PUTIN'S RUSSIA AND RESTORING A MULTIPOLAR WORLD

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To My Family and Friends

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Jack Ketchedjian

Abstract

This research paper explores the different methods and means utilized in Russian

Foreign policy as Moscow, under Vladimir Putin's leadership, attempts to restore a multipolar

international system. Putin's rise to power has seen a restoration of national Russian identity

and a diversified approach to the execution of foreign policy.

This study has compiled and analyzed evidence, facts, and documents to portray how

the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the 2015 military intervention in Syria are pivotal in the

general trend observed in Russian foreign policy under Putin. By applying Neorealist and

Social Constructivist approaches, this thesis concludes that the effective start of the multi-

polarization campaign by the Kremlin was initiated in 2007. Yet, the campaign's culmination

is represented by the military intervention in Syria in 2015.

Keywords: Russia; Putin; Multipolarism; Neorealism; Social Constructivism

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

BRI - Belt & Road Initiative

CEO - Chief Executive Office

CIS – Commonwealth of Independent States

CSTO – Collective Security Treaty Organization

DNA – Deoxyribonucleic acid

DOD – Department of Defence

EEU – Eurasia Economic Union

ESPO – East Siberia Pacific Ocean

EU – European Union

FSB – Federal'naya sluzhba bezopasnosti – Federal Security Services of the Russian Federation

G7 – Group of Seven

GNP - Gross National Product

IMF – International Monetary Fund

IR – International Relations

ISIS – Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

KGB - Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti - Committee for State Security

ME – Middle East

MOD – Ministry of Defence

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

NK – Nagorno- Karabagh

NKAO – Nagorno-Karabagh Autonomous Oblast

OSCE – Organization for Security and Cooperation of Europe

PMC – Private Military Company

RF – Russian Federation

ROC – Russian Orthodox Church

SAR – Syrian Arab Republic

SCO – Shanghai Cooperation Organization

SMO – Special Military Operation

UNSC – United Nations Security Council

US – United States

USA - United States of America

USSR – Union of Socialist Soviet Republics

1. Introduction:

The geopolitical situation dominating the world arena nowadays resembles a tug-of-war between great powers in terms of influence and position. The international system in the world has seldom seen periods of multipolarity, where a number of great powers are considered on par with one another and have peer-like status. However, the same system has seen long periods of bipolar status primarily during the days of the Cold War, when the USSR and USA were the two leading poles of the system locked in what seemed at the time an infinite competition.

The bipolar period came to an end in 1991 with the fall of the Soviet Union. This period is considered by many scholars as the true turning point in the international system. The collapse of the Soviet Union allowed the United States of America to become the sole hegemonic power dominating the international arena, and marked the end of the bipolar system which had prevailed since the start of the Cold War.

After three decades, the scenes are quite different. Rising powers such as Russia and China have provided themselves as alternatives to the hegemonic US, still dominating the international system. This system saw a diplomatic attack unleashed upon it in 2007, when Russian President Vladimir Putin confronted the hegemon, criticized its actions and condemned them, essentially calling for a more just, and multipolar international system.

The Russian Federation, under the leadership of Putin, has seen some dynamic changes in the means and methods by which it conducts foreign policy. Evidence points in the direction of a multipronged approach by the integration of various foreign policy tools to achieve the ultimate target set by Moscow. A Hybrid approach by Moscow in the international arena has been in play ever since the arrival of Putin to the Kremlin with the ultimate aim of restoring a multipolar

world system. The world observed this process between the years 2014 and 2015 when the Russian Federation annexed Crimea and officially declared its entrance into the Syrian Conflict.

The Russian states have always been rational actors, as some realists and structural realists would suggest, however, to have an ample comprehension of their actions it is vital to dive deeper and include other aspects that will assist us in conducting a wholesome discussion on the motives and driving forces of their actions. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to portray how the neorealist and social constructivist approaches in international relations provide us with an interpretation on the steps, and actions taken by Moscow in achieving the ultimate goal of restoring a multipolar international system. The examination of these processes will allow us to complete the mosaic necessary to solving the Gordian knot embodied by Russian perspectives of international relations.

Russian history, throughout the ages, is filled with intertwined examples of the actions of Russian leaders and their continued desire to achieve great power status. The Kremlin's historical trends are a clear example of their geopolitical ambitions which have spanned for centuries. Russian national identity has played a leading role in defining these ambitions as it considers great power status a natural right for Russia and Russians as a society.

However, certain disorders in the contemporary history of Russia, such as the fall of the Soviet Union, have left their mark on the idea of Russian national identity. The arrival of President Putin has revived the devastated national identity by providing key characteristics to the masses. With the national identity of Russia restored and morphed to the requirements of twenty first century international politics, the arrival of Putin has provided a strong motive and backing to the ambitions of modern Russia.

Putin's reforms are not confined to the restoration of national identity. His focus has been spread over multiple areas of statecraft, from domains dear to his heart, such as the military and the hydrocarbon field, reaching other areas such as Russian soft power which have also seen interesting developments. In essence, all the tools and mechanisms at the disposal of the former KGB strongman have been used to strengthen the position of the state with all its diverse aspects.

The Kremlin's foreign policy arsenal has also grown and developed to include elements that perhaps a decade ago would have seemed farfetched. Russia now relies on private military companies, which gained fame in the interventions in Ukraine and Syria. PMCs were quite common in the foreign policy toolset of Western countries, and seeing them develop in Russia present an intriguing advance.

All the developments the international system has seen in Russia and in Russian foreign policy were not random acts of reforms and tactical changes. They emit a farsighted strategic message, which pulsates in the corridors of international politics. These actions are not merely attempts to restore the Kremlin's great status. The aim of Putin's Russia is the restoration of an international system with a multipolar nature, with one of the poles being located in Moscow.

This thesis is a modest attempt to interpret the foreign policy engagements of the Russian Federation, while simultaneously providing a survey of the motives that drive its ambitions. It does not act to predict the future of the foreign policy actions of the Russian Federation, but merely discusses the steps which have led to their adoption, and explains the sentiments and rhetoric which have enforced them.

1.1. Research Ouestion

This thesis revolves around the following hypothesis: The military interventions of the Russian Federation in Crimea and Syria were the starting point to restore a multipolar world system.

To test the abovementioned hypothesis, this paper will explore the goals and methods of Russian foreign policy under the leadership of President Putin. A wide array of cases will be discussed including, but not limited to: The Russian annexation of Crimea and the Special military intervention in Ukraine, the Russian Peacekeeping Forces in the South Caucuses, the intervention of CSTO in Kazakhstan, Russia's energy diplomacy and the role of the Wagner paramilitary group.

Via the lens of Neorealism, this thesis will attempt to answer how the Kremlin's external affairs are determined. Here, it will mainly address the security dilemma and threats that represent an instrumental element in explaining Russian foreign policy. The use of Neorealism theory for this analysis will attempt to pinpoint the factors at a systemic level.

In addition, the use of social constructivism will allow this thesis to obtain an unambiguous view and understanding of how Russian identity impacts Russian foreign policy. In this context, it will also delve deeper into the historical background of Russia and attempt to answer why Moscow behaves in this manner, and what are the driving forces behind its rationale.

Moreover, the merger of the two abovementioned theories will provide a concrete answer on the role of the Russian Federation in the contemporary world and its aspirations in restoring a multipolar world system.

1.2. Methodology

For the purposes of testing the hypothesis, this paper utilizes a qualitative approach and focuses on the inductive characteristics. The thesis will follow a path where specific observations will lead to the general conclusion. The inductive approach will aim to observe patterns and trends which are specific to the presented case.

In addition, this thesis also relies on naturalistic observation. In that sense, it collects, accounts and analyses data and information on the subject matter which have been previously published. From this perspective, it will utilize the collection and content analysis of government documents related to foreign policy and security. Moreover, this paper follows a methodology based on the analysis of primary and secondary sources: Primary sources such as academic researches, constitutions, national security concept notes, as well as the examination of the speeches and statements made by high level Russian Public officials; secondary sources come in the form of scholarly works such as dissertations (published and unpublished), political commentary and newspaper articles.

1.3. Map of the Thesis

The thesis is composed of four chapters. The first chapter includes a review of the relative theories that will explain Moscow's attempt at restoring the multipolar world system, and provides a general survey on Neo-realism and social constructivism. The second chapter, is composed of two parts presenting Russia's foreign policy objectives and strategies. Part I discusses the historical motives for their adoption, while part II focuses on the current dynamics. The third chapter includes an analysis from different perspectives and geographical locations spanning from Eastern Europe to Central Asia, in a bid to explain how these steps fall in line with the Kremlin's general target of restoring a multipolar world system. The final chapter

summarizes the main arguments outlined in this thesis and clarifies the association of the mentioned cases with Russia's trial to restoring a multipolar world system.

2. Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

2.1. Literature on Multipolar World System and Its Importance

History seems to be repeating itself, with Russian forces in Ukraine and the South Caucuses, Turkish military campaigns in the North of the Syrian Arab Republic, and escalated tensions between Ankara and Athens over territory, all similar to events that took place in the same geographical locations and between the same actors around a century ago. Yes, our world may indeed seem to be engulfed in chaos. However, it is much more organized than it was at the time. In an anarchic world, as realists view it, the need for a system to regulate interstate actions is imperative. What remains to be seen is which type of system guarantees the survival needs of the states and preserves global peace, to a certain extent. Is a unipolar world system better than a multipolar one? Or does a multipolar system offer more stability?

In essence, the concept of a multipolar world system is based on the initial theory of balance of power, which will be discussed later on in this Chapter. David Hume, perhaps the most famous philosopher in this field, in his work *The Essay of the Balance of Power*, hints that the theory, although not specifically mentioned, was present in the writings of Thucydides and Machiavelli (Andersen, 2016, p. 13).

De Aguiar Patriota defines the multipolar world system as a geopolitical situation that arises when multiple power centers in the system balance each other out. This balancing can have a military, economic, and international relations nature. A Multipolar world can have two or more great powers competing for influence. Multipolarity is usually contrasted with unipolarity, where one single actor dominates power on the global stage, as was the case following the collapse of the Berlin Wall and subsequently the fall of the Soviet Union, where the United States of

America became the dominant power in the international arena. In the Cold War era, the international system was described as bipolar, where essentially the USA and the USSR balanced each other out on the global level. De Aguiar Patriota summarizes multipolar systems as standards in history where they tend to arise from the balance of power among states (Patriota, 2020, pp. 15-29).

One cannot enter into the dissection of the multipolar world system as a doctrine, without mentioning the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which was and remains a fundamental building stone for world politics, diplomacy, and interstate relations. The Peace of Westphalia ended the 30 Years War (1618-1648), a conflict between Catholic and Protestant estates within the Holy Roman Empire, that gradually escalated to become a conflict involving most of Europe, and the 80 Years War which raged from 1568 until 1648 and was fought over the Netherlands' desire for independence from Spain. In addition, the solidification of concepts such as state sovereignty, international diplomacy, and religious toleration from a political perspective and was one of the first attempts at cementing an international set of laws and essentially proved to be the basis for international communities like the European Union (Patton, 2019, pp. 91-92). Perhaps what is more important in the context of this paper, the Treaty of Westphalia was one of the earliest attempts to foster a system in which the nation-states were balanced, and thus the distribution of power amongst them was seen as an example of a multipolar system of states.

The Westphalian system, however, was challenged by the Napoleonic Empire in the early 1800s. Following the defeat of the emperor in 1815, the European powers at the time held the Congress of Vienna, which sought to restore the previous Westphalian system. This led to the Concert of Europe where the alliance of Russia, Prussia, Austria, and Great Britain aimed to restore the balance of power in Europe, preserve the territorial status quo, protect legitimate

governments, and contain France after decades of war. The Concert of Europe was another successful attempt at setting up a multipolar system based on the fundamental principle of balance of power (Varisco, 2013, p. 3).

Initially, on the concept of polarity scholars of international relations took their inspiration from natural science regarding the concept of polarity, which is evident by the use of the prefixes such as "uni-", "bi-", and "multi-". There are three types of polarity in the realm of international relations. The one great power or pole is referred to as unipolarity, the two great powers or poles are called bipolarity and the presence of more than two great powers or poles is considered multipolarity (Wardhani, 2021, p. 106).

The Second World War was the starting point of the actual debate surrounding the notion of a multipolar world system. Several scholars such as Kenneth Waltz (1964, 1979, 1997) and Nuno Monteiro (2012) believe that the multipolar world system, bipolar included, is a factor of stability and lasting peace. Others such as William C. Wohlforth (1999) believe that it gives rise to uncertainty and unpredictability, and opt for a unipolar world system. Other scholars such as Karl W. Deutsch and J. David Singer (1964) argue that both unipolar and multipolar systems will eventually break, however, the multipolar system is more durable and offers more peace.

Kenneth Waltz in his analysis on the multipolar world system has opted for a bipolar one by focusing his study on the cold war balance between the USSR and the USA. He argues how a bipolar system, is more stable and peaceful. He bases his argument on several factors, which combined limit the violence in interstate relations, he argues that in a bipolar world, there are only two world powers and no peripheries, each action by one actor is balanced by a reaction of the other: for example, the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was balanced by the creation of the Warsaw Pact, the plan to install a West German government produced the

Berlin blockade. Hence, every action is balanced by a reaction by the only rival in the system. He further explains the bipolar balance, by recalling the words of Khruschev to Bulgarians in May of 1962 to summarize this characteristic "They frighten us with war and we frighten them back". When addressing the role of nuclear capabilities, he notes "By making the two strongest states still more powerful and the emergence of third powers more difficult, nuclear weapons have helped to consolidate a condition of bipolarity". He concludes that the stability of the world since the Second World War was due to the bipolar system (Waltz, 1964, pp. 882-884). Kohout supports Waltz's argument in adding that since there are only two great powers in the bipolar system, each with equal positions, balance of power is easier to achieve (Kohout, 2003, p. 58).

Wohlforth, after analysing the hegemonic theory and the balance of power theory from a realist perspective, concludes that both theories predict that a unipolar world system will be peaceful. He argues that when the power gap between hegemonic rivals is high, the chance leading to clashes is low, which in turn results in a more peaceful system. As for the balance of power theory, he challenges Waltz's approach to uncertainty. Waltz argues that a bipolar world is less prone to anarchy than a multipolar world since the uncertainties are far less (Waltz, 1997, p. 915). Wohlforth bases his argument on this logic and concludes that in a unipolar world, the uncertainties such as alliance choices or the calculation of power which lead to war are far less than in a multipolar world. The two remaining options for the "second-tier" states are either to bandwagon with the pole or to take no action to attract the enmity of the pole, hence the unipolar world is more stable, unambiguous, and more peaceful (Wohlforth, 1999, p. 24).

Monteiro challenges Wohlforth's agreement and states that a unipolar world system is more prone to war. He highlights two gaps in Wohlfarth's analysis of a unipolar world system, and conclude the opposite of Wohlfarth's thesis. First, Monteiro criticized Wohlfarth's focus on the

great power. He continues to state that the system, even if unipolar, is composed of other actors, and therefore the perspective cannot be limited only to the great and minor power interactions, but also the minor state dynamics between themselves. Second, Monteiro criticized the defensive dominance approach of the pole in Wohlfarth's analysis, claiming that scholars must also take into account the offensive dominance and disengagement actions of the pole in their strategies. He concludes by saying that these two variables not only dimmish the possibility of conflict, but exponentially multiply its chances (Monteiro, 2012, pp. 36-37).

On another side of the spectrum, scholars such as Deutsch and Singer, basing their argument on L.F. Richardson's stability concept, introduce a new concept which they call the probabilistic concept of political stability. They analyse the relationship between the independent variable which they consider the number of independent actors vis-a-vis the dependent variable, which is the stability of the system taking into consideration the "interaction opportunity," which acts as their intervening variable. They also emphasize on the time scale factor which is the limitation (Deutsch & Singer, 1964, pp. 391-392). In their study, conducted in 1964, they argue that both the unipolar and multipolar systems are determined to implode. However, their study concludes that the multipolar system is more viable and it "might buy mankind some valuable time to seek some more dependable bases for world order" (Deutsch & Singer, 1964, p. 406).

The plethora of scholarly articles regarding the matter of a multipolar world system affirm that regardless of the type of multipolarity, be it bipolar or else, it is imperative to help organize the anarchic system of states, where the actor's essential fear of ensuring their survivability is addressed and secured.

2.2. Literature on Russia's Role in the Current Global System and Aspirations for Multi-polarization

"International relations have entered into a conceptually new historical stage. A stage that consists of the emergence of multipolar world order reflects the strengthening of new economic development centers and power centers"

Lavrov, Sergei (2016)¹

It is no secret that the Russian Federation, under the leadership of President Putin, has spared no effort into the multi-polarization of the world system. Kremlin officials have been declaring this intent in every international arena they appear in. Moreover, the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation published by Presidential decree No. 229, March 31, 2023, in section IV, paragraph 18 clearly states that Moscow is striving towards achieving a multipolar international system (RF Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). This is not the first instance in which this type of rhetoric has been used in the annual concept of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation. Ever since Putin's rise to power in the year 2000, this type of language has been present, signaling the extent of Russia's, and in turn Putin's determination in ending US hegemonic unipolarity prevalent in the system ever since the end of the cold war and dissolution of the Soviet Union (Makarychev & Morozov, 2011, p. 2).

From this perspective, Lukyanov determines how Russia views its role in the current global system. He classifies Russian foreign policy into two unequal periods: The first, from the break-up of the Soviet Union until the year 2007, when the Kremlin's ultimate goal was the integration in international institutions, organizations, and the global economy. Russia had its eyes set on the Council of Europe, the World Trade Organization, and the G7 to name a few. In other words, essentially ready to become a subordinate to the West (Lukyanov, 2010, p. 26).

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¹ Sergei Lavrov's Speech during the second annual Russia-China conference in 2016.

The second period, according to Lukyanov is from the year 2007 and onwards. Under the leadership of Putin, Russia was demanding an equal seat as the West at the international tables. The Munich Conference on Security Policy in 2007 was a turning point in Russian foreign policy. It was during this conference that Putin launched a diplomatic attack of the collective West led by the US. In a 4000-word speech, he declared that the "unipolar world" supported by the West is a world of "one master, one sovereign" led by the United States and its allies. He continued to add that the "unilateral and illegitimate actions" of the United States have created a situation where "no one feels secure", since they create new conflicts and wars (Russian News, 2013). This was an expression of discontent, and following 2007 integration was no more a foreign policy target in Russia. Instead, Moscow focused on enhancing its capabilities and increasing its strength. This change originated from the conviction that the West, especially the United States, were not interested in recognizing Russia as an equal partner (Lukyanov, 2010, p. 27). Lukyanov argues, "The Kremlin intends to push for a revision of the global rules of the game, which took shape during the period when Russia was unable to influence that process to any substantial extent" (Sakwa, 2008, p. 251).

