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The influence of regime type on Russian foreign policy toward “the West,” 1992–2015

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ABSTRACT

Russia's foreign policy does not follow directly from the nature of its internal political system but rather from the interaction of that political system with other political systems. Russian policy toward the Western world is best understood in terms of the capacity of Russia's post-Soviet rulers to achieve two goals that are in implicit tension with each other. They are: a) maximizing the benefit to the Russian state of the country's multifaceted relations with the Western world; and b) securing Russia's status as the undisputed hegemon throughout the country's historical borderlands. These broad policy objectives—shared by Russian liberals and nationalists alike—have been common to both the Yeltsin and Putin administrations, albeit expressed in different ways over time and with differing expectations of being able to reconcile the two. Building upon authoritarian and interventionist patterns established early in the Yeltsin years and reacting to the West's refusal to acknowledge Russian regional primacy, Putin has consolidated an arbitrary personalist regime at home and waged war along the Russian periphery, even at the cost of relations with the Western world. In this respect, Putin's regime may usefully be seen as a “state-nation” with a strong imperial imprint, building upon powerful legacies of Russian political development. The removal of Putin from power will not *in se* change that regime type or key challenges in Russian–Western relations.

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Thank God for the Russian–Georgian war! Now there won't be a Russian–Ukrainian war. (Senior Russian foreign policy advisor, in the presence of the author, December 2011).

1. Introduction

Between 1992 and 2015, both the Russian political system and foreign policy evolved from initial liberal premises to ones based on raw calculations of material interest. Both tendencies proceeded in tandem: as Russia became more authoritarian at home, it became less sensitive to arguments that its foreign relations should reflect assumptions of common values with the Western world. In the shadow of the Russian subversion of Ukraine and consequent economic sanctions levied by the United States and its liberal European allies, Vladimir Putin's government has openly embraced a “war of values” with the Western world, claiming that Putin's Russia represents a morally superior alternative to Western “post-modernity.”

Does this mean, then, that Russia's external policies flow directly from its internal political regime? It is the burden of this paper to demonstrate that Russian policy toward the Western world cannot be reduced to the simple projection of Russian

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regime type. Rather, Russian–Western relations are the byproduct of the *interaction* of different political units in the international system. Regime type matters but not in isolation from the broader global system of which it is a part. Specifically, while Russian–Western relations had nearly collapsed by summer 2014, Putin's Russia had been pursuing a foreign policy whose general objectives were shared by his initially liberal predecessor Boris Yeltsin: that is, to maximize the benefits of Russia's relations with the Western world while also cementing Russia's primacy along its historical borderlands. The challenge to Russian diplomacy has been to avoid having to choose between these two goals. When forced to choose, as Putin's government arguably had to beginning with the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in fall 2004, it has consistently chosen in favor of regional primacy over relations with the West. The general goal, however, has been shared by Russian national security elites and even many liberals throughout the post-Soviet period. In this respect, it may be useful to think about the regime type of post-Soviet Russia as that of state-nation with an imperial imprint. This is not meant to be an exclusive categorization. Putin's regime is highly personalistic, for instance. But choices that Russian foreign policy elites make, and this means most of all Putin and those whom he admits into his inner circle, will tend to reflect their assessment of how Russia's relations with the West affect the prospects for Russian dominance in the “near abroad.”

In the discussion that follows, we shall analyze (a) general relationships between regime type and foreign policy; (b) specific relationships between Russian regime type and foreign policy in the Imperial, Soviet and post-Soviet periods; (c) the relationship between Yeltsin's evolving political regime in the 1990's and that of his successor Putin; and (d) the extent to which key assumptions undergirding contemporary Russian foreign policy are independent of Putin and his regime. We conclude that the consensus within Russia on the country's right to primacy throughout the post-Soviet space—shared by liberals, statist and nationalists of all stripes—is broad enough to survive Putin's tenure in office. Choices about Russia's relations with the West will continue to be filtered through that prism.

