int/terrorism/five.htm>.

³⁵ Julian Borger and Alec Luhn, “Ukraine Crisis: Geneva Talks Produce Agreement On Defusing Conflict,” *The Guardian*, April 17, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/17/ukraine-crisis-agreement-us-russia-eu>.

³⁶ “Russia Accuses Ukraine Of Violating Truce After Easter Shooting Near Slavyansk,” *CBS/AP*, April 21, 2014. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/russia-accuses-ukraine-of-violating-truce-after-easter-shooting-slavyansk/>.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ “Pro-Ukraine Politician’s Body Found in East with Signs of Torture, Kiev Says,” *CBS/AP*, April 22, 2014, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/pro-ukraine-politicians-body-found-in-east-with-signs-of-torture-kiev-says/>.

The breakdown of the Geneva peace deal certainly increases the prospect of a Russian escalation. If the situation continues to deteriorate in eastern Ukraine and pro-Russian militants refuse to back down, Russia could use a similar justification that it used when occupying Crimea to validate an aggressive military action. Russia may have incentive to launch a military incursion of eastern Ukraine, as this would allow Russia to establish a “land bridge” with Crimea.³⁹ Such a land bridge would be of strategic importance as Russia does not currently possess any land-based route through which supplies could be moved to Crimea.

Russia likely has the military capacity to carry out such an action. NATO estimates that roughly 40,000 Russian troops are spread out amongst 100 makeshift camps along Ukraine’s eastern border.⁴⁰ In addition to the troops, NATO satellite images have documented heavier military equipment, including fighter jets and helicopters, indicating Moscow could quickly launch an invasion of Eastern Ukraine if it desires. NATO estimates these troops could mount an invasion 12 hours after the decision to invade is made.⁴¹ In addition, in the event of a Russian invasion of Eastern Ukraine, NATO’s top military commander Philip Breedlove said that Russia’s military “could accomplish its objectives in between three and five days.”⁴²

By some reports, Russia is already actively escalating the situation in eastern Ukraine. Images have surfaced which appear to show Russian Special Forces operating in eastern Ukraine.⁴³ If true, the photos would suggest direct Russian involvement in the unrest of eastern Ukraine and could imply that Russia wants the situation to further escalate. It should be noted that the photos have not been independently verified and Russia denies their authenticity, though the State Department has repeatedly used it as evidence linking Russia and pro-Russian militants.

It is difficult to assess the exact likelihood of whether Russia wants to increase its involvement of eastern Ukraine. A March 26th U.S. intelligence memo asserted that the probability of a Russian invasion is “more probable than previously thought to be,” though it avoids more specific information.⁴⁴ The current facts do indicate that Russia wants to communicate the threat of launching a military invasion of eastern Ukraine, but whether it actually will is dependent on many factors, including the likely substantial diplomatic costs Russia would incur if it did invade.

³⁹ Barbara Starr, “U.S. Intel Assessment: Greater Likelihood Russia will Enter Ukraine,” *CNN*, March 26, 2014, <http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2014/03/26/u-s-intel-assessment-greater-likelihood-russia-will-enter-eastern-ukraine/>.

⁴⁰ Leo Cendrowicz, Luke Harding, and Alec Luhn, “Satellite Images Reveal Russian Military Buildup on Ukraine’s Border,” *The Guardian*, April 10, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/10/satellite-images-russian-military-ukraine-border>.

⁴¹ Laura Smith-Spark, “Ukraine Crisis: NATO Military Chief Warns Russian Troops could Invade Swiftly,” *CNN*, April 3, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/04/02/world/europe/ukraine-crisis/>.

⁴² Adrian Croft, “Russia Could Achieve Ukraine Incursion in 3-5 Days – NATO General,” *Reuters*, April 2, 2014, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/04/02/uk-ukraine-crisis-breedlove-idUKBREA310J820140402>.

⁴³ “State Department Cites Photo ‘Evidence’ Purportedly Showing Russian Troops in Ukraine,” *FoxNews.com*, April 22, 2014, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2014/04/22/us-pictures-indicate-russian-troops-in-ukraine/>.

⁴⁴ Barbara Starr, “U.S. Intel Assessment: Greater Likelihood Russia will Enter Ukraine,” *CNN*, March 26, 2014, <http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2014/03/26/u-s-intel-assessment-greater-likelihood-russia-will-enter-eastern-ukraine/>.