President Putin views the fall of the Soviet Union as the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century (Coleman & Podolskij, 2007, p. 53). Sakwa argues that certain historic events are being revisited in the collective institutional memory of the Russian Federation, such as the role of Moscow in brokering the ceasefire during NATO's bombing campaign of Serbia in 1999 is being viewed as an act of weakness, and these events are being fed into the rhetoric of the "catastrophic 1990s". He continues that the digressive attitude of the West towards Russia has fueled resentment and has been a driving force in changing how the Kremlin views its role in the international system (Sakwa, 2008, p. 249).

In this aspect, it is important to analyze how scholars of the Russian political system perceive the Kremlin's role in the global system. Wilson argues that ever since the Putin's rise to power the steps that the Kremlin has taken such as the strengthening and expansion of regional structures such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and more recently the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) which have all been essential in challenging Western dominance and pivoting Russia to become a major independent source of power (Wilson, 2017, p. 1).

Moreover, Neumann, who has followed the developments in the Russian Federation since Soviet times, and is one of the leading experts on Russia in international affairs, concludes that, ever since its emergence on the international level, Russia has not only fought to be recognized, but recognized as a "*Great Power*" (Neumann, 2016, p. 1382). He also deduced that Russian obsession with great power status is a national fixation, and the centuries-long competition between the West has become an integral part in the construction of Russia's national identity (Wilson, 2017, p. 19).

Most Russian policymakers and influential figures have argued, that multipolarity, although initially an academic concept, has gradually morphed into what they refer to as "objective geopolitical reality" (Makarychev & Morozov, 2011, p. 5).

One cannot deny the role of Russian Nuclear capability in this aspect. For the last 10 years, the Kremlin has adopted to what is known as a policy of "strategic deterrence", in order to force itself onto the international arena. The strategic deterrence policy is meant to operate in times of peace and war. It is a political and military approach to counter external threats and serves to defend the national security interests. This deterrence mechanism entails different capabilities, such as nuclear weapons, traditional armed forces, and non-military assets like media and

information. This policy was adopted to counter to what President Putin calls the "unilateral military advantage" of the United States (Fink & Oliker, 2020, p. 40).

The primary objective of the Kremlin has been and remains to be the restoration of the influential global position that was relinquished following the downfall of the Soviet Union. Even though this aim has remained constant since 1992, the strategies and approaches employed to attain it have evolved. To understand better how Russia sees itself in the contemporary world system, it is imperative that we take a glance at *Putinism*. *Putinism* is an ideology, coined by Anne Applebaum, after her analysis of different aspects of President Putin's *modus operandi*. According to her analysis, *Putinism* functions as the guiding mechanism in contemporary Russia under Putin's leadership. It encompasses an economic doctrine, a political philosophy, a historical framework, and a rationale for legitimacy, essentially meeting the criteria of an ideology (Applebaum, 2013).

The economic doctrine is characterized as a form of crony capitalism, where Putin's close inner circle wields control over the financial and corporate sectors of the nation, frequently comprising individuals affiliated with the 22 military agencies. The political philosophy constitutes a combination of realism and conservatism, advocating for the concept of the "Russian World" (*Russkiy Mir*) and upholding values aligned with the Russian Orthodox faith (Mattelaer & Vansina, 2020, p. 8). Additionally, through a historical lens, a narrative has been constructed around specific periods in Russian history, such as the pivotal year 1945, which has been commemorated annually with military parades ever since Putin's assumption of the presidential office. Lastly, the justification for legitimacy is encapsulated in the notion of electoral authoritarianism, also known as managed democracy, a construct that imparts legitimacy to Putin's leadership (Applebaum, 2013).

Putinism has a vital role in explaining how the Russian society perceives the role of the Russian Federation in regional and international matters. It will contribute greatly in the analysis of the social constructionism theory once it is applied to the Russian case.

2.3. Theoretical Framework: Neo-Realism and Social Constructivism

This section will present the theories on which the study of this thesis is based on. Focus will be made on Waltz's structural realism also known as neo-realism, which will assist in the analysis of the Kremlin's behaviour in the international system. Given that one of the fundamental aspects of neo-realism is that the actors in the system conduct their international politics based on the properties of the international system, the analysis carried out on the foreign policy of states from the neo-realist perspective are independent from variables such as historical precursors, the role of political figures and internal policies (Ili & Lévesque, 2013, p. 12). This perspective will assist in the analysis of Moscow's security dilemma, which arises following altercations in the balance of power and is a crucial factor in the forging of Russian foreign policy.

Neo-realism, also known as structural realism, bases its foundation from the presumed interaction of tangible strengths (economic, military, etc....) in the realm of international affairs. This concept focuses on the proportional distribution of concrete capacities among sovereign nations. The theory of structural realism assumes that the worldwide framework consists of independent political entities that function without a superior governing body, resulting in an anarchic structure (Sørensen, 2008, p. 6). Moreover, in this aspect, the ultimate aim of a state would be survival, and hence would lead to the self-help doctrine in order to achieve its goal.

A significant portion of the literature on security studies and foreign policy has revolved around the understanding of an international system in which bounded, logical, territorially-

based self-governing nation-states coexist within a chaotic setting with the goal of protecting their safety and ensuring their continued existence. These states present a unified identity as self-interested actors striving for security. According to proponents of structural realism, the anarchy inherent in this system defines the fundamental context of global politics, and nations find themselves ensured in an atmosphere of uncertainty. As they seek strategies to bolster their security, they inadvertently become responsible for diminishing the security of others (Suny, 2000, p.142).

The neo-realist theory of Waltz was chosen to assist in the analysis of this paper, not only because it is the most popular theory in international affairs, but also the most referenced and the one that has remained highly relevant even after 44 years (in 2023) since its inception. Waltz's theory of neo-realism, is based on the following assumptions: The international system is anarchic. There is no global authority to govern states. The main driving force of the state actions is state survival in this anarchic system. States, being the relevant actors in the system, operate according to the doctrine of self-help. The unequal distribution of power forces the formation of alliances and bandwagoning in order to balance the power.

Moreover, Waltz also focuses its definition of power on the resources a state possesses. These resources include the natural resources, the size of the population, the size of the economy, the power of the military, and, of course, the proper and skilful management of these resources (Waltz, 1979, p. 106). The lack of trust among states, bound by the ambiguous intentions of the rivals, leads to what is called the security dilemma (Ili & Lévesque, 2013, p. 15).

Several scholars in IR have criticized Waltz's approach for being "too distant from real politics", as it focuses on one level of analysis from a state's level (Ili & Lévesque, 2013, p. 12). From this perspective, since no international relations theory takes into account all the levels of

analysis with detail. This research will also include certain aspects of social constructivism, which will assist in analysing lower levels. Other variables such as the relationship between the state, the leaders, history and identity.

Social Constructivism is a relatively recent theory in the field of international relations. It argues, that ideas, norms, beliefs and social interactions have a role in shaping the behaviour of the states in the international system. This theory contradicts the traditional realist and neo-realist theories in the sense that it emphasizes the function of non-material elements, while the traditional theories in IR focus on elements such as material power and self-interest. In short, social constructivism theory believes that social processes also influence behaviours of actors.

Social constructivism is essential to this paper, and particularly in the study of the perception process of the Russian Federation in terms of the influence the society has on the decision-making process. Given that the Russian federation, which is the largest country in terms of land area, is a multinational state composed of 193 diverse ethnicities, speaking 277 different languages and dialects (Russian Federation, 2021, p. 3), it is imperative to use the social constructivism theory to understand how these different population groups perceive the Russian state in the international system.

Moreover, by using social constructivism this thesis will allow us to obtain a better grasp on how specific events in the history of the Russian Federation have helped shape national identity, beliefs, and understandings in the social composition of Russian demographics. Events such as the expansion of the Russian Empire, the rise and fall of the Soviet Union, the role of Russians in WWII. Ideologically speaking, social constructivism will also support this paper in investigating the motives and driving forces that make up Russian identity. How does the Kremlin view its

role in the international system and what is the rationale for the adoption of its foreign policy actions and decisions?

Constructivism is a method of analysis of social interaction based on the following assumptions: human interaction is characterized by ideational factors and not material ones; Shared collective understanding represents the most important ideational aspect; the actors' identities and interests are fixed on these beliefs (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001, p. 393)

Ruggie defines constructivism as "human consciousness and its role in international life" (Ruggie,1998, p. 856). Adler in turn, argues that constructivism in international relations is "not a substantive theory of politics" (Adler, 1997, p. 323), while Ruggie complements Adlers statement by stating that constructivism is in essence a "theoretically informed approach to the study of IR" (Ruggie, 1998, p. 880).

Price and Reus-Smit summarize the social constructivism theory as a theory that provides a sociological perspective on world politics, which takes into consideration the normative structures as well as the material ones, and the role of identity in the composition of the interests and actions of the state (Price & Reus-Smit, 1998, p. 259).

The Russian role on the international level is not new. Historically speaking, ever since the 1700s the Russian empire was a force to be reckoned with, and that continued until the fall of the Soviet Union. Russian foreign policy today is mainly focused on regaining control, and influence primarily over post-soviet states. The Kremlin refers to these territories as the near abroad and as an integral part of the Russkiy Mir (Russian World). The post-soviet states are high up the chain in Moscow's rank of national and state interests. Fundamentally, the light will be shed on the

security dilemma that the Kremlin possess and the identity crisis which Russians have faced for centuries.

In 1939, Winston Churchill made the following observation on Russia: "It is a riddle wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma". From this perspective, one can comprehend the need for more than one theory in solving this enigma. Continuing on the matter, Churchill adds that "perhaps there is a key. The key is Russian national interest" (Marshal, 2016, p. 4). Hence, be it from a traditional viewpoint of neo-realism or the relatively recent theory of social constructivism, the focal point of this paper will be the national interests of the Kremlin. The theories mentioned will merely aid in imploring how are these national interests of Moscow achieved, from a higher-level analysis with a focus on the state as the actor in the international system, and from a lower-level analysis emphasizing the role of national identity and the perceptions of the Russian demographics.

This blend of theoretical approaches will offer a more complete image of how events today and in the past have shaped Russia's foreign policy, foreign relations, and perception of its place in the multipolar world.

3. Chapter 2: Russia's Foreign Policy Objectives and Strategies

3.1. Part I: The Historical Trend

History plays an important role in shaping foreign policy. Such has been the case since the dawn of time. Politicians often rely on their interpretation of historical events to define the present and forge the future of their approach; this phenomenon occurs both ways, be it consciously or unconsciously. States plan, adopt, and implement their foreign policy objectives and strategies based on the influence of historical events (Brands & Suri, 2016).

The Russian Federation is no exception in this regard. Russian history is rich, powerful, dramatic, and bold, covering numerous domains, from literature to arts, from sciences to military, and from philosophy to politics. All have had their fair share in influencing the Kremlins' actions from an IR perspective. To understand better how this *enigma*, as Winston Churchill once said, has been coded, one must go back to its roots, leading to the days of the founding fathers of modern-day Russia, the Kievan Rus.

3.1.1. The Emergence of Russia

One of the oldest recordings on the origins of Kievan Rus is found in the works of monk Nestor the Chronicler. The work titled the "Tale of Bygone Years" (Povest' vremennykh let), is a chronicle written between 850 to 1110 AD, and includes interpretations of the origins of Rus and the princes of Kiev. The work of Nestor is considered a fundamental source for the history of Kievan Russ (Martin, 2011, p. 97).

The Chronicles starts the narration from Biblical times, where after the flood the three sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth divided the Earth between themselves. Ham received the Southern regions, Shams' share was the Orient, while Japheth received the Northern and Western regions. The chronicle also includes the Tale of the Tower of Babylon, where after mankind multiplied over time, they came together to build a tower as high as to reach the heavens. After spending forty years, the tower was unfinished. As a result, God descended to the land and confused the tongues of the people. God also divided them into seventy-two races and scattered them all over the world (Nestor et al., 1953, pp. 51-52).

Nestor depicts the Slavs as one of these seventy-two races and direct descendants of Japheth. The Slavic tribes settled in the lands between the Danube and the Dnieper rivers. These tribes took their names from the areas they settled in. For instance, the tribe that settled near the

Morava River were called Moravians, the tribe which settled on the right bank of the Dnipro River is referred to as Polianians, in reference to the fields (*Poliya*) they settled on. This tribe in particular, the Polianians were socio-economically more advanced than other Slav tribes that inhabited the region. They were heavily involved in agriculture, livestock husbandry, hunting, and fishing. Their advanced socio-economic status was due to the location of their settlement, being on the trade route between the Greeks, Romans, and the Varangians. The Polianian tribe leaders were three brothers named Kiy, Shchek, and Khoriv. Later, this tribe built a wooden garrisoned city and named it Kyiv, after their eldest brother (Nestor et al., 1953, p. 54).

Following the arrival and settlement of Bulgar tribes to the region, the Polianians endured great hardship and harassment. This continued until Michael the Emperor of Byzantium, between the years 853-858, came with an army and subdued the Bulgar tribes, in an attempt by Byzantium to control the ports around the Black Sea region (Nestor et al., 1953, p. 59). In 859, the Khazars, that hailed from the east, replaced the Bulgar tribes and began demanding tribute from the Slavs. The continual harassment from the Khazars forced the Polianians and other Slav tribes in the region to seek help from the Varangian Rus. Three brothers from the Varangian Rus, named Rurik, Sineus, and Truvor descended to the settlements of the Slavs and assumed control. Between the years 860-862, as the Varangians were controlling the area garrisoned in the flourishing town of Novgorod, the people living on those lands, became known as Kievan Rus (Nestor et al., 1953, pp. 58-60).

The Kievan Rus were pagans, and could hardly be considered a state, but merely a collection of tribes living under the reign of Rurik and his warriors. Their neighbours however were passed paganism, to the East the Khazar Tribes had adopted the Muslim faith while others

Judaism, in the South the Byzantian empire was Orthodox Christians, and Rome and the West were Latin Christians.

In the tenth century, during the reign of Prince Vladimir, delegations began to arrive in the region, each preaching their religion. First, a Muslim came from Volga and was very persuasive. However, once Vladimir found out about the prohibition of alcohol, he responded that "The joy of the Rus is drinking", and hence turned down the offer. Later on, a Khazar Jew approached him later on the matter, but once he learned that the Jews were exiled, he interpreted it as the wrath of God and rejected the religion. Greek philosophers followed and were very convincing. Nevertheless, Vladimir wanted Rus's testimonies on the religions and sent out delegations to Bulgaria, Rome, and Constantinople. The Muslim and Latin services failed to impress the Rus; On the other hand, the latter were captivated by the liturgy in Saint Sophia and were astonished by the great Cathedral. Eventually, the Kievan Rus adopted Orthodox Christianity in 988, and since then Orthodox Christianity has become an indispensable characteristic of Russian people and culture (Bushkovitch, 2012, pp. 6-8).

Fast forward to 1236, the Golden Horde emerged from Eastern Asia. A nomadic tribe of Turkic people, under the leadership of Genghis Khan had united and had become an invincible force, after passing through Central Asia, it had reached the doorsteps of Kievan Rus. The Mongol army was commanded by Batu, the grandson of Genghis Khan, and between the years 1237 and 1240, it conquered the region, including towns such as Moscow and Vladimir, eventually reaching Kyiv and razing it to the ground (Bushkovitch, 2012, p. 20). The Mongol Yoke devastated the Kievan Rus principalities, most of the population was enslaved, and tributes were regularly demanded by the Mongol Khans.

The loss of Kyiv shifted the spotlight to other Rus principalities in the cities of Vladimir and Moscow. The Mongol Yoke lasted up until Ivan the III decided to pursue a policy of "lands gathering", and in 1478 and 1485 conquered Novgorod and Tver respectively. Under Ivan III's leadership, following the Battle of Ugra, the Rus stopped paying tribute to the Mongols. It was finally over after nearly two and a half centuries of Mongol Yoke. It was during this period that the modern term *Rossia* (a term borrowed from Greek) came into use to replace the traditional *Rus* term (Bushkovitch, 2012, p. 37).

The two above-mentioned historical cases represent pivotal points in the attempts to decipher the Russian enigma. The creation of modern-day Russia from the ashes of Kievan Rus and their adoption of Orthodox Christianity is a vital event that has shaped Russian identity and their approach to IR. Moreover, the constant attacks of, first the Khazars and then the Mongolian Golder Horde is one of the first instances where Russian security dilemma arises from the East. Similarly, the attacks from Swedish, Polish, and Lithuanian armies promoted security dilemmas from the West.

3.1.2. A Tsar is Born

Ivan III was succeeded by his son, Vassili III who continued the work of his father in uniting the principalities and territories around Moscow. Vassili III went to conquer Smolensk, the sole ethnographically Russian land outside of Moscow's control in 1514. In hindsight, what Vassili III accomplished at the time was to expand and consolidate the rule of the Grand Duchy of Moscow and more importantly solve *Rossias* security dilemma in the West. For long periods of history, Russian territory saw incursions from its Western neighbours, during the reign of Ivan III and subsequently his son Vassili III, it was the Polish and Lithuanians that were the main

threats. However, Vassily III was unable to deal with the security dilemmas of the South and the East. (Bushkovitch, 2012, p. 47).

Vassili III was succeeded by Ivan IV, who is more commonly known in history as Ivan the Terrible. Following the death of his father in 1533, three-year-old Ivan ascended to the throne and became the Great Prince of Moscow and all Rus. In 1547, Ivan was crowned for the first time in Russian History as Tsar. The title itself was a word derived from the name Ceasar, it was also the Russian word given to the Khan of the Golden Horde. Moreover, it was the title of David and Solomon from the Slavic Old Testament, of which Ivan IV was very intrigued and had the walls of the Kremlin decorated with scenes from it (Bushkovitch, 2012, p. 48). From a Russian perspective, the Tsar of Russia was now on par with the Emperors of the West, and the Ottoman Sultan.

Ivan the Terrible continued the work of his father. At the young age of twenty-two he began a bloody campaign to expand Moscovite territory. In 1552 after noticing that Moscow's influence was dwindling in the Kazan Khanate, he marched with his army Eastwards, conquering Kazan. His appetite for territory did not stop there, he conquered Astrakhan Khanate located at the intersection of the Volga River and the Caspian Sea. These military expeditions represented the first instances in Russian History where the entire Volga River stream along with its trade routes came under the control of Moscow. Moreover, access to the Caspian Sea altered the geopolitical landscape and perception of Russia, as it had acquired vital trade routes in the region. Tsar Ivan was keen on answering the security dilemmas of Rossia from multiple directions. In the 1560s, Russian forces had fortifications at the banks of the Terek River, near the modern-day city of Grozny. They had reached the Greater Caucuses Mountain range and with

a geographical barrier on their side, had secured a natural boundary against uninvited guests from the South Caucasus (Bushkovitch, 2012, pp. 47-53).