2. Regime type and foreign policy: general considerations

The question of political regime type and foreign policy behavior is one of the central issues in academic theories of international relations and is of major interest to policymakers, as well as to those who seek to influence them. As a major instance, the literature on the “democratic peace” rests on an empirical observation that the absence of war among mature liberal democracies reflects the effects that democratic values *cum* democratic institutions have on bounding conflicts of interest among democracies. Curiously, Lenin himself embraced a comparably unit-based explanation of world politics but instead located the causes of modern world war in the inherent logic of capitalism: once capitalism was abolished and replaced by socialism, a Soviet socialist peace would prevail. Soviet foreign policy should thus be harnessed to bring about the transition from capitalism to socialism. Likewise, American liberals and neoconservative alike, from Woodrow Wilson to Paul Wolfowitz and Robert Kagan, have sought to use American power to encourage liberal regime change in the expectation that a more liberal world order would be a more pacific one, as well as one that would be maximally favorable to American interests and values. The invasion of Iraq in 2003, by overthrowing the brutal dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, was intended by its neo-conservative architects to be a major step in this direction (Owen, 1994; Western, 2005, pp. 175–219; Mann, 2004, pp. 332–358; Lenin, 1940 [1916]).

All theories, of course, operate within a range of bounded conditions and potential ambiguity about confirming and disconfirming evidence; this is no less true of the liberal-democratic peace theory or unit-based explanations for foreign policy behavior in general. To take an obvious instance: The liberal peace that has prevailed throughout the Western world since 1945 can hardly be separated from the overwhelming superiority of power of the most important liberal democracy, that is, the United States. Certainly, over time, the absence of war can generate broad societal expectations of continued peace, to the point where they become so deeply rooted in key countries' political cultures that war literally becomes unthinkable, as between France and Germany in recent generations (Duffield, 1999). Yet culture and environment exist in a symbiotic relationship with each other; a crucial change in the latter can affect the former. This is implicitly illustrated by one of the main justifications for the continued existence of NATO: America's overwhelming advantage in power relieves European states from worrying too much about the significant increase in Germany's relative power within Europe since 1989. The postwar liberal peace that has prevailed in Europe thus rests in substantial part on the ways in which the *power* of the leading democracy relieves Europeans, including Germans, from reacting to shifts in relative power that under other conditions could generate real security dilemmas. Relatedly, the more benign the international security environment, the more likely it is—*ceteris paribus*—that liberal democratic institutions and values will take root: lower defense requirements reduce the case for the Leviathan state that, *in extremis*, dominates society in ways incompatible with liberal premises (Lynch, 2005, pp. 18–46).

A second qualification to the premise of the liberal peace has to do with classification. The distinction between a mature liberal democracy and a fledgling democratizing country is as important as that between a mature market capitalist system and a “marketizing” one: the dynamics of long-established systems may be quite different from those of incipient ones (Motyl, 1993, pp. 51–75). The failure of Western efforts to help liberalize Russia in the 1990's is due in part to a failure to recognize this difference. Likewise, as Jack Snyder and Edward Mansfield have argued, the political incentives of a newly democratizing state may well work in the direction of exacerbating conflict with its neighbors, including those that are themselves in early or halting stages of democratization (Mansfield and Snyder, 1995). Moreover, even the most ardent defenders of the thesis of the liberal peace concede that liberal democracies can be quite belligerent toward non-liberal polities. Other complications to the theory include the phenomenon of the “capitalist peace,” based on the distinct

pacifying consequences that expanding networks of trade and investment can exert on interstate relations (McDonald, 2009); the documented brutality of liberal democracies toward other liberal democracies (for example, Britain and France selling out Czechoslovakia at Munich, 1938; covert violence by Western democracies to overthrow nationalist regimes with clear democratic support, for example, Mossadegh's government in Iran, 1953); and near wars among democracies that were resolved in ways that did not reflect the primacy of common liberal values (for example, the Fashoda incident between Britain and France, 1898). Finally, democracies frequently reclassify states that they are allied with or fighting against to make them compatible with self-interest and liberal *amour propre*: for new-found allies, think of the American framing of Stalin as essentially an especially forceful New Dealer during World War II or the reclassification of the People's Republic of China from "Red China" to "mainland China" after the Nixon-Kissinger détente of 1972; U.S. subversion of demonstrably democratic governments in Iran (1953), Guatemala (1954), the Dominican Republic (1965) and Chile (1973) was justified by cold-war *raison d'état*: that is, the threat of communism overrode respect for liberal democratic procedure.