Regime Dynamics

Russian policy towards Ukraine, as well as the former Soviet states as a whole, originates in the Russian government's perceptions of its control on power. The Russian state has become significantly weaker since the collapse of the USSR, as has its coercive capacity. Under Putin, the regime has become very cohesive and insulated from interest groups, but the government struggles to reform and faces perception problems with the Russian people, who sometimes view it as illegitimate and corrupt. Despite the government's perception problems, Putin personally remains very popular among the Russian people.⁴⁵ He has successfully consolidated his control over the regime, appointing only those who remain loyal to him. Thus, he faces little to no opposition within the government and has tight control over the Russian media. Such control gives him liberty to pursue policies that secure his own state and the status of the Russian state without having to compromise with domestic opposition.⁴⁶ Putin does depend on the support of the wealthy Russian elite, who in turn rely on Western states' institutions, particularly financial ones.⁴⁷ Thus, the Russian regime remains vulnerable, especially in the financial sphere. In the past few years, economic growth has slowed in Russia, causing Putin to rely more and more on economic ties with former Soviet states in order to maintain stability in Russia's economy and by extension, his government.

Russian foreign policy is founded on a doctrinal framework of noninterference, based on the idea that one state should not intervene in another's affairs. The Kremlin made one recent exception when it abstained from voting on UN Security Council Resolution 1973, which allowed the Libyan intervention. This intervention went beyond protecting civilians and wound up effecting regime change, reinforcing Russian fears that The West seeks to expand its influence.⁴⁸ At the same time, the Arab Spring and pushes for democracy in other areas have increased Russian concerns over unrest in former Soviet states, which may turn more to the West. Thus, it has actively worked to prevent Western intervention in Syria through the UN Security Council. With regards to former Soviet states, Russia aims to keep them within its sphere of influence in order to maintain its own economic and military strength, but more importantly to control the influence of the West. The expansion of NATO and the EU into this region is one of Russia's paramount concerns.⁴⁹ Putin has publically stated that the end of the Soviet Union was "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century."⁵⁰ Despite its policy of non-intervention in other regions, Russia has proven willing to take action in former Soviet states to maintain its own power.

Of all the former Soviet states, Ukraine remains the most important to Russia. With the headquarters of the Black Sea Fleet in Crimea, the transportation of oil and gas via Ukraine to Europe, and Ukraine's unique status as the birthplace of the Russian Orthodox

⁴⁵ William Tompson. "Putin's Challenge: The Politics of Structural Reform in Russia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 54.6 (2002): 933-57. *Taylor & Francis Online*. Taylor & Francis Group, 1 July 2010. Web. 15 Apr. 2014.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Redman, Nicholas. "Russia's Breaking Point." *Survival* 56.2 (2014): 235-44. *Taylor & Francis Online*. Taylor & Francis Group, 31 Mar. 2014. Web. 14 Apr. 2014.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ "Putin Calls Collapse of Soviet Union 'catastrophe'." *Washington Times*. The Washington Times, 26 Apr. 2005. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

faith, Ukraine holds significant military, economic, religious and cultural weight. Additionally, the population of Russians and Russian-speaking people in Ukraine further connects it to Russia.⁵¹ Thus, the Russian government has incentives to curtail Western influence, and it can better justify acting on those goals given the high public support for them. In late 2013 Ukraine appeared likely to sign the EU Association Agreement, which the EU had made clear would not work with Putin's Eurasian Union plan. The Eurasian Union represents Putin's vision to improve Russia's economy through a network of cooperative economic relationships with former Soviet states, and Ukraine is the cornerstone of the plan.⁵² The possibility of Ukraine aligning with the West threatens the Russian economy and therefore the regime's security. As a result, Russia placed economic sanctions on Ukrainian businesses. Russia's success in preventing the agreement convinced the Russian regime that Ukraine could be persuaded to join the Eurasian Union plan, thus keeping Ukraine away from EU influence.⁵³ The situation changed dramatically with the February 2014 ousting of the Ukrainian President, which seemed to confirm Russia's fears of Western interference. The EU became involved in the accord that allowed for changes in Ukraine's constitution and changes in the presidential election timing. Its role in conjunction with the fall of the Ukrainian President could be seen as a violation of Russia's non-intervention principles.⁵⁴ Ukraine therefore symbolizes larger concerns within the Russian regime as it seeks to maintain its influence on former Soviet states in order to secure its grip on power, both internationally and domestically.