Defensive neorealist approaches to *Rossias* foreign policy continued under Ivan IV. Military expeditions also took place in the Northwest. Following internal disturbances in Livonia (modern-day Estonia), Ivan IV led an army in a pre-emptive move to secure the port of Narva on the Baltic Sea. The Narva port was of vital strategic and economic importance to Moscow, allowing Dutch and English merchants ship to deliver Western goods to *Rossia*, and exporting Russian fur to Western markets. The final campaign under the rule of Ivan IV was to the East, for the first time between the years 1582 and 1583 Russian forces under Cossack's command crossed the Ural Mountains and entered Siberia (Bushkovitch, 2012, p. 53).

The expansion policies carried out by Ivan the Terrible came at a price, although it secured vital resources for the Empire to ensure its survival, it also gathered non-Russian people such as the Tatars and Finno-Ugric under Moscow's umbrella. These acts transformed Russian identity and the Russian state from being the heir of Byzantium as the center for Orthodox Christianity to being a multinational and multiethnic state by the acquisition of different Muslim territories forced by the defensive Neorealism of acquiring land and territories to ensure the Empires' security and survival (Wohlforth, 2001, p. 223). The Grand Duchy of Moscow which started as a small principality became as Tilly puts it "a power that turns into a giant by eating its neighbors" (Çaliş & Tinker, 2022, pp. 31-32).

Ivan the Terrible was ill and passed away in 1584. As he had murdered his eldest son, the rightful heir to his throne in an act of rage, his younger son Fyodor was to claim the throne. However, Fyodor was limited in terms of health and abilities and not capable of bearing such responsibility. He was married to Irina Godunov, the sister of a Russian Aristocrat by the name of

Boris. Boris gained power and influence in the Kremlin. He had significantly remedied the internal policies of Ivan IV, which had all but destroyed the domestic politics. With the death of Dimitri, Fyodor's brother and rightful successor to the throne, supposedly by an accident in 1591 and after the death of Fyodor in 1598. Boris gathered enough support in the inner circles of the Duma and the Church to be elected Tsar of all Russia (Bushkovitch, 2012, pp. 53-54).

This era was dubbed the *Times of Trouble*, as domestic unrest took place following a famine that struck the land and caused rebellions by the Cossacks and other peasants. Foreign intervention in Russian affairs, notably Polish and Lithuanian, had forced the central state to lose control of its territories. Moscow was under Polish control, the shores and access to the Baltic Sea and the city of Novgorod came under Swedish control and the future of the state was at stake. In 1612, the Russian Army gained enough strength and marched to liberate Moscow. Amid all the chaos, the remaining Boyars, the Church, and leaders of the Army called for an Assembly of the Land to elect a new Tsar. Michael Romanov was elected as Tsar of all Russia in 1613, the *Times of Troubles* were over and a new era began (Bushkovitch, 2012, pp. 57-58).

3.1.3. The Story of an Empire: Enter Romanovs

The Romanov family had strong influences on the modernization and development of the Russian empire, each member of the family having their fair share and input in this aspect. Tsar Michael had two tasks to handle following the *Times of Troubles*: on the domestic front, he restored order, set up local governing bodies, and organized the improvement of the army. And, on a foreign level, he signed the Treaty of Stolbovo with the Swedes in 1617 to return Novgorod and other cities to the Kremlin. However, he lost access to the Baltic Sea due to the concessions he had to make to restore most of the lost lands. He concluded peace treaties with the Polish-

Lithuanian Commonwealth and put an end to Polish claims on the Russian throne (Bushkovitch, 2012, pp. 53-58).

Peter the Great is regarded as the most famous Romanov, as he is credited with the greatest transformation in Russia. Historically Russia had sought to resemble Europe, and the rulers aimed at modernizing Russia socially, technologically, and economically based on the Western European model (Çaliş & Tinker, 2022, p. 32). Peter the Great focused on the structure and form of the state and managed to transform the Russian Tsardom into an offshoot of the European Monarchy. He abolished the *Boyar Assembly* (Aristocrats' Assembly) and *Zemski Sobor* (Parliament) and established a State Senate to resemble its European counterparts (Çaliş & Tinker, 2022, p. 33).

The motivations behind the transformations Peter the Great introduced to the Russian state can be credited to his wars against the regional powerhouses represented by Sweden and the Ottoman Empire. The dominant isolation policies in the Muscovite approach to international affairs could not continue. Russia needed allies and recognition of its status in the European order. These motives forced Peter the Great to transform the Russian army to resemble its European counterparts, he invested heavily in shipbuilding and naval technology, and he established Russia's first Naval base and academy. On a diplomatic level, he forced diplomats to be educated and sent them to Italy as Italian was second only to French as the language of diplomats at the time (Altbauer, 1980, pp. 7-8). He increased the diplomatic representation and missions to European capitals to forge alliances in the wars of Russia against the Ottomans and the Swedes, he even assigned experienced yet non-Russian diplomats to serve this purpose (Bohlen, 1966, pp. 341-358).

In 1696, Russian forces, with the newly found navy, were able to conquer the Ottomans stationed in Crimea. Peter the Great was able to reap the fruits of his labour. His naval forces also proved pivotal in the Great Northern War (1700-1721) against Sweden, in which his forces were able to defeat the Swedish army and navy (Mills, 2023). Thus, Russia under Peter the Great became an emerging power in the region and was demanding her fair share in European affairs.

Peter the Great essentially pivoted Russian approaches to international affairs from Waltz's defensive Neorealism to an offensive one as coined by Mearsheimer, therefore the Russian state under his Reign was not expanding and evolving to address the security dilemmas of the state in the anarchic world as his predecessors did, but to gain power and recognition and be on par with the more advanced western states (Heydarian Pashakhanlou, 2018, p. 1).

The women of the Romanov family also had their fair share and involvement in the state affairs of the state. Following the death of Peter the Great, for the coming sixty years, the women of the Romanov family took matters into their own hands. Following the reigns of Cathrine I, Empress Anna, and Empress Elizabeth it was time for Catherine II to assume the responsibility of the throne. Catherine II was crowned empress of all Russia at the age of thirty-three (Bushkovitch, 2012, p. 116).

It is important to mention that this was an era where *Realpolitik* dictated that expansion was a form to address insecurity, and practiced by many states such as Prussia, Britain, France, and others. The Russian state was no exception, as Catherine the Great stated "*I have no ways to defend my borders, but to expand them*", essentially continuing the work of her predecessors in an attempt to bolster the Russian status in world affairs (Chafetz & Sipher, 2023). She aimed to "join the Caspian Sea with the Black Sea and link both of these with the North Sea", to bolster commerce and enhance Russia's eminence in Europe (Maroger, 1955, p. 385). She made Russia

the sole dominant power in the region following her war against the Ottoman Empire which lasted from 1768 to 1774, delivering a devastating blow to the Ottoman Empire. Her ambitions became reality in 1783 when she annexed Crimea after defeating the Ottoman Empire and the Turkic Tatar tribes on the peninsula and assuring them access to the warm waters (Stronski, 2021).

On the Western front, with Prussia and Austria, she was responsible for the partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth on three separate occasions in 1772, 1793, and 1795. In 1780, Catherine the Great established what was known as the League of Armed Neutrality to defend neutral shipping from the British Royal Navy (Bushkovitch, 2012, pp. 117-136). She elevated Russia's status in global affairs to an unprecedented level, at one point attempting to mediate between the United States and Britain by submitting a peace proposal (Burakovsky, 2015). Her forces were even active in the Middle East as they occupied Beirut for a brief period (1772-1774) during her war with the Ottomans (Persen, 1955, pp. 279-280).

Catherine the Great and her policies had an enormous impact on Russian identity. The Russian Empire went beyond Europe and was now an important actor on the international arena. Catherine the Great also reinforced the doctrine of warm water access in her war against the Ottoman Empire, a true visionary as she understood the importance of the access to warm waters, which has ever since become a fundamental element in Russian foreign policy. She passed away in 1796 after years of hard work establishing a European and stable order in Russia. However, the arrival of Napoleon I to the leadership of France reshuffled all the cards and changed the rules of the game.

Catherine the Great's son, Paul, assumed control of the state following her death in 1796. Tsar Paul, however, had a short stint, as after five years as head of state he was assassinated. He was succeeded by Alexander I in 1801 (Bushkovitch, 2012, pp. 138-142). The times of Alexander I were turbulent to say the least, as threats were looming all over Europe following the aftershocks of the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon to power with his imperialistic ambitions. The hegemonic aspirations of Napoleonic France were a clear threat not only to Europe but to the Russians as well.

Napoleon in a bold attempt invaded Moscow in the summer of 1812, marching in with his *Grande Armée* he found Moscow empty. The Tsar and his generals had evacuated the city and moved further inwards. This grad strategy was aimed at increasing the logistical hindrances for the French, as the supply lines would become longer and dispersed. Surrounding villages were set ablaze so the French troops could not use them. It was a waiting game in which the Russian forces won. Due to the harsh winters of Moscow, the French army was devastated, forcing Napoleon to retreat (Brown, 2001, pp. 24-28). Tsar Alexander's forces followed in their trail and eventually ended up in Paris in 1815, putting an end to Napoleon's imperialistic ambitions.

The Tsar's victory over Napoleon was followed by the Paris Conference and the Congress of Vienna. Both events portray how a self-confident and proud Russia forced itself to be a great actor and an equal to its European counterparts in building the multipolar architecture of Europe and securing its status as a great power. Moreover, on a domestic front, the intense mobilization during the war with France nurtured the national and patriotic elements in Russian society while addressing the age-old security dilemmas of the state from the West. The war is referred to as the *Patriotic War* in Russia highlighting the importance of the victory against France, which secured Russia's seat in global politics and power dynamics (Addison, 2023).

Tsar Alexander I passed away in 1825 and was succeeded by his younger brother Nicolas the I. As Russia's status flourished in the international arena, the arts, literature, and culture

spread all over Europe (Bushkovitch, 2012, p. 248). On the other hand, the growing ideological movements in Europe had influenced Russian Officers stationed in the West and intellectuals studying in European universities and triggered dissatisfaction on a domestic level. Amid the confusion as to who was to take the throne of Alexander's two brothers, rebels began a movement known as the Decemberist Revolt (Çiçek, 2017, pp. 101-103). Influenced by the liberal ideas from Europe, they aimed to establish a constitutional monarchy and abolish serfdom. This revolt did not last long as it was quickly crushed by Tsar Nicolas I (Rabow-Edling, 2012, p. 144).

Tsar Nicolas I's reign was a catastrophic one both on the domestic and foreign policy fronts. He despised serfdom but was reluctant to abolish it fearing backlash from the aristocracy and noblemen. On a foreign policy level, he managed to expand Russian influence and territory, he played a vital role in the independence movement of Moscow's Orthodox brethren in Greece, as well as in increasing Russia's Southern borders in the Caucasus by seizing land from Persia, and managed to successfully end the Russo-Turkish war (Bushkovitch, 2012, pp. 168-171). However, his successes were incomparable to the failure of the Crimean Offensive which devastated the financials of the state beyond repair, and its ramifications were felt by generations to come. Following his passing in 1855, he was succeeded by his son Tsar Alexander II (Bushkovitch, 2012, p. 187).

Tsar Alexander II inherited a devastated state. Russia at the time was a pole in the international system, and the newly crowned Tsar conducted what was later dubbed as a pacifist foreign policy. At the epitome of the competition with Great Britain mainly in Central Asia, he opted to support the Union in the American Civil War and even sent warships on many occasions (Gilbert, 1947, p. 13). In this aspect, the Empire was no longer a merely European superpower, it

was now behaving as an international one. However, the poor finances of the state caused by the years-long Crimean War unleashed by his predecessor Tsar Nicolas, in addition to the fear of losing the remote territory of Alaska to the British Navy, Tsar Alexander II sold the territory to the United States in 1867 (Gibson, 1983, pp. 16-17). On the European front, the role that Moscow was playing as a main actor kept on, in an attempt to maintain the balance of power among the Eastern European monarchies along with Germany and Austria-Hungarian he founded the League of Three Emperors (Van Der Oye, 2006, p. 566). One of the motives behind the formation of the League was due to the founding of the First International, an international organization aimed at uniting labor unions, communists, anarchists, and left-wing socialists, whose influence had been growing in Europe as the class struggles kept on growing (Johnson, 2014). A social movement that was clearly a threat to the leadership of all three Empires.

On a domestic level, Tsar Alexander II was a reformist. He was responsible for ending some of the privileges of the nobility as social unrest due to the struggles among the classes was intensifying. To address this issue, his significant decision was the emancipation of the Russian surfs in 1861 for which he was nicknamed Alexander the Liberator, and granting them access to university education. He continued the reform process by introducing elections for local judges and the establishment of self-governance via the *Zemstvo* system (Nafziger, 2008, p. 2). However, the Emperor's decision to free the serfs was not enough to satisfy the radical social movements in Russia. The majority of the rural population remained poor, and resentment toward the central government and the autocratic regime of the Tsar was still prevalent. After surviving numerous assassination attempts on his life, the Tsar finally met his fate and was assassinated in 1881 by a revolutionary left-wing socialist group called *Narodnya Volya* (People's Will) (Bushkovitch, 2012, p. 206).

After his assassination, he was succeeded by his son Alexander III, who reigned from 1881 to 1894. He was quite the opposite of his father and often perused policies known as counter-reformist. He was a strong advocate of the ideological pillars that had been the core of Russian rule which were autocracy, orthodoxy, and national identity. On a foreign policy level, there were no major wars during his time, so he was nicknamed Alexander the Peacemaker. However, on a domestic level, he countered every liberal reform that his father had adopted, he strived to return the full autocratic regime of the Empire concentrated in the hands of the Tsar. He was heavily in favor of a policy of Russification, where the Russian language became mandatory throughout the schools under the empire's command, and Russian Orthodoxy was the sole religion (Weeks, 2004, pp. 471-489). His attempts to homogenize the mosaic of the Russian empire forced the increase of anti-tsarist sentiments among the social movement.

He was followed by his son, Tsar Nicolas II, later to be known in history as the last tsar of Russia. He assumed command in 1894 when Europe was boiling and the drums of war echoed around the globe. Nicolas II had a difficult task in maneuvering Russian foreign policy, although he had limited success in maintaining the Kremlin's role in the international system such as the proposal and initiation of the Hague Convention of 1899, one of the cornerstones of international law (Bonnet, 2022). On other fronts, every step he took to maintain the Empire's status in the world was a direct blow to his popularity. The harsh crackdown during the 1905 Russian Revolution directed against the Tsar and the nobility damaged the Tsar's reputation dearly. Moreover, the unsuccessful military campaign against the Japanese tarnished Russia's status in the war (Esthus, 1981, p. 397). The catalyst of the downfall of the Romanov dynasty was its role in the Balkans. Following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by a Bosnian Serb in 1914, the Austria-Hungarian authorities with the support of Germany moved against the Serbs.

Tsar Nicolas II mobilized his army against this decision causing Germany to declare War on the Kremlin (Clark, 2014, p. 509).

3.1.4. Russia is Red

The First World War had officially begun, and the Russian Empire, having the largest army in the world at the time, was performing badly, specifically on the Western front. Prussian forces delivered devastating blows to the Tsar's Army. The string of military defeats had demoralized the troops significantly and desertion levels were very high (Tames, 1972, p. 46). The war also inflicted heavy blows to the economy. With access to the outside world cut due to the Prussian occupation of primary ports on the Baltic Sea, Russia was in essence isolated from the international markets (Zickel, 1991, p. 50), heavily indebted to other states, and became the poorest of the powers (Harrison & Markevich, 2012, pp. 5-11).

By 1916 on the domestic front, the situation was in shambles. Labor and food shortages, in addition to the low popularity of the Tsar, sparked social unrest indoctrinated by the growing tide of Marx and Engle doctrines which had gained strong popularity among the working class of the Russian population; and gave rise to a man by the name of Vladimir Lenin, who believed himself to be an orthodox follower of Marxian ideology (Gurian, 1952, p. 8). The February Revolution presented a golden opportunity to Lenin, whose brother had been executed by the autocratic tsarist regime. Lenin, leading the Bolshevik party, opposed the war ever since the start, and with promises of peace gained control of the state on March 2, 1917, after the tsar abdicated the throne (Sklaviadis, 2014, p. 1).

This period is marked by the isolation of the state from the international system, as the internal fighting amongst different socialist revolutionaries, the Bolsheviks and the Tsarist devastated the Kremlin's status. Russia had officially lost its status in the world. A civil war

erupted between the Bolsheviks and the Tsarist; the struggle of the classes was a reality as Marx had prescribed, in practice the internal system of Russia had taken a Hobbesian nature, and the war of all against all dominated the scenes. Under the leadership of Lenin, the Bolsheviks took control of most of the territory of the former Russian Empire abolishing capitalism as a system (Sherman, 1994, p 6). The world witnessed the birth of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1992 (Davis, 2022).

The Russian identity crisis, from a social constructivist nature, continued to morph along with the system of rule. The capitalist system of Tsarist Russia was gone, and along with it the notion of the classes. In essence, Russia was now a communist state under the umbrella of the Soviet Union, a system where atheism was prevalent. The heir to Constantinople from an Eastern Orthodox perspective was no longer the leading rhetoric in the nation. Lenin's literature and scholarly works summarize the situation, particularly in his work *State and Revolution*, and define the role to be played by the proletariat for the state and the revolution in general (Lenin, 1935).

However, the state, being the main actor in the system from both a neo-realist and social constructivist lens remains to have state goals, targets, and foreign policy aims. In the case of the Soviet Union, initially, the ideological motivation was to export the communist school of thought to other states, and it succeeded to a certain extent. The epitome of the exportation perhaps is represented in the role of the USSR in the Second World War, as one of the fundamental foreign policy goals of the Soviet Union was the support of communist takeovers in other countries among others (Hoffmann, 1987, p. 16).

Joseph Stalin was the man who replaced Lenin following his death. He led a large campaign to industrialize the USSR, the vast resources under the control of the Kremlin were

instrumental, and the economy started to grow. The pivotal point in the USSR's role in the international system was during the Second World War. Throughout the time of its establishment the USSR was in isolation from the international system, and the clash of ideologies had taken their toll. It was Adolph Hitler and his invasion of Russia that changed the dynamics. A reproachment occurred between the dominating powers and the USSR, and the intercrossing of the national interests, increased the status of the USSR in the system.

The Germans invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, initiating WWII in the process. As a countermeasure the USSR conducted a swift military campaign in Eastern Poland, Finland, and the Baltic states (Chamberlin, 1956, p.81). In a Mearsheimer-esque offensive realist manner, Stalin was quick to address the security dilemmas from Hitler. Even though there was a treaty of non-aggression between the two states, Hitler's expanding Germany was a threat to the USSR and Stalin was keen on obtaining a buffer zone between the West and the USSR.