If there is no law-like causal link between liberal democracy and peace, there can be no simple and direct causal link between political regime type and foreign policy more generally. Consider that in 1935 the fascist Mussolini sought an alliance with democratic France against fascist Germany, out of fear of German ambitions in the Germanophone Alto Adige region that Italy carved out of the defunct Austrian Empire after World War I. It was only after Mussolini realized that the Western democracies would not confront Hitler that he turned to a bandwagon strategy, seeing alliance with Germany as a second-best method for protecting the Brenner borderlands (Kissinger, 1994, pp.297–300). Identical ideologies helped provoke the "cold war within the cold war," that is, the Sino-Soviet split, as Moscow and Beijing competed for the mantle of communist standard bearer, while diplomatic history is strewn with examples of powers abandoning ideological imperatives for advantages in power: the most Christian Francis I of France concluding an alliance with the Muslim Ottoman Empire against fellow European Christian powers (1536); monarchical France supporting republican America against monarchical Britain (1778–1781) and, in the same conflict, Russian Empress Catherine refusing Britain's King George's request for 20,000 Cossack troops to fight republicans in North America (1775); Christian Britain and France in league with the Muslim Ottomans against Christian Russia (1853–1856); the alliance between republican France and Tsarist Russia against monarchist Germany (1894); repeated Soviet betrayals of the interests of local communist parties on the altar of *Realpolitik* (Kazemzadeh, 1991); the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact (1939); Vladimir Putin's alliance with the United States after September 11, 2001; and others.

At the same time, extensive research across the social sciences has shown that tendencies toward violent conflict depend significantly on the extent to which the parties in conflict identify the "Other" as belonging to, tending towards, or at least not moving away from, one's community of values. The narrower the "ideological distance" between parties in conflict (assuming that they are not competing for the same constituencies) the more amenable to negotiation and compromise issues in conflict are often seen to be. The greater that distance, the less manageable such conflicts tend to be seen (Haas, 2005, pp. 4–39). If we think of political regime type as signifying a particular community of political institutions and values, it can matter, and sometimes a great deal, whether a state's leaders, elites, parties, and publics are identified with or against those of another state. One only has to think of the exercises in "values clarification" that Putin's regime has been engaged in vis-a-vis the Western world in recent years to grasp the point and its potential implications for sharpening or ameliorating international conflict.

One of the signals diplomatic accomplishments of Peter the Great (ruled 1696–1725) was to obtain European recognition of Russia as belonging to the "European republic of Christian monarchs." This ideological assimilation greatly facilitated Russia's territorial expansion in Europe as Russia's gains, nearly always made in conjunction with powerful European allies, were regarded by Europe as legitimate in ways that the Muslim Ottomans' domains in the Balkans were not (Malia, 1999, pp.15–84). In the 19th century, autocratic Russia often allied with autocratic Prussia (later Germany) and Austria in the conviction that concerted international action among the key European monarchies was central to preserving the ancien régime at home against revolution, a version of the "conservative autocratic peace" in action. By 1894, however, the growth of German power and the assertion of German interests overrode Tsarist concern with solidarity among European monarchies and Imperial Russia signed the fateful military convention with republican France, a diplomatic marriage of ideological opposites as striking in its day as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was in 1939 (Malia, 1999, pp. 85–232; Kennan, 1984, pp. 136–237; Geyer, 1987).