Relationship with The West

With the recent resurgence of tensions between the United States and its European allies and Russia, it is important to consider the course of post-Cold relations. Several issues have laid the groundwork for the current downturn, but they can be reduced to two major geopolitical trends: first, the insensitivity of the West to Russian security concerns after the Cold War, as demonstrated by the decision to expand NATO and Western missile defense systems into Eastern Europe, and second, Russian attempts to maintain global influence similar to its levels the height of the Soviet Union. These two factors have created a significant divide between the West and Russia, which is apparent in the current Ukrainian crisis.

Western insensitivity after the Cold War is a key motivating influence behind the current confrontation. In the immediate aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Western countries, especially the United States, sought to integrate Russia and the former Eastern bloc into the European system. They also hoped to promote democracy, capitalism, and protection for human rights in the new Russia. It was believed that integration would prompt reform in Russia and would help push it in a direction where its interests aligned more closely with those of the West.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Redman, Nicholas.

⁵² Hill, Fiona. "Mr. Putin and the Art of the Offensive Defense: Approaches to Foreign Policy (Part Two)." *The Brookings Institution*, 16 Mar. 2014. Web. 13 Apr. 2014.

⁵³ Redman, Nicholas.

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Wallander, Celeste. "Russian-US Relations in the Post Post-Cold War World." Last modified April 23, 2014. PDF.

However, the West's emphasis on NATO expansion served to alienate Russia.⁵⁶ While the idea of integrating Russia into NATO was considered, such an action would have required significant alterations to the alliance's structure, and so the West pursued both Russian integration and NATO expansion, two mutually contradictory policies. Additionally, the weakness of President Boris Yeltsin's government meant that Russia was unable to acquiesce to the security and reform commitments the West desired.⁵⁷ Several analysts, including George Kennan, creator of the famous "containment doctrine," worried that NATO expansion would alienate Russia and stoke tensions, but such concerns were generally ignored.⁵⁸ Western policymakers concluded that Russia was too weak to stop NATO expansion even if it tried, and thus supported it.⁵⁹

While NATO expansion and Western humiliation of Russia after the Cold War served to lay the seeds of future tensions, the Russian effort to regain Soviet-level stature and influence is a major contributing factor in the current state of tension. Russia opposed the invasion of Iraq, and later did not support the toppling of Colonel Gadhafi's government, although it did sanction the humanitarian intervention that preceded the regime change, in an effort to keep pro-Russian leaders in power. Putin has consistently sought influence in the Arab world commensurate to that of the Soviet Union, but Western intervention and instability in the region have undermined this goal.⁶⁰ Russia's emphasis on building influence in the Middle East helped propel it to a major confrontation with the West over Syria, which caused cooperation to deteriorate in the run up to the Ukrainian crisis.⁶¹

In the case of Syria, Russia has continued to supply both diplomatic support for and arms sales to the government of Bashar al-Assad, a staunch Russian ally, despite Western threats of intervention against the Assad regime and criticisms of the Syrian government's brutality towards its people. Russia had a number of important interests in supporting Assad. Russia has a naval base in Syria at Tartus. It also views preventing an intervention as a crucial step in diminishing US hegemony in the region and discouraging future interventions. Despite some diplomatic deals on Syrian chemical weapons, the West and Russia continue to remain at odds, adding greater animosity to the already rocky relationship.⁶² While specific differences existed between the West and Russia on the issue of Syria, the diplomatic conflict surrounding the intervention is also indicative of the larger struggle between a Russian government attempting to regain some of the power that it has lost and a set of Western states attempting to spread an institutional and ideological framework based on protection of human rights and democratic political contestation.

⁵⁶ Granville, Johanna. "After Kosovo: The Impact of NATO Expansion on Russian Political Parties." Last modified April 23, 2014. Digital file.

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Friedman, Thomas. "Foreign Affairs; Now a Word From X." *The New York Times* (New York, NY), May 2, 1998, Opinion.<http://www.nytimes.com/1998/05/02/opinion/foreign-affairs-now-a-word-from-x.html>.

⁵⁹ Blank, Stephen. "Russian Policy on NATO Expansion in the Baltics." *Wilsoncenter.org*. Last modified January 27, 1998. Accessed April 30, 2014. <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/151-russian-policy-nato-expansion-the-baltics>.

⁶⁰ Malashenko, Alexey. "Russia and the Arab Spring." *carnegie.ru*. Last modified October 1, 2013. Accessed April 30, 2014. <http://carnegie.ru/2013/10/01/russia-and-arab-spring/goq4#>.