Stalin's foreign policy goal of avoiding taking part in the Second World War was not successful (Hoffmann, 1987, p. 16). The Germans declared war on the USSR in 1941 and had reached Moscow and Leningrad. As reinforcements began to arrive to the Red Army from the East, Hitler's army launched an offensive in 1942 in the direction of the south Caucuses eyeing Baku's oil and reaching Stalingrad. Stalingrad proved to be the turning point for the Red Army, a counter-attack initiated in Stalingrad ended up in Berlin in May 1945, marking the end of Nazi Germany (Zickel, 1991, pp. 74-77).

The Soviets had paid dearly in the fight against Nazism. By the time they reached Berlin, 20 million Soviets citizens and soldiers had been martyred as a direct result of the War, which became known as the *Great Patriotic War* in the USSR (Zickel, 1991, p. 77). WWII ended leaving Europe in rubbles. From a Soviet perspective, Nazi Germany and its threat to the security

architecture in Europe was neutralized mainly by their efforts. Remarkably, the victory of the Red Army in the fight against Hitler was similar to the victory of the Imperial Russian Army against Napoleon's Army, and in both cases, the Russians emerged as victors demanding their fair share and recognition of their great power status.

From a conventional neorealist perspective, one might argue, that following the end of the War, the world was not a bipolar system yet as the USSR's Gross National Product (GNP), Energy output, and industrial production represented a small proportion of that of the US (Lebow, 1994, pp. 256-257). Social Constructivists argue that the one versus one nature of the competition between the USSR and USA was of two state identities, whose actions only reinforced the others' identity (Hopf, 2006, pp. 662-674).

3.1.5. The Cold War Era

Following the end of the Second World War, the USSR and the USA mutually parted ways after the objective of removing Germany from the international arena was achieved. Both states were skeptical of the other's motivations, and each action was balanced by a counterreaction by the other side. The decision to unite Germany in 1948 was met with the Berlin blockade, this crisis was one of the motivations for the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1949, which of course was met by the creation of the Warsaw Pact by the Soviets.

In essence, the policies of both states were to balance the actions of the other. An intimate tango was being observed on the international stage as both states conducted their international relations. Internally the situation was different in the Soviet Union. Seven countries in Eastern Europe had communist governments, and controlling or influencing them was conducted by

troops and secret police. Those were how Stalin operated to maintain control in the Soviet Union or as Winston Churchill called it the "*iron curtain*" (Zickel, 1991, p. 79).

When Nikita Khrushchev came to power in 1955, an era of collective leadership started in the Soviet Union, and a policy of de-Salinification began. On an international level, he conducted a much more lenient foreign policy reproachment towards the West, allowing Austria's neutrality between both camps and even agreeing to meet with President Eisenhower and reaffirming Soviet promises of "peaceful coexistence" with capitalism. However, given the dynamic nature of world politics, the everchanging scene of global affairs gave weight to events such as the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 (Zickel, 1991, pp. 82-88).

Leonid Brezhnev's tenure as the head of the Soviet Union also saw turbulent times. However, the most remarkable aspect was the delicate balance of both blocks and the respect of the status quo. This era was titled the détente period, as relations between both superpowers were stable and cooperative to a certain extent, up until the Soviet Army marched into Afghanistan in 1979. Soviet influence around the globe expanded, mainly due to the competition between the USSR and Communist China in the Third World countries, as communist states began popping up in South America, Africa, and South East Asia. Interestingly, the USSR was exercising defensive realism vis-a-vis the United States by maintaining the balance of power, but offensive realism vis-a-vis China by maximizing its influence and power in the international system. However, the avoidance of fundamental economic and political reforms in the USSR forced the state into a decline of power and prestige during the 1980s (Zickel, 1991, pp. 90-95).

In 1985, Mikhael Gorbachev came to power, but little did he know he was to be the first and last president of the Soviet Union. With the USSR's economy in ruins, hit hard by the recession, and the political situation very fragile, he began campaigns titled *Glasnost* and

Perestroika, which in simple terms meant openness and restructuring respectively (McForan, 1988, pp. 166-169). However, the unsuccessful attempt by Gorbachev to salvage the economy of the Soviet Union and the rising national sentiments eventually led to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and as Eastern European countries began to abandon their communist governments Gorbachev remained helpless (Beissinger, 2009, pp. 338-340). In essence, as Francis Fukuyama later wrote, it was the end of history, in this case for the Soviet Union in a literal manner. The Soviet Union officially dissolved in 1991, along with it the Warsaw Pact giving birth in the process to the state of the Russian Federation (Papadopoulos, 2021, p. 1).

The Russian identity as we have observed during the ages has endured a significant amount of shock, adaptation, and change. However, some elements remain cemented in the collective identity of a population, which is formed by its history, norms, values, religion, and culture. The domestic elements between a state and the people are dependent on two main elements, national and economic security, in short, a type of "social contract" that evolves through time and if harmonious maintains the stability of the state.

Russian identity also takes into consideration the geography of the state. As Marshall points out, the plains of eastern Europe are a direct threat to Moscow. History has proven through the campaigns of Napoleon and Hitler, that the buffer zones to Moscow create an unmaintainable supply route for invading armies (Marshall, 2016, p. 5). From a naval point of view, access to warm waters is vital for commerce as Catherine the Great had highlighted.

In parallel, the Cold War was one of the main motivations for Waltz to come up with the theory of Neorealism in 1979, and the intricate studies on the roles and actions of the United States and the Soviet Union during that period from the lens of the balance of power yielded the

debate on polarity in the world system. The end of the Soviet Union introduced a new chapter in this debate as the world system became unipolar under the leadership of the United States.

After analyzing the history of the Russians, all the way from Biblical times we can deduce that they do not settle for second best. The Russian Federation, by heredity, inclines to restore the great power status of its ancestors, however, is the restoration in progress? What are the driving forces and motives behind them? and how are they being achieved?

3.2. Part II: The Current Dynamics

On December 25, 1991, the Soviet flag over the Kremlin came down and was replaced by the white, blue, and red horizontal-striped flag of pre-revolutionary Russia (Papadopoulos, 2021, p.1). The Russian Federation was born out of the ashes of the USSR. The situation was confusing, to say the least, and uncertainty regarding the future of the newly established Russian Federation gloomed. Gorbachev was keen on reforming the USSR and did not have the intent to bring the Union to its collapse. However, he could not escape his fate. Gorbachev was locked in an intense power struggle with Boris Yeltsin. Yeltsin had held the post of first secretary of the CPSU and had been discharged by Gorbachev from his role. Furthermore, he was dismissed from the Politburo in 1988. By 1992, Boris Yeltsin had become the head of the Russian Federation, the legal successor of the USSR (Papadopoulos, 2021, pp. 5-6).

Boris Yeltsin remained president until 1999 (Gidadhubli, 2007, p. 1820). He led a rigorous campaign of "westernization", his foreign policy strategies and objectives included agendas such as arm reduction agreements, openness to the Western states, the initiation of relations with NATO and the EU. To address the dire economic situations of the state, he had commenced negotiations on the accession to the IMF and World Bank (Zonova & Reinhardt, 2014, p. 501).

Yeltsin's tenure as president of the Russian Federation was marked with multiple blunders. On an economic front, he led a large reform campaign to stabilize the broken Russian economy. However, his approaches to the fiscal and monetary problems of the federation did more harm than good to the economy. The Yeltsin government introduced "Shock Therapy" to assist in the transformation from a socialist economy to a market economy. The rapid liberalization of pricing and the loose monetary economy of the Russian Central Bank led to severe hyperinflation as prices increased 1100% during 1992 (Gerber & Hout, 1998, p. 4). Some even suggest that the economic crisis that the Russian Federation went through during the Yeltsin period was more severe than the Great Depression (Nolan, 1995, pp. 17-18). Alexander Rutskoy, the vice president of Russia in 1992, dubbed Yeltsin's economic reforms as "economic genocide" (Shogren, 1992). On the social level, the ideas of liberalization gave weight to the formation of oligarchs in Russian society by means of privatization. By the end of 1996, 88.3% of the Russian Federation's industrial output had been privatized (Roberts et al., 1999, p. 483).

On an international level, the Kremlin under the leadership of Yeltsin opposed NATO expansion and even called for the security architecture be conducted under a pan-European umbrella represented by the OSCE, while NATO remaining a political only organization. He even corresponded multiple times with the leadership of the USA on this matter. In short, the Kremlin was against the neo-containment plans of the West and was inclined to inclusion and not seclusion from the security architecture discussions (Savranskaya & Blanton, 2018).

In 1994, Yeltsin engaged in the First Chechen War in an attempt to consolidate authority and rule in Chechnya. The War went on for two years and ended in a cease fire between the central government forces and the Chechens. This represented another blunder for Yeltsin, as it soured relations with the opposition, due to the use of military force (Dash, 1995, p. 371). In

1996, to the surprise of many he sought a re-election campaign. Many had thought that due to his hearth problems he would retire from politics, however despite the health concerns and the declining ratings, he managed to come through and gathered 53.8% of the votes (Hockstader, 1996).

During the campaign for re-election, Yeltsin had secured US \$10.2 billion loan from the IMF, and following his re-election foreign debt had grown to US \$40 billion (Gordon, 1996). The economic miscalculations eventually led to the 1998 financial crisis of Russia, the default of Moscow on its debts caused the ruble to lose its value and the Russian financial markets to collapse (Clairmont, 1998, p. 3188). This, in addition to the political and security blunders during the 1999 NATO bombing campaign of Yugoslavia represented the straw that broke the camel's back. Yeltsin, suffering from severe heart conditions and a problem with alcohol, fired his prime minister and assigned Vladimir Putin in his place before declaring his resignation in a televised speech on December 31, 1999. Yeltsin left the Kremlin adored by the West and disliked by his own people (Gidadhubli, 2007, p. 1820).

The transitional period from the USSR to the Russian Federation was plagued with crises, be it on the economic, social or political levels. The world itself was also in a confused state of mind, the bipolar world order had been shattered. The fall of the USSR had left a vacuum in the intricate game of balance preserved between the collective West and themselves, and with no alternative actor to fill the void, the international system became unipolar.

It is no secret that the restoration of the multipolar world system is a cornerstone of Russian foreign policy (Makarychev, 2011, p. 354). In its attempt to restructure the architecture of the international system, the Russian Federation has employed a multipronged and multidimensional approach. The complex mechanisms put in place by the Kremlin, by utilizing

hard and soft power methods have changed how Moscow perceives the world and vice versa. Additionally, the advancement of geo-economic components to Russian foreign policy such as energy has extended its influence and reach. Moreover, the pivotal events that have taken place in the world, and more specifically in the periphery of Russia have altered how it views major players in the system such as the US, the EU, and China.

The strategies adopted by Moscow ever since the military interventions in Crimea and Syria in 2014 and 2015 respectively, have spread Russian influence all over the globe. These strategies are multifaced and cover a large range of realms, be it blunt or brutal hard power, such as military interventions in Ukraine and Syria, or a mix of hard and soft power elements such as the activities of Moscow-backed paramilitary organizations, specifically the Wagner group and their activities in Africa and elsewhere, or the utilization of Russian "petro-carrots" and "petrosticks", as Newnham gracefully put it. (Newnham, 2011)

In addition to the direct approaches of the Russian Federation, the Kremlin has also utilized the organizations and institutions that operate under its sphere of influence such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the counterpart of NATO.

3.2.1. Mr. President the Floor is yours

Before the resignation of Yeltsin, months after his appointment prime minister Putin began the Second Chechen War. This came after numerous terrorist attacks on several cities in Russia which were attributed to the Chechen separatists. Prime minister Putin became acting president of the Russian Federation following Yeltsin's resignation in 1999 as presidential elections were set take place on March of 2000 (Nohlen & Stover, 2010, p. 1642). In February, Russian forces had entered Grozny, the capital of Chechnya. Prime Minister Putin's Ratings and popularity soared, and after a month he was elected as president of the Russian Federation.

There were two threats in the eyes of the newly elected president. The first one, was the loss of control, authority, and influence in Russia and the post-soviet states which is known as the near abroad in the Russian lexicon. NATO's eastern expansion and the Chechnyan crisis fall in that arena. And the second, was the loss of financial sovereignty of Moscow, due to the huge amounts of foreign debt and financial obligations.

In his first term as president, he consolidated power back to Moscow, unlike Yeltsin who was a strong believer in decentralization and had given more powers to the self-governing bodies of the federation. Moreover, as Khodorkovsky states, the president initially continued to secure domestic power in a centralized system, where key government positions were filled either with former KGB colleagues of Putin, or members of the successor agency the FSB (Khodorkovsky & Sixsmith, 2022, p. 104). For this reason, Alexander Dugin, one of Russia's leading ideological philosophers regards Putin as a statist (Roberts, 2017, p. 35).

As for the second case, when Putin had assumed office as prime minster in 1999, Russia was bankrupt. Moscow owed US \$ 16.6 billion to the IMF. The upward trend in the international oil prices seemed like Godsent to Putin as the price of a barrel increased from US \$ 20 in August 1999 to more than US \$ 35 by September 2000. Eventually, a stabilization fund was set up to collect the extra profits from oil revenues in 2004 and by 2005 Russia had paid its debt to the IMF 3 and a half years before its deadline (Gaddy & Kuchins, 2008, pp. 204-206). Russia had now regained its financial sovereignty.

After recovering from the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation gradually restored state structures, mechanisms and sovereignty. These steps were primarily conducted under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, after dealing with the Chechnya issue and refurbishing the economic and financial affairs of the state he went on the offensive. In 2007, during the

Munich Security Conference, he launched a harsh diplomatic attack on the collective West and demanded the equal treatment of the Russian Federation as a great power (Stuermer, 2009, pp. 4-11).

During the 2008 Presidential elections, he allowed his protégé Dimitry Medvedev to assume the role of the President of the Russian Federation, with himself accepting the responsibilities of Prime minister (Harding, 2008). The duo launched an invasion of the neighboring country of Georgia in 2008, following a color revolution and calls to join the EU and NATO. The brief war was fought for five days, and Russia ended up increasing its military influence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The Russian Federation was no more a bystander to NATO expansionism in its neighborhood, and reacted in the only way it knew how at the time, by direct military intervention. The strategically significant areas were of utmost importance to the security to Russia's third unofficial capital, the city of Sochi on the Black Sea. Moreover, it was a strong message to the West, Moscow was not as it was in 1999 during the bombing of Yugoslavia, it had recuperated and reinforced its calls for the end of western expansionism. Two months after the short war, Moscow had put forth a plan to reform, restructure and modernize the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation by 2020, with an initial cost of US \$ 700 billion (Trenin, 2016, p. 24).

Medvedev's tenure lasted for one term, that being four years. In 2012, the duo exchanged positions; Putin was re-elected as president and Medvedev took on the responsibilities of the Prime Minister. Putin's second term as president came with a revised foreign policy regarding the role of the Kremlin in International Affairs. In short, the former KGB officer was now implementing offensive realism, where the need for security and the safeguarding of the state's survival were to be ensured by maximizing power (Johnson & Thayer, 2016, p. 1).

Following the world financial crisis of 2008, the world was changing at an increasing pace. The more or less stagnant nature of international affairs was not isolated and followed suit, with it the foreign policy of the Kremlin as an actor in the international system. Moreover, the tools and methods utilized by Moscow to achieve them became more diverse and dynamic.

3.2.2. Russky Mir: Kyiv, Karabagh, and Kazakhstan

3.2.2.1. Eastern Europe

In Russian idiolect, *Russky Mir* means Russian world, fundamentally referring to the post-Soviet states and the areas of influence of the Russian Federation. In simpler terms, *Russky Mir* is the backyard of Moscow, where historically it has had strong influences and presence. Sometimes referred to as the near abroad, the Russky Mir has a significant strategic value to the Kremlin. It acts as a buffer between the heart of the RF and its historical enemies. From the Western side, Ukraine protects the Eastern European Steppe and acts as a buffer from the rest of Europe. From the South Caucuses, it shields it from the Turkic and Iranian regional powers. As for the Central Asian countries, they shield Russia where natural boundaries are not found and were historically used against them by the British Empire in the days of the "Great Game".

All three Russian presidents have been cautious of the threats of Western expansionism to the near abroad. They have all been vocal about it and on numerous occasions vehemently rejected the ideas. However, their calls were left unanswered by the West (Ili & Lévesque, 2013, p. 41).

As Ukraine demonstrated desires to join the EU and NATO and western influence grew in the region, Russia was forced to act. In February 2014, Russian forces in civilian uniforms entered Crimea to support the pro-Russian population of the peninsula. Crimea was of utmost importance to the Kremlin, it housed the Black Sea Russian Naval Fleet in the port of

Sevastopol, essentially the sole warm water port of the Russian Federation (Treisman, 2016, pp. 47-50). Putin was not going to allow the home base of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, the port of Sevastopol, to be relinquished to a country where pro-Western influences have been growing for years.

Moreover, following the events of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. The Ethnic Russian population of the greater Donbas region has faced continuous bombardment. Their rights to exercise their belief, the freedom of speech, and their right to self-determination have been continuously infringed. In 2015, the Ukrainian authorities passed the "Decommunization law", which involved the Ukrainization of the names of cities, towns, and villages from traditional Russian denominations to Ukrainian ones. Furthermore, in places where the majority of the population had ethnic Russian roots, the Russian language was removed from public life, and public servants were required by law to relinquish the Russian language (Andrews, 2018).

The constant eastward expansion desires of the West, in addition to the growing anti-Russian sentiments in Ukraine, forced Moscow to intervene militarily by initiating a special military operation in 2022. Sergei Lavrov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation claimed that the military operation was necessary due to "most blatant violations of rights of ethnic Russian and Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine and the eight-year-long war against them with all signs of genocide, as well as the West's stubborn refusal to bring the Ukrainian authorities to order." (Lavrov, 2022).

The loss of influence in Ukraine was a national security threat to the Kremlin. Ukraine's strategic position on the borders with Russia and its vast size make it a natural buffer against Western expansionism. Moreover, the housing of the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian naval forces, in addition to the degrading treatment of ethnic Russians in Ukraine, and the potential loss of

control over vital oil and gas pipelines which transport Russian hydrocarbon exports to European markets made it an imperative for the Kremlin to intervene militarily albeit by the limited special military operation in an attempt to force Kiev to give up its desires of joining NATO and maintaining at least a neutral position to reassure security dilemmas in Moscow. In short, the entry of Poland, and the three Baltic states into NATO were a huge blow to Russian national interests and Ukraine's desires to joining NATO was something the Kremlin strongmen were not going to allow.

3.2.2.2. South Caucuses

In the South Caucuses, the three post-Soviet countries Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan represent the *Russky Mir*. This geographical space is important to Russia as it provides a buffer to the pan-Turkic aspirations of Türkiye, and acts as a connection zone to the Islamic Republic of Iran, the strategic partner of Moscow in the Region. Ever since the collapse of the USSR, the region has been involved in an ethnic clash between the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis over the region of Nagorno-Karabagh.