So degrees of ideological distance do matter but not in a geopolitical vacuum. Often, gross imbalances of power, especially when combined with aggressive assertions of interest, can override formal political and ideological allegiances. Mexican liberals, after all, hardly rallied to the American cause during the Mexican War (1846–48); and in the late 1990's the beginnings of NATO expansion, followed soon by NATO's air war against Russian client Serbia, saw Russia's pro-Western liberals—who mainly opposed NATO's action and regarded it as an act of betrayal by the West—undermined domestically (Owen, 2000; Lynch, 2001).

Conversely, power politics continues to matter but not in an ideological vacuum. The Soviet Union that acquiesced in the collapse of communism throughout Eastern Europe and the subsequent unification of Germany in NATO in 1989–1990 was as powerful by every measure of material strength as was the country that Gorbachev inherited in March 1985. What changed was not Soviet power or even the balance of power between the Soviet Union and the Western world but rather how Gorbachev defined what Soviet interests were and his ability to act on that definition before a disabling political coalition could be mobilized against him. In sum, a change in a unit-level factor triggered enormous changes in systems-level features of world politics (Garthoff, 1994; Grachev, 2008).

If the Gorbachev period underscores the limits of a mechanistic Realism, the 1990's would quickly reveal the limits of Idealism as applied to post-Soviet Russian foreign policy. Announcing in 1992 that Russia's international interests were a simple extension of the leadership's aspirations to build a liberal economic and political order at home, by 1999 Boris Yeltsin's government had rejected liberal internationalism as the basis of Russian foreign policy and explicitly replaced it with a classical Realism based on the calculation of Russia's material interests. These included an exclusive Russian sphere of influence throughout the post-Soviet periphery, a point to be developed later. The domestic weakness of Russia's liberals, compounded by economic and social collapse at home and retreat abroad, each of which was identified by Russian elites with Western and above all American policies—discredited the Russian liberal agenda in foreign as well as domestic policy. By 1998–99, Vladimir Putin was the Russian National Security Advisor and participating directly in mobilizing Russian resources, such as they were, against NATO's occupation of Kosovo (Talbot, 2002). A surprise overnight march of 200 Russian paratroopers from Bosnia to Kosovo failed, at the risk of confrontation with NATO forces, to secure for Russia an independent peacekeeping zone in north Kosovo and a frozen conflict. If successful, Russian troops would have enforced the *de facto* partition of Kosovo into a Serb north and Albanian south. Yet Putin was by then helping to execute a policy that had been building from nearly the beginning of Russia's brief liberal-democratic moment. Russia's liberals had learned that sheer power continued to matter, especially when, like Russia in the 1990's, you had much too little of it (Stent, 2015, pp. 35–50). Russia's nationalists, or more precisely “imperial state-nationalists,” filled the resulting political vacuum.

3. Political regime and Russian diplomacy: historical patterns and legacies

How do we understand the nature of the Russian political regime? Historically, the Russian polity that emerged after the retreat of the Mongols between 1380 and 1480 combined a patrimonial fusion of sovereignty and wealth that was initially extended to the East Slavic principalities and then, as it became more successful in expanding throughout the Eurasian landmass, assumed an explicitly imperial character. While the degree of merging of political and economic power would shift over time, the Russian state maintained an impressive degree of control over the economy even after the formal institutions of patrimonialism were abolished, that is, compulsory service for the nobility, ended in 1762 and serfdom, ended in 1861 (Pipes, 1997 [1954], pp. 58–111; Poe, 2006). For instance, Russian industrialization from 1890 to 1913 was propelled by government guarantees of 8% return to foreign investors, a rate made possible by the government's ability to control the prices at which peasants could sell their grain to the government, which in turn exported it for gold (Geyer, 1987). The Soviet peasantry paid an even more terrible price for Stalin's industrialization of the 1930's: the re-enservment of the peasantry represented by collectivization allowed for industrialization with declining standards of living for the majority: in Tsarist Russia, the ratio of consumption to investment was 2:1; under Stalin, this was exactly reversed, reflecting the renewed fusion of polity and economy and the extraordinary coercive power of the Stalinist state (Palmer et al., 2002, pp. 699–700; Aron, 1981).