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Lister, Charles, and William McCants. "The Syrian Civil War: Political and Military State of Play." *brookings.edu*. Last modified February 18, 2014. Accessed April 30, 2014. <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2014/02/18-syrian-civil-war-lister-mccants>.

Economic Incentives

Russia's security concerns can be traced back to the climate of uncertainty that has come to characterize the country's economy. Although Russia has experienced substantial growth in its economy over the last several years, an over-reliance upon natural resources makes it vulnerable to market fluctuations. Relatedly, Russia is likely concerned about the disruptions in its natural gas trade that the alignment of Ukraine with the EU could cause. Russian GDP growth took a steep dive in 2008 but recovered quickly, suggesting that powerful and temporally inconsistent forces may be at work, and as a result the Russian economy might not rebound quite so quickly in the future. Forbes also notes that their economic growth has slowed, a trend that Putin is likely eager to reverse to paint himself as a guarantor of prosperity.⁶³ These economic concerns could explain why Putin annexed Crimea with relatively little provocation. Furthermore, a ten-year prediction from the World Bank shows that Russia's economy will stabilize but shrink modestly relative to the mid-2000s. This prospect might pressure Putin to pursue aggressive action in order to prevent stagnation in the near future.

Elimination of political competition has led to corruption in Putin's government, which prevents the implementation of new economic policies that might make the system more efficient. The economic inefficiencies that this corruption has produced may motivate Russia to seek other sources of revenue.⁶⁴ Like many nations, Russia also faces the pressures of an aging population without a large enough workforce to support it. These demographic changes will cause a more significant strain over the next decade and may force Russia to secure its economic strength through increased trade or more accessible infrastructure, such as the Ukrainian gas pipes or Crimean ports. Relatedly, budgetary issues and anemic investment could lead Russian living standards to deteriorate relative to other nations, putting additional pressure on Putin to secure the resources necessary to facilitate economic growth.⁶⁵

Dependence on oil has also made the Russian economy prone to rapid fluctuations. Russia has the world's largest natural gas reserves a major source of revenue for the Russian government along with oil and other hydrocarbons.⁶⁶ Crimea possesses valuable offshore oil and gas reserves, which would allow Ukraine to become less dependent on Russian energy imports.⁶⁷ Furthermore, 40% of Russian natural gas exports to Europe

⁶³ Adomanis, Mark. "Russia's Economy Is Decelerating Sharply, But It's Still Close To Full Employment." Forbes. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/markadomanis/2013/12/23/russias-economy-is-decelerating-sharply-but-its-still-close-to-full-employment/>

⁶⁴ Drury, A. Cooper, Jonathan Kriekhaus and Michael Lusztig. "Corruption, Democracy, and Economic Growth."

International Political Science Review, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Apr., 2006), pp. 121-136

⁶⁵ Aleksashenko, Sergey. "Russia's economic agenda to 2020." *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-), Vol. 88, No. 1 (January 2012), pp. 31-48

⁶⁶ "U.S. Energy Information Administration - EIA - Independent Statistics and Analysis." U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA). <http://www.eia.gov/countries/country-data.cfm?fips=rs> (accessed April 23, 2014).

⁶⁷ Matlack, Carol. "Losing Crimea Could Sink Ukraine's Offshore Oil and Gas Hopes." Bloomberg Business Week. <http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2014-03-11/losing-crimea-could-sink-ukraines-offshore-oil-and-gas-hopes>

travel through pipes in Ukraine, making them a strategic ally.⁶⁸ Therefore, Crimea posed a threat to Russian energy trade with Ukraine at a time when Ukraine was shifting to a European trade alliance. In mid-August, trade between Russia and Ukraine briefly halted, which could have indicated to Russian elites the possibility that if Ukrainian leaders chose to align with the West, they might yank valuable resources away from the Kremlin.⁶⁹ Such considerations could have led Putin to annex Crimea to deter Russian trade partners from pivoting towards Europe.

Russia has a near-monopoly on natural gas sales to Ukraine, and is using it as a source of leverage against the country.⁷⁰ Putin has demanded increased repayment of the \$2.2 billion that Ukraine owes for natural gas that Russia has delivered to Ukraine. This demand is compounded by Russia's recent decision to increase the price of the natural gas that it sells to Ukraine by 80%.⁷¹ The Ukrainian government has claimed that Russia's stance on natural gas is politically motivated.⁷² Putin has expressed concerns that these policies might result in Ukraine illegally siphoning natural gas from the gas lines that led to the rest of Europe.⁷³ If Ukraine were to respond to Russian gas cutoffs to Ukraine, then Putin's threat of gas cutoffs would not inherently prove as motivating to the Ukrainian government.