The mountainous region was a self-ruling autonomous oblast in the Soviet Union, populated heavily by ethnic Armenians. Following the fall of the Soviet Union, the NKAO in line with Soviet Legislation, specifically the Law on Succession from the Soviet Union (also known as the April 4 law) declared their independence in 1991 (PeopleOfAr, 2020). The referendum was not recognized by the Azerbaijani government and the armed forces were sent to the region to suppress the population's desire for independence. The inter-ethnic communal clashes erupted into a full-scale conflict in 1992. The conflict lasted for two years, between the self-declared defense forces of the unrecognized state of Nagorno-Karabagh and the Armed forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan. In 1994, with Russian mediation, the parties to the conflict

signed the ceasefire agreement also known as the Bishkek protocol (Geukjian, 2016, pp. 207-213).

By the time the ceasefire was signed, the defense forces of the self-declared republic had gained control of the NKAO and the surrounding 7 districts, which they considered as buffer zones. The newly found Russian federation exercised her diplomatic efforts to reach the ceasefire agreement between the two post-soviet countries in 1994. In line with Yeltsin's approach to the security architecture of Europe at the time, the OSCE offered a pan European umbrella under which the conflict resolution was to take place. Thus, the conflict due to its nature of stagnation in terms of negotiations became known as the frozen conflict of the caucuses (Geukjian, 2016, pp. 207-213).

Keeping the conflict frozen in the south caucuses is in line in Moscow's foreign policy regarding its near abroad. As is the case in Moldova, where the breakaway region of Transnistria acts as a tool to exert pressure on preventing the government of Moldova from joining NATO and the EU from one side. And from the other side of the spectrum, the breakaway region allows the Kremlin to act as a peacemaking power (Candiago, 2022). In short, keeping conflicts in the near abroad frozen allows Moscow to keep its influence alive in the CIS.

National interests are dynamic and change over time as certain agendas prioritize others in the hierarchy. Foreign policy follows suit, it adapts to serve and cater to those interests. In September 2020, the Azerbaijani president, with strong military and diplomatic backing from Türkiye, began a military incursion on the self-declared Republic of Nagorno-Karabagh, which lasted for two months (Fraser, 2021). The Russian Federation fearing the loss of influence on both Armenia and Azerbaijan intervened diplomatically and ended the hostilities by brokering the November 9, 2020 ceasefire declaration (Poghosyan, 2020). The declaration was made up of

9 points, perhaps the most important of them being the introduction of Russian Peacekeeping forces into the region to act as a buffer between the Azerbaijani armed forces and the self-defense forces of the Nagorno-Karabagh.

In essence, the non-use of force as a solution for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict adopted by the international community and the RF was now obsolete. The status quo in the south Caucuses had changed along with it, Russian foreign policy regarding the region. The Russian Federation had now boots on the ground after a century-long absence.

3.2.2.3. Central Asia

The post-soviet countries in Central Asia are also part of the Russian near abroad. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan act as a shield that historically defended the Soviet Union from Anglo-Saxon expansionism in Central Asia, primarily from the British colonies on the southern shores of the continent. Moreover, they are countries rich in natural resources, which were fundamental elements for the Soviet Union. Most of these countries are also part of the CSTO. The Collective Security Treaty Organization was founded in 2002, composed mainly of Russia and most of the post-soviet states. In 2009, a Collective Rapid Reaction Force was formed by the CSTO members.

Kazakhstan, in particular, is rich in natural gas. Russia, for decades, has provided the infrastructure to transport the natural gas to European markets via the pipeline systems throughout its territory. Moreover, Kazakhstan is home to Baikonur Cosmodrome the Russian spaceport. In essence, Kazakhstan is a strategic partner to the Russian Federation and an important outpost for the Kremlin in Central Asia, as it shares a 7,000 KM border with it (Pannier, 2022, p. 16).

In January 2022, unrests and riots broke out in Kazakhstan due to a price hike on liquefied petroleum gas. As anti-government protests covered the country, president Tokayev appealed to the CSTO to intervene citing terrorist threats to the country. CSTO members such as Armenia and Kyrgyzstan had previously requested the CSTO for military assistance, however, with both cases being outside the mandate of the CSTO, the organization had not answered their requests. The call of Kazakhstan was the first time where the organization answered and deployed military personnel on the ground (Pannier, 2022, p. 4).

The events unfolded rather quickly, as Pennier puts it "No CSTO decision is made without the Kremlin's approval" (Pannier, 2022, p. 16). Within a matter of 24 hours, the CSTO deployed some 2,500 military personnel on the ground in Kazakhstan to perform their peacekeeping and anti-terrorist operations. The Rapid Reaction Force of the CSTO was tasked with protecting vital infrastructure such as airports, thermal power plants, schools, and hospitals. The significance of this operation lies in the clear messages it emits. The CSTO which was once regarded as a weak and dysfunctional military organization, was now different. It had now conducted a successful mission for the first time in its history.

The Kremlin is cautious to say the least when it comes to color revolutions. It has experienced numerous ones which have occurred in the near abroad from Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia. Whether the events that unfolded in Kazakhstan fall in the category of color revolutions is debatable, however the slightest scent of it caused Moscow to act. The mass antigovernment protests against President Tokayev were squashed in a manner different than the traditional Russian modus operandi. Furthermore, the Kremlin projected a strong and bold statement to China and other actors, which have been competing for influence in the region for two decades or so, that security in Central Asia is under Russian control. Moreover, it projected

signs to Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, both non-CSTO countries, that a military alliance with Moscow is an effective and fast method to deter terrorist activities and ensure security (Pannier, 2022, p. 16).

3.2.3. Syria: The Tale of the Bear and the Lion

Following the end of the Second World War, the USSR began showing signs of interest in the Middle East. Official diplomatic relations between Syria and the Soviet Union were established in 1944 when Syria was still under the mandate of France. Relations between the two states began to grow in 1946. In February of that year, the Soviet Union and the Syrians had a secret agreement in which the Soviet Union was to provide a diplomatic and political umbrella for the newly found Syrian Republic and assist in the foundation of the armed forces of Syria. Two months later on 17 April 1946, the Syrian Arab Republic declared its independence from the French Republic. Relations were further strengthened between the two actors in 1950, when the two sides signed a non-aggression pact (Ginat, 2000, p. 156).

The chain of events which followed in the Middle East during the 1950's and onwards, and as the competition for influence grew between the West and the USSR blocks, pushed the relations between the Soviets and the Syrians to higher levels. The Suez Crisis in 1956 deepened the ties between the USSR and the Syrians, as it represented a win-win situation for both parties. The Syrians would acquire military technology and weapons from the Soviets, in return for growing Soviet influence in the region. Three coup d'états later, Captain Hafiz Al Assad assumed control of the country in November 1970, and the first official visit of President Assad in 1971 was none other than Moscow (Aghayev & Katman, 2012, pp. 2066-2067).

President Assad had read the situation well; he knew that there was no alternative to the Soviet Union in the bipolar world schematics. The strong anti-imperialist and anti-western

sentiments in the society as well as the 15-year-old ties between Syria and the Soviet Union, and the close ideological similarities between Assads' political party, the Syrian Baath Party, and Communism made the choice of alignment obvious. Assad demanded additional military and economic assistance from Moscow, and in return, he provided a listening station, a naval base, and an air base to the USSR. The necessity of having a strong influence zone in the Middle East to ensure nuclear balance in the system implied the offer was tailor-made to the Soviets (Aghayev & Katman, 2012, pp. 2066-2067).

When Gorbachev assumed control of the Soviet Union, the foreign policy of the Union towards the Middle East was redirected. The deteriorating economy of the Soviet Union in the 1980's took its toll on the foreign policy regarding the Middle East, it was no longer about the spreading of Communist ideology and growing influence in the region. The main objective was now about finding economic partners in the ME. This had led the USSR to grow ties with the State of Israel, the arch nemesis of the Syrian Arab Republic.

The relations between the USSR and Syria remained warm until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. The Russian Federation, the legal successor of the USSR had a cooler relationship with Damascus. Naturally, the military and economic assistance from Moscow diminished, however the Russians still maintained their naval base in Tartus and their military generals continued to provide consultations to the Syrian Army (Aghayev & Katman, 2012, pp. 2066-2067).

Following the death of President Hafiz al Asad in 2000, his son Dr. Bashar al Asad was elected president of the Syrian Arab Republic, in an election which was unopposed. 2011 represents the pivotal point in this relationship. Inspired by the Arab Spring, and given the terrible economic, social, and political situation of Syria, citizens took to the streets demanding

reforms from the government. The peaceful protests turned into riots which in turn morphed into armed clashes and ignited what seems to be the never-ending Syrian civil war. As soldiers and officers began to defect from the Armed forces and join the opposition's counterpart Free Syrian Army, the central government representing President Bashar al Asad and the Syrian Baath Party began to lose control of the country (Keil, 2021, p. 258).

Initially, the RF provided a diplomatic and political cover to the leadership of Damascus, by vetoing a western backed UNSC resolution demanding the resignation of President al Asad (Gutterman, 2012). That all changed in 2015, when on September 30, President Putin requested permission from the Federation Council to deploy the Russian military in Syria to fight terrorist activities. The approval came the same day, as Russian Orthodox priests blessed the fighter jets, and Russian involvement in Syria was now official.

The Kremlin's message was clear. They wanted to avoid the unilateral actions of the West in the ME at all costs. Having unpleasant memories from the Yugoslavia campaign and the much recent Libyan experience, Moscow was not going to allow the collective west to turn Syria, a close ally, into another Libya for the sake of regime change. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that "attempts to reproduce the Libyan experience in other countries and regions" such as the SAR is "very dangerous" (Allison, 2013, p. 798).

The motives of Russian involvement in the Syrian Civil War are diverse covering aspects from the domestic arena to the international one. On the domestic level, Moscow was afraid of the spread of ISIS and its extreme ideology into its Southern borders, where several republics such as Dagestan and Chechnya are predominantly high in Muslim populations. We all remember Putin's experience with Chechen terrorism in 1999, he was determined to avoid a

sequel. Moreover, he required a "win" to improve his internal approval ratings as he was struggling to deal with the economic problems (Inozemtsev, 2016, pp. 21-22).

On an international level, the Russians were keen on limiting Western influence in the region and hindering the unilateral actions of the West in countries that have close relations with the Kremlin. Moreover, the strategic importance of Syria to Russia, from a geopolitical point of view made it even more imperative to intervene and secure Russian interests in the region. With Türkiye controlling the straits of Dardanelles and Bosporus and subsequently the transit of military vessels in and out of the Black Sea under the Montreux treaty (Montreux, 1936, Article II), the Russian Naval presence in the Mediterranean was a valuable strategic asset. The deprivation of Moscow from the Naval base of Tartus was clearly a red line.

In short, commenting on Russian intervention into the Syrian Crisis and the motives behind it, Inozemstev claims "Russia would like to restore a Cold War-like world with clearly marked frontiers both sides must not cross" (Inozemtsev, 2016, p. 25), and in this geographical area, Syria falls under Moscow's umbrella. Furthermore, the intervention into the Syrian Crisis was evidence yet again of Moscow's urge to restore its great power status in the region and be on par with other actors in the system who have dominated the arena ever since the fall of the USSR.

3.2.4. Too Many Cooks Spoil the Broth

PMCs are illegal in Russia, and not clearly defined in any international or humanitarian law. However, what are the driving forces behind the rapid expansion of the Wagner group from 1,000 "employees" in 2014 to more than 50,000 by the end of 2022? Moreover, what are the main motives which have made PMCs an integral tool to Russian foreign policy?

The answer to the abovementioned questions come down to one man, who laid the founding stone of the Wagner group. Yevgeny Prigozhin, was a former convict turned restauranter who was also known as "Putin's Chef" due to his catering activities in the Kremlin. In the 1980s he was convicted for bribery and theft and sentenced to 12 years in prison, but was released in 1990 on the count of good behavior (Speri, 2023). Following his release from prison he began work in the grocery business, and after some successful entrepreneurial steps, he obtained shares and interests in domains such as construction, gambling and industry. In 1995, he expanded his portfolio and entered the restaurant business (Barshad, 2022).

The restaurant business offered Prigozhin a great deal of exposure. He began catering the Kremlin banquets and events. His restaurant was the gateway to fame and glory, and more importantly, access to Putin's inner circle. His restaurant called the New Island became a favorite spot for President Putin to entertain his international guest. He hosted French President Jacques Chirac in 2001, and a year later US President George W. Bush. Being part of Putin's inner circle was key for Prigozhin. His catering company (Concord Catering) began securing bids to cater fancy events at the Kremlin, contracts to supply food to the Russian Armed Forces and even contracts to serve government workers and school children (MacFarquhar, 2018). The former convict was now a fully established Russian oligarch.

In 2010, Yevgeny Prigozhin and Dimitry Utkin, a highly decorated intelligence officer founded the Wagner group (Bell, 2023) (Moeder, 2023, p. 4). Western and Russian sources consider the Wagner group as a private military company (PMC), but it is much more than that. Riley Moeder dubs the Wagner group as the "Invisible arm of Russian Foreign Policy" (Moeder, 2023, p. 4), in essence, a tool that allows Moscow to spread its influence yet maintain the aspect

of plausible deniability. Ever since its inception, the Wagner group has grown to be a formidable and strategic asset of the Kremlin. The Wagner operations can be divided into two categories.

First, from a purely military perspective, the Wagner group serves as a proxy for the Kremlin. Such was the case in 2014, when during the Donbass War this group initially appeared assisting pro-Russian forces to seize control of government buildings in Donbass. Another prime example is the involvement of Wagner personnel in the Syrian Crisis. The deal brokered in 2016 between the Syrian Government and the Wagner group allowed their military intervention in regaining oil and gas fields on behalf of Damascus in exchange for a 25 percent cut from the revenues of those liberated fields (Reynolds, 2019, p. 5).

Second, from a business perspective, the Wagner group's business model has thrived in Africa. As of June 2023, the Wagner group holds operations in 20 African countries via 64 shell companies. Wagner provides services in counter-terrorism, security, and mining. Their business activity has allowed them to exploit the natural resources of Africa and ensure a stable flow to finance their military activities (Moeder, 2023, pp. 6-7).

The Wagner Groups operations have seen successes on multiple fronts; besides the economic and financial gains the group has secured throughout the regions in which it operates, it has served the interests of the Kremlin's foreign policy of increasing influence in the Middle East, Africa, and more recently Ukraine. The Wagner group entered the SMO in Ukraine at a later stage and was relied on in places where heavy and brutal urban fighting was involved. In an environment where traditional warfare tactics of the Armed Forces were not successful such as the contact line of the breakaway Luhansk region, in places like Bakhmut the Wagner group came in handy. The experience gained in Syria, Libya, and other regions helped the group in achieving strategic gains.

Despite the important strides the Wagner Group helped achieve during the SMO, disputes began to surface between the MOD of the RF and the leadership of the group. On multiple occasions Prigozhin criticized Shoigu's management of the military operations, some disagreements even went as far back as their involvement in the Syrian file. The discord between the two parties led to what was later known as the Wagner rebellion. The MOD was keen that all Wagner fighters sign contracts with them, a condition that was not taken kindly by the group's leadership. On June 23, 2023 Prigozhin announced that some 25,000 fighters were commencing a march towards Moscow in which he referred to as a "March of Justice" (Serwat et al., 2023, pp. 21-23). This act was immediately dubbed an act of rebellion and treason by the Kremlin strongmen.

On the afternoon of June 24, 2023 President Putin announced an ultimatum to Wagner fighters marching towards Moscow. They either had to leave the Wagner group, or sign contracts with the MOD or redeploy to Belarus. Prigozhin later announced that he accepted the option to redeploy his forces to Belarus, against amnesty on prosecution (Gavin & Oliver, 2023). The 1-day rebellion, was the first time ever since the Chechnya incident that Moscow's authority was challenged. President Putin, the statist as Dugin calls him was keen on his demand. All Wagner fighters must have contracts with the Ministry of Defense.

Following the mini-rebellion or the attempt of, Prigozhin appeared to have had his eyes set on Africa. He was even spotted at the Africa-Russia Summit held in Saint Petersburg on 28 July, 2023 (BBC, 2023). Events changed on August the 23rd, as the plane carrying Prigozhin from Moscow to Saint Petersburg crashed. He was later declared dead following a DNA test (BBC, 2023). Western sources claimed the Russians were behind the crash, but the Kremlin denied the allegations (Burrows & Madhani, 2023). Prigozhin was an influential figure, to say

the least. His aspirations became known when he began the march to Moscow with the Group. The cause of the plane crash carrying him is debated to this day, however, one thing remains certain too many cooks spoil the broth.

3.2.5. "Petro-Carrots" and "Petro-Sticks"

The aspirations of restoring a multipolar world cannot be complete without taking into account the role of economics. President Putin came to power at a time where the finances of the state were in shambles. Economically, he had a huge challenge to reform the devastated Russian economy. He needed a strategic national plan to overcome this issue. The Soviet Union was known for its centrally planned five-year plans, which controlled the economy and gave an outlook of what was ahead. However, Putin had a different strategy, his focus was not based on the traditional Soviet Marxist-Leninist economic ideology, but ironically, a western capitalist one.

During his time in the KGB under Yuri Andropov's leadership, extensive research was conducted on Western literature and theories to help solve the post-Stalin economic situation in the USSR. Putin in turn, based his research on *Strategic Planning and Policy* by William King and David Cleland of the University of Pittsburgh. He later used this theory in his post-doctoral economics dissertation (Gaddy & Kuchins, 2008, pp. 204-206).

After President Putin was inaugurated as the president of the RF, expansion into energy markets became an essential objective for Moscow. In the initial periods of his first term, luck was on his side as rising oil prices helped the Russian Federation to pay the debts owed to the IMF and other grantors. Energy strategy became a cornerstone for the Kremlin, the plan originally adopted in 2003 was to address the energy concerns and its role in the Russian economy as well as certain foreign policy goals until the year 2020. The main goal was to secure

access to global markets as well as to use energy to reassert Russian geopolitical influence in the system. The former director for policy planning at the US DOD, while commenting on the plan, confirmed that Putin's plan is to utilize the Russian energy sector to "once again reassert Russia's imperial status" (Ozawa & Iftimie, 2020, p. 16).

The Russian Federation being the legal successor of the USSR, is not a novice actor in the field of energy. It holds the world's largest natural gas reserves; coal reserves are the second largest and Russian territories contain the world's seventh largest oil reserves. Following the turbulent events of the 1970 Oil Crisis, a new notion entered the sphere of international relations and diplomacy called energy diplomacy. In a nutshell, energy diplomacy revolves around the concept of energy securitization, covering its three main elements: the supply of energy, the demand of energy, and the transit of energy (Zhiznin, 2010, pp. 1-2).