Patrimonialism, or virtually unconstrained autocracy, allowed Russia's rulers to compete with a modernizing Europe by extracting resources from an underdeveloped economy and society and deploying them for the purposes of the state (mainly war). Military success brought large numbers of non-Russians, non-Slavs and non-Orthodox Christians into the polity, which thus became functionally imperial in character. Loyal non-Russian elites were often rewarded by the Crown with handsome emoluments and in many cases non-Russians outnumbered and outclassed Russians in the administration of the state (especially ethnic Germans from the Baltic provinces). Loyalty to the Russian Crown, not the Russian nation, was the touchstone of political affiliation. By 1896, just 40% of the population of the Russian Empire was ethnically Russian. The Russia that collapsed under the strain of World War in 1917 was thus not a nation-state but rather a state-nation: society existed for purposes of the state, which was also colonial in character, having integrated an alien periphery into the Russian metropole (Bobbitt, 2003, pp. 144–204).

By 1922, Soviet Russia succeeded in reestablishing control over the bulk of the Russian Empire, with loyalty to the Communist Party replacing loyalty to the Crown as the touchstone of political participation (Pipes, 1997). By the late 1930's, Stalin succeeded in reestablishing a strict patrimonial fusion of polity and economy whose basic structure would persist until dismantled by Gorbachev. The Soviet regime type thus resembled that of Tsarist Russia in key respects: authoritarian hegemony of the State over economy and society and unitary integration of a multinational, multicultural periphery. Gorbachev never intended the disintegration of that polity. If anything, he believed in it too deeply, convinced at least in 1985 that the Soviet Union had resolved the nationalities issue once and for all. For example, on June 25, 1985, Gorbachev twice referred to the Soviet Union as “Russia” in extemporaneous remarks in Kiev that were broadcast on Soviet television (Nahaylo, 1985).

Why does this matter? The Soviet Union that collapsed in 1991 represented not simply a collapse of communism but the end of a political regime-type—autocratic empire—that had propelled Russia's rise to world power status in both the Tsarist and Soviet periods and furthermore provided a framework of social life that most Russians regarded as normal.

The case of Crimea will suffice for these purposes. Annexed by Catherine the Great in 1783 after a series of wars against the Ottoman Empire, the predominantly Muslim peninsula was promptly integrated into the unitary Russian Empire. It remained Russian into the Soviet period, when Crimea was incorporated into the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1944, Stalin deported the entire native Muslim population of some 250,000 to Central Asia (he did the same in Chechnya) and replaced them with Russians and other Russified Slavs, the better to assimilate this maritime territory. Similar population transfers in the Baltic States and Moldova helped to solidify Soviet power in the volatile early postwar period (Nekrich, 1978). In 1954, Nikita Khrushchev reassigned Crimea from the Russian to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, evidently in a bid to secure the support of Ukrainian party bosses in his bid for supreme power. For most Russians, the idea of Crimea was associated with

heroic military defeats against the British and French (1853–56), a resultant literature (including Tolstoy) that glorified the Russian military and imperial effort there, as well as the staunch if doomed defense of Sevastopol during World War II. For many Russians, Crimea was a vacation place of choice and doubtless the administrative transfer of the peninsula from Russia to Ukraine was lost on them. If any thought about the mass deportation of the Crimean Tatars, it was in the context of the official line about collective treason during the war and thus justified. By the end of the Soviet period, the population of Crimea was more than 60% ethnic Russian, in spite of the return of the Crimean Tatars to their homeland beginning in the late 1950's.