Until recently, Crimea's electrical infrastructure has been dependent on Ukraine. On March 24th, power to Crimea was interrupted for several hours, and Russia was unable to restore it because electricity in Crimea originates in Ukraine. Although Russian forces currently occupy Crimea, they are not in control of basic elements of its physical infrastructure. Online spectators and several news agencies affiliated with Moscow accused Ukraine of intentionally disrupting power to Crimea as a demonstration of Ukraine's partial control over the region, but the Ukrainian government has denied these accusations. Thus far, the Russian government has moved over 1,400 mobile power stations to Ukraine as part of an effort to stymie future power interruptions.⁷⁴

Ethnic Tensions

Ukraine encompasses a region eastern and western cultures have merged considerable in the past, creating an environment of ethnic and cultural pluralism. Recently, the most important ethnic, cultural, and linguistic divide has been between ethnic Ukrainians and the Russian speakers of the south and east. Since the nation's independence in 1991, the country has been politically divided along these ethno-linguistic lines, with ethnic Ukrainians holding substantially more power than their ethnic Russian counterparts.

⁶⁸ Source, Energy. "How The EU And U.S. Can Use Natural Gas To Keep Russia In Check." Forbes. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/energysource/2014/04/07/how-the-eu-and-u-s-can-strangle-russia-inc/>

⁶⁹ Popescu, Nicu. "The Russia-Ukraine trade spat." Institute of Security Studies . http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Alert_Ukraine_trade.pdf

⁷⁰ "A Divided Ukraine." *CNN World*, March 3, 2014, http://www.cnn.com/interactive/2014/02/world/ukraine-divided/?iid=article_sidebar.

⁷¹ Ilya Arkhipov, Daria Marchak, and Jake Rudnitsky, "Putin Lacking Beachhead in East Ukraine as Stalemate Seen," *Bloomberg*, April 9, 2014, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-04-08/putin-lacking-beachhead-in-east-ukraine-as-stalemate-seen.html>.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Laura Mills, "Crimea Besieged by Ukraine Control of Power, Water," *AP*, March 26, 2014, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/crimea-besieged-ukraine-control-power-water>.

As electoral maps of the 2004 and 2010 national elections show, these ethnic divisions manifest themselves in stark differences in political allegiance. Massive protests in Kiev received international media attention, but were largely the product of ethnic Ukrainian mobilization. While the unrest paints a clear picture of a westward leaning majority that embraces democracy, the country's eastern regions are more skeptical of Western ideas and substantially more integrated with Russia than with the EU.

Yanukovich's origins in the far eastern regions of Ukraine and tenure there as a regional governor have only exacerbated ethnic tensions. His ouster, a product of protests in Western Ukraine, served to alienate his supporters in the East. Furthermore, the different regions of Ukraine have different historical experience with Russia. To generalize, eastern Ukrainians view the Soviet Union and, by extension, Russia, more favorably. These facts have left Putin with a window of opportunity. By stoking ethnic tensions and utilizing historical ties between different groups, Putin has been able to annex the region of Crimea and loosen the central government's control on much of eastern Ukraine.

While the situation remains fluid, the course of Russian and Ukrainian action so far indicates that divisions within Ukraine are likely to create a permissive environment for an expansionist Kremlin. Putin has capitalized on his own domestic popularity and on feeling of post-Cold War victimize to justify his action to his constituents, claiming his country's right to territory currently under the control of neighboring states but containing various ethnic enclaves. To a large extent, this narrative is affirmed by a number of eastern and southern Ukrainian communities, which have repeatedly sought Russian power to counter the influence of Kiev, ethnic Ukrainians, and the West. The mass mobilization of the Russian military, Russian legal authorization for military action in Ukraine, and repeated threats to "protect the rights of Russians abroad," all indicate that the aforementioned eastern and southern Ukrainians may just get their wish. Meanwhile, Kiev and the West assert that Russian special forces have covertly moved across the border to help foment unrest in pro-Russian areas. The extent of Russian covert action is debatable, but Putin has clearly taken steps to destabilize eastern Ukraine in a push to retain influence in a nation he fears will move toward the West.