The Kremlin's energy strategy for the year 2030 clearly states that energy has become a crucial element for Russia's national security (Ozawa & Iftimie, 2020, pp. 17-18). When Putin took over from Yeltsin, he began to meticulously consolidate the energy industry into the hands of the state. He utilized state owned Gazprom to nationalize private energy conglomerates such as Sibneft, which was bought by Gazprom in 2005 for \$ 13.1 billion (Kramer, 2005). However, not all of the acquisitions went so smoothly. In 2007, Russneft declined the offer from a Kremlin-verified buyer. Subsequently, Mikhael Gusteriev, the CEO of Russneft was bombarded with multiple and diverse pressure tactics until he caved in and sold his oil company (Kramer, 2007). The message was clear from the former KGB officer, if the state wants to buy a private energy producer, no is not an answer (Newnham, 2011, p. 138).

The consolidation of energy power back to the state was the starting point for President Putin. Once that was settled and the internal actors understood his message, he utilized energy in foreign policy. The use of energy is in foreign policy is not new, as it was an effective weapon of the USSR in the 1990s. It was used to pressure the independence movements in the Baltic Soviet republics. Events such as disruptions in supply and unscheduled maintenances became an effective tool for Moscow to pressure other actors. Between 1991-2008, 40 cases of energy disruption or threats of disruption were recorded by the Kremlin, with all having political motivations (Lough, 2011, p. 8).

States with friendly relations with the Kremlin, such as Belarus, receive energy usually at discounted prices or even customized payment mechanisms which favor them. The heavy reliance on Russian energy also exposes them to the pressure mechanisms of the Kremlin. In 1993, the threats of price hikes, disruptions in supply and unfavorable payment terms forced the national energy company of Belarus, Beltransgaz, to sell 50% of its shares to Gazprom (Lough, 2011, p. 8).

Ukraine on the other hand, fearing the inevitable, passed a law in 1995 preventing the sale of national oil and gas assets. However, the energy fiasco between Russia and Ukraine did not stop there. In 2006, 2009, and 2014, energy supplies to Ukraine were disrupted due to disputes in the pricing systems between the states. Due to the fact that Ukraine also acted as a transit hub for Russian gas to European markets, and the heavy dependence of European states on Russian energy, Brussels was quick to react. The Ukrainian debt package of \$ 4.6 billion to Gazprom was settled due to the mediation efforts of the EU (BBC, 2014).

The use of hydrocarbons as tools in foreign policy has motivated the works of Newnham. He refers to the situation as Russian "petro-carrots" and "petro-sticks". He adds that the heavy reliance by post-Soviet states and EU states on Russian energy has given birth to what Keohane

and Nye would refer to as "asymmetric interdependence" (Newnham, 2011, p. 134) (Keohane & Nye, 2012).

More recently, following the SMO in Ukraine and Washingtons push to find alternative energy sources to its allies in the EU have motivated the Russians to seek alternative markets for the hydrocarbon products. Moreover, the sanctions placed on Russia and Russian energy have forced the Kremlin to pivot eastwards towards China and India. The Asian duo have become unparalleled partners for Russian energy exports, and have kept the revenues for Moscow flowing despite the European sanctions due to their reliance on convenient sources of energy (Sassi, 2022).

John Lough claims that "No Western leader has a level of knowledge of the international energy business comparable to Putin's, based on his strong interest in Gazprom" (Lough, 2011, p. 2). The Russian energy strategies adopted ever since the arrival of Putin to the Kremlin, have transcended the role of hydrocarbons as merely economy assets and drivers. Hydrocarbons in Russia play a vital role as a tool in foreign policy, they are instrumental for the national security of Russia. President Putin has been able to build a system, under which he exploited the dependency of other actors in the system for Russian energy, and gained strong footholds in capitals key to NATO. Moreover, in the near abroad, he has been able to "bribe" the post-soviet states into staying loyal to the Kremlin by offering discounted gas prices. Also, if need be, there is always the tool of the "petro-sticks" which is used to "discipline" the counterparts to stay in line. In short, in the pursuit of restoring a multipolar world, President Putin has revitalized the role of hydrocarbons as tools in foreign policy.

3.2.6. Friends and Foes

3.2.6.1. Russia and West

The Russian Federation under Putin has seen different approaches when it comes to relations with the USA. Initially, following the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR, there were attempts made by Yeltsin to pursuit an integration policy with the West. This was primarily done with NATOs Partnership for Peace programme. However, the events which unfolded in global affairs, such as NATOs campaign against Yugoslavia in 1999 were not taken lightly. Additionally, events such as the invasion of Iraq by US forces in 2003, and NATO actions in Libya in 2011 have all left their mark on the Russia-West dialogue (Ili & Lévesque, 2013, p. 51). The unilateral actions which the west has taken regarding other actors in the system have made the Kremlin cautious to say the least.

The Russian Federation has always been vocal regarding the unilateral actions of the West, its entry into the Syrian conflict based on the narrative that Moscow will not allow the Libyanization of Syria stands testament to the matter. Moreover, the strong disagreements regarding the security architecture of the system have made cooperation nearly impossible.

From a social constructivist perspective, the strong differences in identities and the conformities to them have made dialogue difficult. The Russian federation, seen as the protector of conservative values with strong orthodox sentiments has been more focused on hard security issues. The West on the other hand, remains committed on primarily liberal values such as democracy, the rule of law and individual freedom, and embracing soft security mechanisms and values. The constant rhetoric of marginalizing Russia and Russians out of the European security architecture has only made the Kremlin more determined to achieve a just, equal and multipolar system (Makarychev, 2011, p. 17).

3.2.6.2. Russia and China

The Sino-Russian relationship shares a historical precursor. Both states were communist states and had a standing alliance up until the 1960s. Moreover, the similar roles in the international system of Beijing and Moscow make an impressive argument for their alliance which only seems natural. Both states are permanent members of the UNSC, both have advanced military capabilities and are nuclear powerhouses. Adding to the mix, the common strategic views of international affairs, in which countering US Hegemony and unipolar approaches is a cornerstone for both states, unambiguously call for the strategic cooperation (Ili & Lévesque, 2013, pp. 55-71).

Furthermore, the growing economy of China and the constant demand for energy has placed Moscow into a position to fill the gap. This phenomenon represents one of the apparent motives of Putin: pivot eastwards and find alternatives to the European energy markets.

Although signs show that there is a growing competition between the two powerhouses, primarily over influence in Central Asia, the Sino-Russian relations are "warm". However, a historical perspective from a social constructivist opinion concludes that warm relations between the two have almost always ended in clashes as was the case in the 1960s and in 1989 (Ili & Lévesque, 2013, p. 71). Another hiccup on this path would be the cultural aspect, in which the differences between the two countries make it difficult for long term relations. Voskressenski notes that these differences between the cultures make it difficult to establish "equal diplomatic relations" (Voskressenski, 2003, p. 15).

The fact of the matter remains clear, as for the time being, the common views on global affairs and the equal approach against Western unilateralism has pushed Beijing and Moscow even closer to achieve the primary goal of restoring a multipolar world system. However, how

can the actions performed by President Putin be explained from a structural realist point of view? and how does Russian history, identity and culture play a role in the chain of events? Can a Waltzian approach and a social constructivist lens provide us with a rationalization on Russian motives to restore a multipolar world system following their military interventions in Crimea and Syria?

4. Chapter 3: Attempting to Decipher the Enigma

After analyzing the track record of modern-day Russia under the leadership of President Putin in the last two decades or so, in this section, this thesis will attempt to decipher the reasoning and rationalization of the motives of Russian foreign policy from both a neo-realist and social constructivist perspective. As mentioned before, the neorealist school in international relations focuses the analysis on the state level, which is the only actor in the international system. However, neglecting history, culture, and identity as a driving force in the adoption of foreign policy objectives will undervalue the approach. Hence, the social constructivist approach will assist in this aspect, to offer a more complementary discussion.

Furthermore, this section of the thesis will be used to test the main hypothesis of this paper which states that "The military interventions of the Russian Federation in Crimea and Syria were the starting point to restore a multipolar world system.". The discussion will either verify or negate the hypothesis presented and follow through as a foundation for the conclusion of the thesis.

The Russian Federation ever since the rise of Vladimir Putin, has seen important developments. The Second Chechen war (1999), the military interventions in Georgia (2008), Crimea (2014) and Syria (2015) and more recently the SMO in Ukraine (2022). Evidence has pointed that the Munich Security Conference of 2007 was a key moment in the chain of events. It

was during this Conference that president Putin launched a harsh diplomatic attack on the collective West, signalling out the United States of America for its unilateral actions in the system which he deemed unacceptable.

The importance of the military intervention in Syria is vital for the elaboration of Russian foreign policy goals and objectives. In 2015, once Russian fighter jets entered the skies above Syria it was the first instance in post-Soviet Russia that a military intervention had taken place outside of the near abroad. The ramifications of this intervention are vital as it signalled Moscow had entered a new phase in foreign policy. Russia was no longer operating in post-soviet space, or the traditional buffer zone which kept Moscow safe, but in fact its hard power was now present on the shores of the Mediterranean.

4.1. The Waltzian Approach

4.1.1. Neorealism and the Russian Case

Structural realism was chosen as a reliant theory for this thesis as it is the best theory that can explain the Russian case. All the criteria by which the ties are made between the theoretical approaches of Waltz and the actualization of those in the Kremlin's actions and reactions conform nicely. The Waltzian approach relies on certain ingredients for actors to survive in the anarchic system, where the notion of self-help determines the pathways. These components for power are state integrity in the system, state security and economic prosperity.

Waltz also highlights the role of resources, be it natural, demographic, military or economic. These resources are instrumental for the growth of a state's power in the system, but what is more important perhaps is the skilful management of these resources. Also, the uneven distribution of power in the anarchic system creates the need for bandwagoning and alliances. Another element is represented in the anarchic nature of the system where the lack of a

governing or regulating force to manage interstate relations creates an environment of mistrust among actors. The mistrust and the constant competition of actors to accumulate power gives rise to what Waltz refers to as the security dilemma.

For the Russian case, it is quite evident that the rational of the continuous leadership ever since Ivan the Great has been based on addressing security dilemmas. History itself has proven to the successive Russian leaderships that their security concerns were correct. Napoleon and his army were roaming freely in Moscow until the Russians fought back. So was Hitler and the Germans. Later on, NATO and its continuous urge to expand eastwards disregarding the constant Russian warnings of them. The unipolar design of the international system ever since the fall of the Soviet Union, had allowed NATO under US leadership to encroach on spaces that were previously part of the soviet bloc. For the Russians, this was unacceptable. However, given the unipolarity of the system and the lack of power on Moscow's side, the demands to cease NATO expansion eastwards were vocally limited.

Following the NATO Bucharest Summit of 2008, both Georgia and Ukraine were granted into the NATO Membership accession program (NATO, 2008). An act viewed as a threat to the security of the Russian Federation, which led to their military intervention in the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Following the Kremlin's decision to intervene militarily in the region was the starting point to the implementation of the plan to restore a multipolar world system. Keeping in mind that these events came after a year of Putin's diplomatic attack in Munich against the collective West.

Following the military intervention in Georgia, the Russian Federation began the largest military upheaval program in its history with an estimated cost of around US \$ 700 Billion (Trenin, 2016, p. 24). It was a clear message to the West: the Russian bear was waking up from

his hibernation. However, the interventions in Georgia were minor and their prime objective was to send a message to the unipole of the period, the USA, that no means no! It was unacceptable to the Russian Federation to have its security dilemmas and genuine fears disregarded, and in an act of rubbing salt on the wounds, NATO kept on expanding.

Russia considers the West with its rhetoric and actions an existential threat to the survival of the state. The self-help doctrine of Moscow forced it to interfere militarily to send a strong signal. However, the Russian leadership had foreseen that it was not alone in the calls for the end of a unipolar system. The main issue remained the fact that there was no great power alone in the system to challenge the USA as the hegemon in and demand an equal seat.

This act had forced the culturally different states of Russia and China to form a strategic bond and to challenge the unipolarity of the world. Both states alone lacked the power to shift the balance of power in the system. However, their alliance has brought them close (Mearsheimer, 2023). The goal is clear, the restoration of a multipolar world system which is void of a single hegemon. This has been stated in the Russian Federations Foreign policy objectives.

When assessing the actions and policies implemented by the Kremlin, one can deduce its actions are in line with achieving its goal. President Putin has consolidated power in the state, be it economically and financially by the actions of state-owned companies such as Gazprom, or by installing close associates in key position in the Russian state. Catherine Belton calls them "Putin's People", who are mostly former KGB and FSB associates in the inner circle of President Putin (Belton, 2020).

Another aspect which falls in line with the consolidation of power in the state was the constant demand of Putin himself that Wagner group fighters have contracts with the MOD: the

key point in the arguments between the late Prigozhin and Putin. It was unacceptable for Putin to have highly trained and experienced individuals who have access to military grade equipment to roam freely in all corners of the world, and particularly in post-soviet space. Left unattended, they represented a ticking time bomb and hence their identities and consolidation of their power was necessary for the Kremlin to neutralize any threats that may arise in the future from PMCs. The state is the primary actor in the system and hence all affairs must be represented by it.

Moreover, the post-soviet space is vital to the Russian Federation as it represents multidimensional importance. In addressing the security dilemmas on multiple fronts, the Near abroad presents itself as the main buffer zone between expansionist ambitions of other powers and Russia. Also, the near abroad serves as a forward operating base for the Armed forces of the Russian Federation. It also houses vital infrastructure to the Armed Forces of Russia such as the Port of Sevastopol in Crimea and the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. Economically they serve as a secure logistical link for Russian pipelines targeting foreign markets, and for trade corridors with other economic partners.

The argument for the Near abroad from a Russian perspective is quite simple once focus is made on Moscow's national interests as Churchill advised. Russia, as a rising power with aims to restore a multipolar system requires the "rights" it once had when the Soviet Union was still alive (Ili & Lévesque, 2013, p. 51). These "rights" are imperative to Moscow to achieve its goal. In order to restore the great power status and subsequently a multipolar international arena, the Kremlin requires a launching pad. This pad is formed by the post-Soviet states, which provide Russia with an extended reach out of the Eurasian zone into the international one. In other terms, the securitization of Russian "rights" in these regions permits Russia to be the regional hegemon, and thus extend its power and capabilities to achieve the multipolar desires of the system. The

development of a framework in the Russian foreign policy intelligentsia with respect to the near abroad is the manifestation of a Monroe Doctrine à la Kremlin, as demanded years ago by Yevgeny Ambartsumov, the chair of the Russian state Duma Foreign Relations Committee in 1993 (Evans & Novak, 1993).

While keeping the balance of power in the near abroad on the side of the Kremlin, with vital economic, political and security decisions at Moscow. By the creation of asymmetric interdependence as Nye called it, president Putin has forced multiple near abroad countries to bandwagon with the Kremlin to secure their own interests. Moreover, the presence of Moscow is needed in the region to fend off the prospects of influence from other actors mainly NATO in Eastern Europe and China in Central Asia.

While discussing Russia's moves and policies from a Neorealist perspective it is vital to also take into consideration the branching of neorealist approach. Are the actions of the Kremlin explainable via a defensive Waltzian method or does the offensive Mearsheimer approach fit better?

4.1.2. Security or Power

Neorealism has two main branches which operate under its sphere of influence: defensive and offensive. Kenneth Walts, who is considered the founding father of Neorealism as a school in international relations, has a defensive perspective. John Mearsheimer in his book "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics" followed on the footsteps of Waltz, but the modifications he made in his approach later led to the distinction between offensive and defensive Neorealism.

The starting point of the debate is the agreement that the system is anarchic, and thus all the states, being the primary actors of the system pursue a policy of self-help to secure the survival of the state. The anarchic nature of the system, creates an environment of doubt and

uncertainty, where states are prone to act in an egoist manner. As survival of the states becomes the rhetoric, states seek to increase their capabilities causing the rise of security dilemmas in other states (Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 3).

The difference between the defensive and offensive branches of Neorealism is in this segment. In essence, it is how states choose to increase their capabilities. Defensive neorealists argue that the states, in order to address their security dilemmas, become security maximisers. On the other hand, offensive neorealist argue that the states become power maximisers, with the ultimate aim of reaching hegemony.

When looking back to the events of the Russian military interventions in Georgia in 2008, the situation would quite clearly be seen as a defensive neorealist action. The tendencies of the Georgian leadership at the time to join the EU and NATO were unambiguously perceived as threats to Moscow's security. Similarly, the annexation of Crimea can be analyzed in this manner. The desires of the Kiev, following the Maidan Revolution of moving closer to the West and even considering being part of Washington led NATO, was a problem for Russia. Moscow views the United States is "out to get them" (Taylor, 2018, p. 17), and having NATO presence in the strategically important location at the basin of the Black Sea, which is also home to the Russian Black Sea fleet is a national security issue. Hence, that state represented by the Kremlin behaves in a matter to maximize security.

In the Syrian Arab Republic, where the strategically important Russian naval facility of Tartus is located, the ripple effect of the Arab Spring, had made the presence of Russia in the region under existential threat. Moreover, as the demonstrations in Syria turned to armed conflict, foreign fighters from around the globe flooded en masse. Most of these fighters came from Russia and from Central Asia, from countries which were part of the USSR.

Monitoring the lexicon used by the Russian officials, the intervention in Syria was against fighting terrorism. The bitter memories of the Chechen Wars were hard to forget in Moscow. Having the fighters return home to Russia and the Central Asian countries bordering the Federation and wreak havoc was unacceptable to Putin himself, let alone Russia as a state. The terrorism issue, along with the potential loss of Russia's naval presence in the ME were some of the reasons why the Kremlin entered the arena in Syria, its behavior correlating with Waltz-ian approach of maximizing the security of the state.

In Nagorno Karabagh, the resumption of hostilities between the Azerbaijani Armed Forces and the NK Defense Army in 2020 paved the way for the Russian Federation to intervene once again. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan are part of the Russky Mir. As the Azerbaijani Armed Forces initiated military advancements in the region, Russia had no other option but to intervene. Having two simultaneous conflicts in the Russky Mir was unacceptable to the Kremlin as the SMO in Ukraine required full focus. Moreover, the delicate situation which Moscow found itself in, forced Putin to make a decision between the least difficult of the two alternatives. Armenia is a strategic and essential outpost for Russia in the Caucuses. On the other hand, Azerbaijan's status in Russia grew following the initiation of the SMO in Ukraine as a means to bypass European sanctions and deliver Russian hydrocarbon exports via Baku pipelines. Being caught between a rock and a hard place, the Russian Federation was quick to resort to diplomatic mediations to coerce both sides into signing the November 9 trilateral declaration in Moscow.

The trilateral declaration allowed for a grosso modo acceptable situation for all sides, as Azerbaijan managed to keep multiple regions it had occupied in the NK region, Armenia had the chance to end the hostilities and delay territorial losses, and Moscow introduced Russian peacekeeping forces in the region, extending its soft power and securing national interests in

both post-soviet countries and in the NK region. A chaotic Russky Mir is a threat to the Kremlin, and intervention was necessary to preserve the security of the region, and subsequently the security of Russia.

After analysing the behaviour of the Russian Federation under Vladimir Putin, the cases presented, as isolated incidents quite clearly seem to portray aspects in which the Kremlin utilized security maximizing methods to address the security dilemmas. Moreover, as actions seemed to be instigated by the West per Russian sources, and the West being seen as out to destroy Russia and seize its resources (Taylor, 2018, p. 18), it becomes clear why Moscow views these events as threats to its survival.

However, once looking at the events as a whole, what's obvious might not be the case. While the reactions of the Kremlin may appear to be characterized as security maximizing, the holistic picture appear, as power maximizing. Furthermore, the shift to an interventionist foreign policy by Putin has allowed the Russian Federation to seize opportunities which have risen as a result of reduced US involvement. By presenting itself as an alternative and filling the vacuum left by the US in certain areas, the power maximization exercised by the Kremlin on multiple fronts aims to restore the great status of Russia and eventually a multipolar world system.

4.2. The Social Constructivist Lens

4.2.1. Russia and the Great Power Identity Crisis

One would be leaning toward defining a state as a great power if the state was part of some international "super club" such as being a permanent member of the UNSC, but that would seem to be a shallow understanding in terms of defining the great power identity. The interpretation is deeply rooted into the national doctrine portrayed by the masses and their perspective of the state in the great power interplay of states. Ever since the emergence of

Rossiya, the consecutive leaderships have been constantly fighting for recognition as a great power. In the European arena, the center of the great power clashes, this identity characteristic was prevalent among all the actors. To be a great power in the European field was to be identified as a pole in the multipolar system of the time.

Great power status was highly interlinked with material resource characteristics: the size of the territory an actor controlled, the diversity and abundance of resources under its disposal, the size of its army, and the control over vital trade routes to name a few. When Ivan the Great expanded the size and control of the Tsardom, he was aiming for acknowledgement for great status. Similarly, when Peter the Great established a navy and began a campaign to modernize the diplomatic corps and armed forces to be on par with his European counterparts, he had the same goal in mind.

The parts that the Russian Kingdom, Tsardom and later the Empire played in the European security architecture cemented their role as a pole in a multipolar system. The treaty of Westphalia, the Congress of Vienna, and the Hague Convention stand witness to the phenomenon. In addition to the high correlation between the great power identity status and materialistic components, there are certain non-materialistic elements which have gained stride in the identification of great power status, these include the roles of religion, ideology, perceptions and ideas.

The emergence of the Soviet Union, with the communist ideology, the identity of Russia further developed and its role further fortified as a pole in a multipolar and following the defeat of Hitlers Germany in WWII, in a bipolar system. However, the USSR, being an atheist state had limited the role of the Russian Orthodox Church, which for ages had played a pivotal role in defining motives for Russian identity and subsequently Russia's place in the international

system. Tsygankov views Russian Orthodox Christianity as an important aspect of Russian identity (Tsygankov, 2012, p. 29), even though Russia is a multicultural state. He also considered the USSR as a misrepresentation of Russian identity. The notion in the narrative of considering the Kievyan Rus, the founding fathers of Russia as the "Holy Rus" has been dominant in the Russian Orthodox Church (Kasapovic, 2023, p. 4). The transmitting of the idea that the Russian identity is Holy, and by this Holiness has the duty to uphold Orthodox values and traditions to protect the Russians from threats. Moreover, this narrative has enforced the need to be a great power, as Russia is the decedent of the "Holy Rus", and as Patriarch Kiril stated this strive for greatness is due to the foreign policy of Russia which is based of moral Orthodox Values (Curanović, 2018, pp. 257-258). In essence, amplifying the role of morality in Russian identity.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union paved the way to the appearance of countless scholarly works which became cornerstones in international relations. Francis Fukuyama in "The End of History", argued extensively on how the democratic liberal west had won over their counterparts. In an ideological inquiry and debate, he portrayed how liberalism had become triumphant; however, does this imply that history has stopped at this moment? The answer quite simply is no. The fall of the Soviet Union and the actualization that liberalism had prevailed implies that a chapter has been concluded, but it does not imply that the book has been closed. The emergence of new, alternative ideologies to liberalism, backed by the innate and ideational urge to restore previous status and historical heirdom, the counterparts of liberalism fight back with the simple desire to restore previous glory, position and, in their perspective, their "rights".

Samuel Huntington in turn, the previous mentor of Fukuyama, published his work titled "The Clash of Civilizations", which later initiated a great amount from debates in international relations circles. His argument revolved around predicting the geopolitical map of the world

following the end of the USSR. He concluded that the next clashes were going to be at the fault lines where different civilizations meet. As for the Russian Federation, he notes that the Russian economy is weak, the army is incapacitated, and demographically the population is declining, and hence, Russia as a state cannot survive against the rise of China and the united West. He called for the integration of Russia into the collective West, a phenomenon history saw during the days of Yeltsin. However, the ambitions of both Huntington and the west of absorbing Russia failed to materialize. As for the West, he called on them to respect the status and role of the Russian Federation as the leader of the Christian Orthodox bloc and to acknowledge the legitimacy of its security dilemmas.

On another note, there are certain perceptions and ideas which are critical to the formation of Russian identity. In this aspect, Tsygankov considers that having the notion of yearning for a strong and socially defending state able to shield its own subjects and the idea of a Russia as a great power in the world is part of the Russian identity (Tsygankov & Tsygankov, 2021, p. 5). Another aspect of these perception is how Russians and Russia view the CIS. In the perspective of Russian identity, the former Soviet States which span from Central Asia to Eastern Europe are still somehow considered subjects and hence are included in the shielding process of the centralized strong state. That is, the Russian identity defines these states as geographical locations in which Russia has certain "rights", and inherently these post-soviet states are to adhere to those rights.

Identity itself is a crucial element to study in the perspective of social constructivism, which in turn leads to understanding the direction of the adopted foreign policy. The innate desire of Russia to identify as a great power is mainly due to historical precursors which have dictated how foreign policies in Russia were oriented. However, the confused nature of Russian

identity as the USSR fell, and the newly established Russian Federation was struggling and required some time to recuperate and rediscover itself. Communism was now gone, and the ideas of integration with the West dissolved when NATO started bombing Yugoslavia. With the absence of a ruling ideology, how can the masses be reoriented and what are the step to do so? Why is the role that current Russian President Vladimir Putin has played very important to the crystallization of Russian identity?

4.2.2. Putinism

The answer to the above-mentioned questions can be summed up in one word – Putinism. Ever since his inauguration as President of the Russian Federation, he has portrayed himself as a statesman. His speeches, declarations and plans have always been centred around the state itself. This has led to prominent scholars, academics and international relations philosophers to label him a statist. Moreover, the arrival of the former KGB man to the Kremlin with a plan to restore the state and the status of the Russian federation with a given set of tools, methods and schematics have compelled some scholars such as Applebaum to label the approach as Putinism.

Applebaum's argument on as how Putinism can be characterized as an ideology is based on the following observations. First, Putinism offers an economic doctrine, which runs the financial affairs of the state. Second, the notion contains a political philosophical approach. Third, it entails a theory of history which provides an explanation to historical events for the Russian context. Finally, Putinism, serves to grant legitimacy to the state and leadership.

Ever since Ivan the terrible began the expansion campaign of the Tsardom, the demographics of the state changed dramatically. The previous Grand Duchy of Moscow now had subject from different ethnicities and religions. The expansion of the borders did not stop there as it was continued by Peter the Great and Catherine the Great. The constant expansion campaigns

swallowed up subjects from different backgrounds, until they resulted in the formation of a territory having the borders of the modern-day Russian Federation. The decades long rule of the USSR followed suit, which incorporated republics from the periphery of the Russian state into one centralized power. The multicultural aspect of the Republic kept growing. Nowadays, modern-day Russia is considered a multicultural state containing republics of different ethnicities, cultures and religions. Uniting them under one doctrine might be difficult, but President Putin has managed to do so.

One of the central pillars of Putinism is the concentration on a political philosophy. Currently the dominating features in the Kremlin narrative revolves around Orthodox and Conservative values. Under Putin's watchful eye, the role of the Russian Orthodox Church has grown to be similar to what it was during the days of pre-soviet Russia. The ROC plays a leading role in identifying threats and goals of Russia and consequently Russian foreign policy. Moscow is portrayed as the protector, similar to the Empire days, of Orthodox Christians around the world.

The justifications offered by the ROC and Kremlin officials summarize the situation. When Russia annexed Crimea, Donbass and Luhansk the justification was revolving around the protection of ethnic Orthodox Russians in Ukraine which were being discriminated by Kiev authorities. As for the military interventions in Syria, the photographs of Russian Orthodox priests blessing fighter jets were quite compelling and painted a vivid image. The Russian Armed Forces had the blessing of the ROC, their actions in Syria were noble and their intentions were to fight the forces of evil. The discord continued to revolve around the realities that military intervention was to fight terrorism and offer protection to the Christian communities in Syria. The notion of spiritual and moral superiority was omnipresent, the intervention was even referred

as a "Holy War". In his Christmas interview on January 7, 2018 Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all of Russia declared the following: "...there was a very important idea in Russia's participation [in Syria] - to protect the Christian minority. Thanks to Russia's participation, the genocide of Christians was thwarted" (Tass, 2018).

As for the importance of Crimea to Russia, the roots of the narrative also follow a similar trajectory in the integration of Russia's Orthodoxy. Putin himself linked the annexation in 2014 to the spiritual importance of Crimea to Russia. He stated that Prince Vladimir was baptized in Crimea as Christianity was adopted by the Rus, and continues to note that Crimea is as important to Russia as Temple Mount in Jerusalem is important to Jews and Muslims (Comerford, 2015).

The political philosophy also includes elements of Conservatism, with the aim of protecting the subjects from the threats of western liberal values. This approach has resonated highly with the conservative Christian and Muslim communities in Russia. Moreover, Putin believes that religion has a role to play in shaping values (Roberts, 2017, p. 38). In 2007, during his famous speech at the Munich Security Conference he attacked the West for its universalism in defining human rights, and the selective approach for international law. The dominant narrative in conservative Putin's approach is focused around the notions of high morality, Russian values and approaches to human rights and international approach. The narrative of the ROC has been focused on forcing Russia to live up to its moral obligations and "act as a teacher" in the international system (Curanović, 2018, p. 258).

Another central pillar of Putinism lies in its interpretation of the economic ideology of the Russian Federation. Putin's dissertation in 1997, titled "Strategic Planning of the Reproduction of the Mineral Resource Base of a Region under Conditions of the Formation of Market Relations." focused on mining resource management and its role in the development of the

Russian economy (Danchenko & Gaddy, 2006, p. 3). Two years later, in 1999, he published an article in the Russian Mining Institute Journal discussing Russia's energy and fuel projects (Balzer, 2006, p. 48). Putin had understood that the survival and development of Russia depended heavily on its natural resources and their management.

Putin's dissertation also highlighted the role of private enterprises and how they operate based on personal interests, and therefore they cannot be trusted (Danchenko & Gaddy, 2006, p. 5). He concluded his argument by favoring a market economy, with intense state regulations. The focal points in Putinisms economic thought revolve around the vital role of Russia's natural resources and their management through state regulated markets. In other words, as Applebaum states it is the reliance on crony capitalism.

As the Russian Federation established, the liberal approaches of Yeltsin had led to the privatization of many state-owned corporations which delt with natural resources. At one point even the hydrocarbon giant Gazprom was considered for privatization. Putin's arrival changed the approach. The previously privatized corporations, such as Sibneft and Russneft were renationalized by acquisitions conducted by Gazprom. The Russian hydrocarbon market became essentially under the control of the state in an indirect manner.

The Russian energy market is not fully nationalized and private enterprises still exist, however the acquisition methods implemented with Russneft sent a clear message to owners of the private companies in the domain. Their actions and interests should serve the state and the policies set by the Kremlin to regulate the energy market. On the foreign front, the process of energy securitization, such as the transportation of hydrocarbons and the securement of markets to Russian energy exports. Putins approach was the creation of an asymmetric dependence to European markets in return for influence and power in key NATO capitals. Russian energy

exports are vital to the EU, however the sanctions placed by the them following the Russia-Ukraine fiasco have led to the exploration of different markets (Cholacu, 2018, p. 357).

The pivot to the East, mainly in the form of tapping into the Chinese and Indian markets have kept the revenues flowing to Moscow. Moreover, as Newnham argues, the Russian "Petrocarrots" and "Petro-sticks" have revitalized how Moscow conducts foreign policy while using energy supplies, transports and markets to the fulfilment of the ultimate goal of multipolarization and the establishment of Russia as a pole.

President Putin also concentrated on the theory of history as a form to consolidate national identity. Ever since his arrival, he has been keen on celebrating Victory Day, the day in which the Red Army entered Berlin, defeating Nazi Germany in May 9, 2023. It is not in vain that the sentiments of the Soviet Union still run high in the mindset of Putin. He considers the fall of the USSR the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century. He also believes, that focus on certain events in history unify the general population despite the differences created by multiculturality.

The creation of a unified, consolidated and institutional national identity for the masses is essential in Putinism. The Russian identity being focused on historical trends serve the ultimate goal of multi-polarization by offering the alternative. The Russian identity perceives that it was Communism that shielded the Russians from the corrupt Capitalist approaches of the West, and it was the Red Army that defeated fascism in Nazi Germany (Engström, 2014, p. 366). The sense of the ultimate battle between the forces of good and evil, has enhanced the fusion of perception behind the anti-hegemonic western world order. Moreover, this narrative has shaped Russian national identity, the sense of pride and the view of Russia as a superpower, which have reinforced president Putin as the spearhead in the plight against Western hegemony.

Every leader in the world requires a sense of legitimacy to continue to serve in their respective domains. Legitimacy is important as it provides the legal basis for the presence of certain individuals in leadership roles. The case is not different for the Russian Federation. The system of rule in Russia according to its constitution is described as "... democratic federative law-governed state with a republican form of government." (Const. of RF, Article I, § 1). Putin himself has reiterated multiple times that the Russian people have chosen democracy (Evans, 2008, p. 6). However, a key note on this matter is that he vehemently argues that democracy should not be imported from foreign countries, but the universal understandings of democracy should be applied and adopted taking into consideration Russian life, reality, traditions and history (Evans, 2008a, p. 902).

President Putin relies on a notion, as Evans calls it, the "sovereign democracy". Applebaum in turn refers to this form of rule as "electoral authoritarianism", or "managed democracy". Putin clearly states that no one outside of Russia has the right to interfere in the internal affairs of the nation or to evaluate the democratic process of Moscow (Evans, 2008a, p. 903). President Putin has constantly criticized the west for spreading democracy in the near abroad of Russia. He categorically rejects the actions of the West in this matter and is quite cautious for the Russian case.

The constant interference of the collective West in the affairs of countries part of the Russky Mir have consolidated legitimacy to Putin as the defender of Russian sovereignty. Color revolutions instigated on the bordering countries of the Russian Federation are seen as clear threats to Russian national identity and national security. Moreso, the actions of the west have given rise to a narrative of superior and inferior. The West's evaluation of the levels of democracy are definitively rejected by the Russian identity perceptions. These have also

provided more legitimacy to Moscow to act more bluntly when it comes to the near abroad, given the intense belief of "rights" in these geographical locations to the Russian identity. In short, the notion of being told what to do and how to do it does not fit well with the Russian identity mentality, especially if the directives come from parties that are considered unfriendly.

What Putinism has managed to do in this aspect is to provide a metaphorical cover to the restored post-soviet Russian identity and perceptions, in the absence of an actual ruling ideology. Moreover, Putinism has found a method to unify the multicultural, multiethnic and multireligious Russian society under the doctrines of the state and nation. Putin himself has stated that "... Russia was created as a super centralized state. That's practically laid down in its genetic code, its traditions, and the mentality of its people" (Putin et al., 2000, p. 86). High nationalism by the intertwined experience of the masses in Patriotic Wars have created a bond that has solidified power and given a driving edge to Putin to fulfil the ultimate goal of multi-polarization of the international system.

Furthermore, the constant focus on the state and service of the state by the Kremlin elite led by Putin have created a sense of pride and duty by which the strategic and tactical uses of state resources and assets have served to shield the society, and cement the role of Russia as a great power in the alleys of Russian national identity.

4.3. Obstacles in Sight

Great powers often have multiple tools and methods at their disposal to implement their foreign policy goals. Among these tools are the hard and soft power elements of each state. Moreover, the constant competition of great powers to maximize security and power creates an environment where obstacles might rise in the execution process of these objectives. After all, in the anarchic structure of the international system, smooth sailing is not a given.

The Russian Federation under the leadership of President Putin has put forth the aim of restoring a multipolar world system. However, the meticulous calculations of the elite in the Kremlin have certain obstacles which require their full attention for the implementation of Moscow's plan. As previously discussed above, for Russia to restore its great status it requires a launching pad, which will cement its position as the sole regional hegemon, and then expand to the international system.

From this perspective there are two important situations which the Kremlin needs to address. First, the soft power mechanics of Moscow need restructuring, particularly in the Russky Mir. And second, the alliance forged with the Beijing requires careful and calculated approaches to preserve the balance of power in regions which are intertwined and both states have interests in them.

4.3.1. Soft Power

In the 1980s Joseph Nye introduced the concept of soft power into the vast academic domain of international relations (Nye, 2004). By 1990 as he published his article titled "Soft Power" in the Foreign Affairs Journal the term became instrumental in the field of IR. He argued extensively between the capabilities and methods of states to achieve foreign policy goals. Power itself is the ability to affect other actors to achieve the desired goals by the means of coercion or payment or attraction.

The components of a state's soft power rely on three main ingredients: the culture, the political values and the foreign policies. The culture needs to be attractive to other actors in the system, the political values have to be values which others are keen on adhering to, and the foreign policies must be conducted under the auspices of legitimacy and moral authority (Nye,

2013). On the other hand, hard powers rest on the military capabilities which are under the control of the state and the ability to force other actors to obtain the desired outcomes.

Being regarded as one of the founding fathers of neoliberalism, Nye argued that states should not only rely on the hard power mechanisms that they possess, but also focus on soft power elements which will allow them to reach their foreign policy goals in a more swift and smooth manner.

The Russian Federation has traditionally been a fan of blunt and hard power, and there is no doubt about the capabilities of the Russian Army. However, the everchanging dynamics of the international system, along with the change of foreign policy goals and objectives of great powers requires them to draft foreign policies which include soft power element to ensure the desired outcomes are achieved. In this sense, foreign policy officials, ever since the arrival of Vladimir Putin, particularly during the start of his second term as president of the Russian Federation have attempted to incorporate the soft power game into their foreign policy.

In 2007, the year known for Putin's diplomatic attack on the US and the collective West in the Munich Security Conference, is also the year in which soft power mechanisms were institutionalized in the Russian Federation. By a presidential degree, the NGO with the name of Russky Mir was established. This NGO was tasked with the primary goal of promoting Russian language and culture in countries abroad.