Recently, Putin referred to all ethnic Russians as Russian citizens, and used an attack on them as justification for military action response, comparing it to America's justification for intervention after attacks on its citizens during 9/11.⁷⁵ This rhetoric plays into a narrative of ethno-nationalism focused on re-uniting Russian speaking peoples, including those living within foreign nations' borders. For instance, Putin frequently refer to regions of Eastern Ukrainian as "Novorussia," a historical term for the region dating back to the time of the Czars.⁷⁶ The presence of rival ethnic constituencies in Ukraine makes the region an easy target for Putin, indicating that Russian expansionism may not spread much further but the international community may have a very hard time reversing Russian incursions into Ukraine.

⁷⁵ Herszenhorn, David M, *The New York Times*. "Away From Show of Diplomacy in Geneva, Putin Puts On a Show of His Own." http://mobile.nytimes.com/2014/04/18/world/europe/russia-ukraine.html?_r=0&http://mobile.nytimes.com/2014/04/18/world/europe/russia-ukraine.html?_r=0&referrer= (accessed May 1, 2014).

⁷⁶ Steven Pifer and Hannah Thoburn, "Nuanced Views in Eastern Ukraine." *The Brookings Institution*. <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2014/04/28-nuanced-views-eastern-ukraine-pifer-thoburn> (accessed May 1, 2014).

Conclusion

When examining the course of Western-Russian relations since the fall of the Soviet Union, several important considerations arise. Russia and the West share responsibility for the deterioration of relations. The West did not pursue integration and reform in Russia with the same vigor that it pursued NATO expansion, alienating Russia and driving it to pursue more aggressive policies in order to maintain its own security. Thus, some conciliatory action from the West, particularly in the realm of greater cooperation between Russia and NATO in conjunction with greater investment in Russia's economy, is needed to mend relations.

Although both sides bear responsibility for the broader diplomatic problems that have come to characterize their relationship, the current crisis in Ukraine has occurred primarily due to Russian actions, not Western pressure. In trying to reclaim the level of influence it possessed during the Soviet period, Russia is directly undermining the Western goal of maintaining a strongly institutionalized world order..

In order to transition from confrontation in the short term to reconciliation in the long term, the US and its allies must work with Russia to construct a diplomatic solution based on gradual reduction of sanctions and increases in other incentives in exchange for the removal of covert elements from Ukraine and an end to future aggression. Such a negotiation will allow both sides to save face while protecting their interests in the region without the use of force. While the West must take strong action in response to Russia's provocations, it should not turn to deterrence and non-engagement reflexively.

Any deterrent action on the part of the West must be tempered with a move toward engagement with Russia to create a more cooperative diplomatic environment over the long term. Putin depends on a permissive domestic political environment to give him the flexibility to carry out foreign policy how he please, so he may accept a loss in one area in exchange for a concession by the West in another area so long as he can present the situation as a foreign policy victory at home. Russia's actions appear to be rooted in a generalized fear of falling behind the West in coercive and hegemonic capacity. Therefore, by including the Kremlin in some of the international organizations that it currently views as policy instruments of the West, the United States and its allies may allay some of Putin's security concerns while simultaneously defusing the situation in Eastern Europe that has set NATO ill at ease over the last few months. The West must respond decisively to Russia's actions, but it must do so in a way that allows Putin to save face by bringing his elite supporters a diplomatic victory. Otherwise, Russia's security concerns will continue to manifest themselves in forceful expansion.

The trajectory that changes in Russian power have taken over the last several decades also constitute an important consideration in developing a strategy to deal with Russia and an additional justification for a response focused on deterrence in the short term and engagement in the long term. Russia's economic instability may have been a driving factor in their aggressive expansion, as Russia's aging population and volatile oil prices may reverse the growth trends of the last decade. Russia needs to secure stable economic growth, and Crimea represents an easy method of diminishing Ukrainian, and therefore Western, strength while gaining a port and greater gas and oil reserves. Because Russia faces the strong possibility of a recession in the future, Putin may have perceived a window of opportunity to increase Russian power in the immediate term before economic trends

within Russia diminish its staying power on the international stage.⁷⁷ Aligning with Western Europe rather than the Russian bloc will help Ukraine grow economically and militarily, especially with European military support. This support has not yet materialized on a large scale because European nations have no stake in Ukraine and are unlikely to risk their own military resources and jeopardize relations with Russia for the sake of an alliance that has so far not been established in concrete terms. By striking now, Russia gained economic resources before Crimea gained European support.

⁷⁷ Richter, Kaspar. "Russian Economic Report." World Bank Blogs.
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