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also seen programs dedicated to soft power mainly focusing on the CIS countries. In this aspect, academic institutions have also been highly involved by setting up scholarships for students around the world to have the opportunity to complete their education in well-established Russian universities. The Russian state annually

allocates seats for foreign students. Each embassy is dedicated from 70 to 100 seats for foreign students from their respective (Sergunin & Karabeshkin, 2015, pp. 355-356).

The Russian foreign policy saw a change during President Putin's third term as the Russian foreign policy concept note (2013) highlighted that "Soft power has become an indispensable component of contemporary international politics...". Moreover, Russian foreign policy experts and analysts believe that the soft power technologies have become tools for security, as security itself includes a combination of hard and soft elements (Sergunin & Karabeshkin, 2015, p. 353). Also, the Russian Orthodox Church has also played an integral role in the projection of the Kremlin's soft power.

On the matter Nye argues that soft power is the ability to be attractive (Sergunin & Karabeshkin, 2015, p. 353). In the near abroad, post-soviet countries perceive Russian soft power as suspicious and as means the Kremlin uses to undermine the sovereignty and independence of these states. Moscow's approaches in the near abroad by utilizing soft power is seen as mechanics to enhance the Kremlin's status and position at the expense of statehood. Contradicting Nye's definition of soft power in that it is supposed to not be a zero-sum game, and that all parties involved should benefit from the exertion of soft power, something the Kremlin has not fully grasped (Nye, 2013).

As previously discussed, Moscow requires the near abroad to be on good terms with Russia to provide it with the necessary trajectory into great power status. However, how can states which are now no longer part of the Soviet Union grasp the policies aimed at them by Moscow when they present no added value to them? In essence, the Kremlin's power as a hydrocarbons exporting giant has made the policies it adopted a double-edged sword. How can Kazakhstan accept the functioning of the terms of the decades old agreement of providing natural

gas to Russia under market prices, and accept losing vital revenues by abiding to a deal that serves Moscow only? How can other post-soviet countries accept to be blackmailed by Russia in terms of energy supplies and still contain pro-Russian sentiment?

In short, Russia's activities in the utilization of energy as a weapon has done more harm than good for the post-soviet states. In this regard, it has only increased anti-Russian sentiments and introduced an almost hostile environment for Russian state interests to thrive in these locations. Moreover, the consideration of a "higher" Russian culture vis-à-vis other cultures present in the near abroad serves to divide rather than unite. In summary, there appears to be a misunderstanding in the concept of soft power by the Russian elite as their economic policies in the near abroad has been characterized by "arm-twisting" which is more consistent in hard power rather than soft power. The understanding and execution of soft power as instruments in foreign policy require immediate attention by the Kremlin as they are imperative in helping Moscow achieve the ultimate goal of multi-polarizing the international system (Sergunin & Karabeshkin, 2015, pp. 357-359).

4.3.2. Long-Term Shortcomings

Another obstacle which might present itself along the path is the shortcomings of alliances formed in the pursuit of the ultimate goal of the Kremlin. In this regard, the relationship formed with the economic powerhouse of the Peoples Republic of China requires careful consideration. There are three primary elements which the Kremlin needs to be warry about with respect to Beijing. The first element is regarding the vast cultural differences between the two powerhouses, the second is the asymmetric interdependence which has been created as a result of Moscow's pivot Eastwards following the Russia-Ukraine Crisis, and the third is the developing great game sequel between Russian and Chinese interests in Central Asia.

Many scholars describe the relationship between China and Russia as "a marriage of convenience" (Ying, 2016, p. 96). Both states share a common history, ideological roots and a perspective for a multipolar international system. However, their relationship over time has been based on multiple differences, mistrust and sometimes rivalries. During the times of the USSR, both states had their differences on the ideological principals of communism and had their rivalry on the assumption of the leadership role in targeting the third world countries. It was in 1989 that both countries restored their relationship to normalcy and jointly declared that the bilateral relationship between Moscow and Beijing will be based on "mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual nonaggression, non- interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence" (Ying, 2016, p. 97). On another aspect, Russia is more experienced in the international arena and diplomatically more blunt and powerful, China on the other hand prefers a reactive and careful diplomatic approach. This in addition to the vast cultural differences between the two states make it impossible to establish long term equal diplomatic relations. As Ili & Lévesque pointed out earlier the historical trend tells us that whenever the two powerhouses have come close and deepened their ties, they have grown farther from each other as the relationship has turned sour.

On another level, economic ties between the two giants are essential to their growths. Over the past two decades economic ties between the two have increased exponentially. Recently, due to the ongoing SMO in Ukraine and the economic sanctions which have been placed as a result on Russian hydrocarbon exports have forced Moscow to pivot East and tap into markets with huge economic capabilities and subsequently demands for energy. China is one of these huge markets who's thirst for energy seems unquenchable as the economy continues to grow.

However, the key fact remains in the physical nature of the infrastructure which delivers Russian oil and gas to China. In 1999, Khodorovsky suggested the construction of the ESPO (East Siberia Pacific Ocean) pipeline to serve Chinese oil demands. The Russian leadership however had chosen another line with the aim of serving multiple markets with the same pipeline. They had eyes for Japanese, Korean and other Asian markets in addition to the Chinese. As relations with Tokyo deteriorated and, in an attempt to move closer to Beijing, the Kremlin built a smaller version of the ESPO intended for Chinese markets (Lubina, 2017, pp. 168-169).

The Chinese with their patience had recovered from the initial loss of the full ESPO. Come 2017, China became the largest buyer of Russian oil and gas from the ESPO, with some 70% of the exports being destined for the Chinese markets. This enabled Beijing to force its terms on the Russian suppliers, effectively creating a monosomy in the Asian market, Beijing was able to ensure the supply of energy and have preferential rates due to their control of the market and their financial contributions to the completion of the ESPO (Lubina, 2017, pp. 169-177). Moreover, the introduction of the Power of Siberia pipeline in 2019 has only increased Russia's dependence on Chinese markets and the proposed Power of Siberia 2 pipeline shows no deviation in this aspect (Lubina, 2017, pp. 183-184). Effectively, the Russian strategy of having great influence in the East Asian energy markets has led to the fostering of asymmetric interdependence, and created in the process a condition of economic bandwagoning by Russia.

Central Asia is of great importance to both Moscow and Beijing. For the case of Russia, it is part of the Russky Mir, or the near abroad, an essential cornerstone for the Kremlin's national security. On the other hand, the same geographical area is of great interest to the Chinese mainly due to the economic activities and investments Beijing has been conducting abroad and as the Central Asian countries are on the path of the Chinese BRI.

As we have discussed in the abovementioned section, Russian soft power has been lagging in the region. This has forced the leaderships of these countries to seek alternative partners to ensure economic development and growth. China, with its huge economic capabilities has grasped every opportunity to fill this void. Nevertheless, the competition which has surfaced between Beijing and Moscow over the past decades has also had fairs shares of cooperation. The two capitals agree to fight terrorism, separatism and religious extremism in the region, in an attempt to cater to the security dilemmas of both states. Russia as explained above sees Central Asia as part of its near abroad and hence a strategic security belt, and China, fearing the spread of the elements to bordering Xinjiang province, home to the ethnic Uygur minority (Bolt, 2013, pp. 59-60).

Beijing has been heavily involved in economic development programs and initiatives in the region, while relying on a positive sum game. The Chinese, through various institutions which operate under its umbrella such as the New Silk Road Fund, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, have heavily invested and funded development programs in Central Asia (Cooley, 2015, pp. 1-3). Their modus operandi relies on providing assistance to the Central Asian states, in return increasing influence and soft power in the region for the proposed implementation of the BRI. The developing great game in Central Asia has indications of a coopetition relationship developing between the two powerhouses. However, the lack of soft power from Moscow and the enormous economic capabilities has seen the influences of China materializing.

The three notions discussed above, in addition to the different approaches of Beijing and Moscow in the international system have left their mark of Putin's Plan. Russia sees consolidating Central Asian security matters into the CSTO, which operates under its influence.

Moreover, Moscow believes that the SCO should also include a mechanism for security cooperation and coordination. Beijing remains committed on the SCO's economic role (Bolt, 2013, p. 61). Also, where Russia under Putin has taken a direct and blunt approach with the aim of altering the international system, China has been focused on a more lenient method. What remains clear from this complex Sino-Russian relationship is that the common goal of fighting the unipolar structure of the system has brought them close, but a formal long-term alliance seems highly unlikely given what China represents to Russia and vice versa.

4.4. Multi-polarism Today

In a recent interview to Credit Lyonnais Securities Asia (CLSA), John J. Mearsheimer declared that the unipolar world ended sometime in 2017 when an intense securitization and great power competition began on two different fronts. The first front is represented by the US-China competition in East Asia and the second one, which has been grabbing more of the headlines is the competition in Eastern Europe between the US and Russia (Mearsheimer, 2023).

Putin's Russia, from what the evidence presents, appears to be on the path, which according to their perception, will restore a multipolar international system. China appears to be committed in this campaign alongside Russia, although having its own perspective and approach to the matter. The balance of power in the international system is changing, and it's not in the favour of the previous hegemon in the system: the USA. What remains to be seen is how will the Washington elite react to the matter. Currently, it appears as it is business as usual for the White House, however that is not a correct reflection of the state of global affairs.

The plausible trajectory which is foreseen for the international system is turbulent to say the least. The main factor in this regard is the disruption of two of the main assumptions in the offensive neorealist theory. The first one being that the states in the international system function in a rational way and the second being that state cannot be certain that other states will not utilize their offensive military capabilities (Steinsson, 2014, p. 2).

The key aspect in this regard is the declining power and influence of the reigning hegemon of the system. A superpower with a diminishing status force it to shake the foundations of the international system by disrupting the assumptions upon which the theoretical framework is based. The fading pole in the system will continue to take steps and actions attempting to cling onto its position and to preserve its hegemonic status.

What the world is observing nowadays in the security competition in Easter Europe between the USA and Russia falls in this category. It is no secret that the international system is heading for a change, and that Washington's position in the international system is falling behind. The actions which continue to be carried out by the godfather of NATO all point in the direction of disrupting the base of the theoretical approach. The insistence on the continued process of arming and funding Kiev with the assertion of Ukraine's NATO membership fall classically within the paradigms of irrationality. The failed counterattacks by Kiev and the continuous loss of territory and manpower can only be described as irrational.

The conflict between Russia and Kiev has turned into what IR scholars would refer to as a war of attrition. In such wars, there are two elements that count, the size of the population and the artillery capabilities. In both elements the Russians have a 5 to 1, and somewhere between 5 or 7 to 1 advantage respectively (Mearsheimer, 2023). Therefore, the outcome is quite obvious yet the actions of Moscow's counterparts show signs of irrationality.

The second disturbance in the assumptions lies in the uncertainty in the intentions of the adversaries in the use of their offensive military capabilities. This uncertainty creates an element

of fear which is based on the intentions of the opposing side. Intentions and more importantly future intentions cannot be known beforehand; thus, the element of fear rises and leads to actions which are reckless and endanger the entire security balance of the international system.

As the thesis mentioned above, a declining superpower armed with components of uncertainty and fear regarding the adversary will undoubtably make the world a more dangerous place. The future actions of the White House as the status quo in the international system persist will determine not only their fate in the international system, but the fate of the security balance and architecture of the international system.

5. Chapter 4: Concluding Remarks

As a summary, it is clear that the Russian federation under the leadership of President Putin has chosen the path to restore a multipolar world system by the utilization of different tools and methods to achieve the ultimate target of the Kremlin's foreign policy. It is also apparent that the military interventions in Ukraine (2014) and Syria (2015) are the culmination of Putin's international agenda, keeping in mind that the intervention in Syria had enormous dimensions as it was an operation conducted outside of the Russky Mir. However, the initiation of the project remains marked by the famous 2007 Munich speech and the military intervention in Georgia (2008).

The historical evidence presented and discussed portray a vivid image on the role which history has played in the construction of Russia's security dilemmas and national identity. The ascension of Ivan IV (The Terrible) to the throne was a pivotal point in the shaping of Russian national identity, the Grand Dutchy of Moscow became a giant due to the expansionist policies of Ivan IV. He was also crowned Tsar of Russia, a title perceived to be on par with other great powers in the system at the time. Moreover, the constant expansion, consolidation of power to

the state and the Russian Orthodox Church, in addition to a keen eye on vital trade routes all became integral elements in Russian national identity.

Peter the Great in turn, with the establishment of the Russian Navy and Naval academy, the reforms in the Russian diplomatic fleet and the armed forces were also considered steps to be on par with other great powers in Europe, the center of the international system. In essence, the steps were the implementation of Realpolitik to the point. Catherine the Great followed suit, and her mark arguably is even greater, as under her reign, Russia became an international actor, intervening in far places such as the ME, and even North America.

The defeat the Russian army dealt to the invading French in a war which became known as the Patriotic War also has its fair share in the nostalgic Russian national identity. It reminisces to times Russia was a great power, and active in the international stage being part of the Paris Conference, and the Congress of Vienna.

As for the establishment of the Soviet Union, it plays a crucial aspect in cementing the notion of Russia as a main actor, a representative of just and good intentions, shielding the population from the corrupt mindsets of capitalism, and saving Europe and humanity from the aspirations of Nazi Germany under Hitler. It is not in vain that the Russians refer to the second World War as the Great Patriotic War. Following the defeat of Hitler, the historical trend, actions and policies of the USSR also reinstated the doctrine of Russia as a great power, the rival of the USA in an international system which later was called the bipolar world.

The collapse of the USSR in 1991 shook this identity, which was carefully developed throughout the ages. The integration attempts to the West spearheaded by Yeltsin confused the Russians, as after centuries being regarded as a great power, it was unacceptable to take the back

seat. The domestic political instability, along with certain favoring elements paved the way for Vladimir Putin to reach the Kremlin.

Putin's arrival signaled a new start for Russia and Russian national identity. The fall of the USSR had left the emerging Russian Federation without a ruling ideology to provide perspective in the international system. Putinism has filled the void and developed into a full-scale ideology which includes an economic doctrine, an interpretation of history, a political philosophical aspect and a sense of authority and legitimacy.

The implementation of Putin's plan with the assistance of Putinism had allowed the Kremlin to pursuit its ultimate goal of restoring a multipolar international system. This goal is not a secret one and has been found in the Russian Federations Foreign Policy concept note ever since 2003. However, the conditions in the international system, along with the capabilities of Moscow had not yet developed to fulfill it. The declaration of Putin's plan of restoring multipolarity came in the form of his 2007 Munich Security Conference speech, in which he attacked the ruling hegemon, the unilateral actions and the system which has been catering to its needs.

This thesis relies on a multilevel formula to attempt to decipher the enigma of Russia. Besides the social constructivist approach and Putinism, this formula is also based on the neorealist theory of Waltz, with hints of Mearsheimer's offensive Neorealism that has allowed this thesis to expand the levels of analysis. The two main principles of the theoretical framework of Neorealism highlighted by the survey of Russian foreign policy goal, strategies and actions to execute them are the security dilemmas and the balance of power.

The security dilemmas are essentially the manifestation of the geographical characteristics of this vast state and the relationships which have been forged over the years with nearby civilizations. Addressing the security dilemmas fit nicely into the perspective of the Waltz in his neorealist approach which have elaborated and interpreted each foreign policy action and step taken by the Kremlin in an eloquent manner.

Successive rulers of the various ruling forms of government of the predecessors of modern-day Russia have all completed the theoretical assumptions which remain the building blocks of the neorealist theory. Their adherence to the assumptions has made their actions rational, strategic, and based on the ultimate goal of state security and survival.

The endless inquiry of Russia to locate a social and political seat among their Western partners has seen reorientations in Moscow foreign policy and the return to neorealist domains due to the shifting balance of power and the endless rise of security dilemmas. The short stints and aspiration of integration into the West to mimic the economic developments of European capitals, starting from the days of Peter the Great, to Gorbachev and Yeltsin have all seen road blocks represented by the security dilemmas.

The shifts in the balance of power have been caused by intense security competitions in the international arena. However, what is evident in Moscow's case is the multipronged approach in the annals of security competition. It is true, that in a neorealist perspective, security always trumps the list, even at the expense of economic prosperity. That being said, the security competition still has an economic aspect to it. The use of different tools and methods in the Kremlin's foreign policy has provided a diverse approach to the fulfilment of the ultimate foreign policy goal.

The use of Russian hard power is quite compelling, be it in Ukraine or Syria. Another elements this thesis has discussed is the use of diplomatic power to control the situation in the near abroad such as the introduction of Russian peacekeeping forces in NKAO. Elsewhere in Central Asia, by Russian motivation, the CSTO executed the first military intervention in its history, intervening in Kazakhstan to fend off a suspected color revolution in the making. In this toolset, Putin's doctoral dissertation has come in handy in the game of "Petro-carrots" and "Petro-Sticks" as Newnham called it. The use of hydrocarbons as a foreign policy tool has been quite effective for Russia, however recent events has made it a double-edged sword due to the rise of the asymmetric interdependence with China.

The studies carried out in this thesis also displayed the great power dynamics evolving in the current international system. From one side, this study observed the growing competition between the reigning hegemon of the system represented by the USA and the Russian Federation. The security competition in Easter Europe has been a focal point due the location of Ukraine in the Russky Mir, a geographical area which from a historical perspective has been the buffer zone for Moscow, and sites of influence in the presence of exclusive "rights" for the Kremlin. Of course, the West and other adversaries of Russia fail to see eye to eye on these "rights".

From the other aspect, this research has also delved into the dynamics of the Sino-Russian dialogue. While the system tends to see the growing economic ties between the two superpowers, the relationship is far from being called a strategic alliance. Competition in Central Asia, also part of the Russky Mir, has seen growing signs. Moreover, the economic power of Beijing has allowed it to obtain great influence in the region. The economic sanctions on Russian hydrocarbon exports to European markets after the start of the SMO has harmed the diversified

market portfolio which the Kremlin previously had. The reliance on China as a huge energy market has created asymmetric interdependence and a form of economic bandwagoning. The key remains in Central Asia; as Russian soft power proves incapable of presenting itself as attractive and Chinese influence on the rise due to its economic power, how will the scenario develop in this region of the system.

This thesis has taken into consideration multiple elements to verify the hypothesis presented above. However, it would be interesting to see the introduction of the military technologies to this analysis. The conventional methods of conducting military warfare have changed as new hybrid warfare methods have come into play with the assistance of technologies.

Strong military capabilities rely on strong economies, this has been the golden rule since the dawn of time and in the words of Clausewitz "War is merely the continuation of policies with other means" (Clausewitz et al., 1989, p. 87). The dynamic nature of warfare and the rapid advancement of technologies in the system have presented the opportunity of integrating these advanced technologies into the realm of warfare. In an international system, where great powers are competing for the seat of the hegemon, the study of the technological advances of the great powers would provide valuable insight on the plausibility of achievement of the foreign policy targets, especially in cases as this thesis has discussed the ultimate target of creating a multipolar world system.

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