In this light, the news in early 1992 that Crimea was not Russian but Ukrainian came as puzzling, if not a shock, to virtually every Russian. Almost immediately, the Russian parliament passed resolutions calling for the return of Crimea to Russia while the popular mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov, embraced the repatriation of the province in order to establish his credentials as a national politician, one who might contend for the Presidency of Russia itself. The previous August, Yeltsin himself declared that Russia retained the right to make territorial claims against any republic with a large Russian population that sought to secede from the Soviet Union; he specifically mentioned Crimea and the Donbass region of eastern Ukraine (Remnick, 1991; Plokhiy, 2014, p. 164). Yeltsin's government, nominally committed to partnership with the liberal West, resisted these pleas although a Russian–Ukrainian treaty of May 1997 provided for substantial autonomy of Crimea within Ukraine. Until March 2014, the Crimean policy of both Ukraine and Russia rested on the legal division of the Black Sea fleet, based in Sevastopol, that was inherited from the Soviet Navy. In this context, it was child's play for Putin to persuade the Russian nation that the annexation of Crimea was a natural adjustment of frontiers—and on a democratic basis!—rather than a crass violation of international law in general and Ukrainian sovereignty in particular (Levada Analytical Center; Rose, Mishler & Munro, 2011, pp. 64–123; Volkov, 2015). Empires cast long shadows.

The idea of empire and the reality of the state–nation, then, connect the Tsarist, Soviet and even the post-Soviet eras of Russian political history. The official state emblem of post-Soviet Russia, with three crowns representing the “three Russias” (Russia, Ukraine and Belarus) emphatically confirms this. Yet while the regime type of imperial state–nation remains a constant—with the very brief exceptions of March–November 1917 and the early 1990's and today more as legacy than as reality—there is no simple relationship between Russian regime type and Russian foreign policy. At the most general level there is an observable element of continuity: the illiberal Russian state–nation has tended to follow the precepts of the balance of power in its dealings with great powers far beyond its boundaries while along the imperial periphery it has generally pursued policies based on domination and absorption. Generally conscious of the inferiority of Russian power and culture vis a vis the West, Russia's rulers have tried to insulate the management of their borderlands from the encroachment of other great powers (LeDonne, 1996). At times, they have done this in collaboration with other great powers, as in the Anglo-Russian division of Iran into spheres of influence (1907), the three partitions of Poland (1772–1795) or the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (1939), which inter alia codified the fourth partition of Poland. To this list we can add the removal of Chechnya from the agenda of American–Russian relations after the brief alliance that Putin forged with Washington Afghanistan and the Taliban after the September 11, 2001 terror attacks.

On the other hand, autocratic and imperial Russia as well as Soviet Russia displayed considerable variability in their foreign relations. Very often, Tsarist Russia played the balance of power skillfully, avoiding encircling coalitions and dangerous over-commitments on ideological grounds. For instance, Catherine the Great refused the request of King George III of Britain to send 20,000 Cossacks to North America to suppress the American revolt. Exhausted from a series of wars with the Ottomans and having just survived the Pugachev peasant rebellion, Catherine—without any sympathies for republicans, after all—refused on pragmatic grounds of state interest (Bolkhovitinov, 1976, pp. 1–43). Catherine's famous Francophilia disintegrated in the wake of the French Revolution and Russia began to collaborate with a league of European monarchs to crush the French republic. Russia's emergence as a European great power was ratified by the multilateral Treaty of Nystad (1721) while during the wars of the French Revolution Russia tacked in pro- and anti-French directions depending on power realities and the sometimes erratic proclivities of its rulers (Ragsdale, 1980). At other times, Imperial Russia sought to forge a community of conservative powers whose prime aim was to suppress republican challenges to the old European order (Kissinger, 2013). The limits of such ideological solidarity, in effect the limits of extrapolating foreign policy based on regime type, were shown in the collapse of the Russo-German alliance after the departure of Bismarck (1890) and the alarming assertion of a rapidly rising Germany's ambitions under Wilhelm II (Kennan, 1979). Reactionary Russia was now constrained to play the revolutionary *Marseillaise* in greeting its newfound republican French allies.

Much the same can be said of the Soviet period. To be sure, what Vladislav Zubok has termed the “imperial-revolutionary paradigm” lasted from the 1920's through the early Gorbachev period. Soviet foreign policy remained committed throughout this time to the socialist transformation of the world as the only sure basis for Soviet peace and prosperity. Yet the long trajectory of Soviet diplomacy describes an enduring tension between the logic of regime type and the socializing logic of the international political system. Periods of détente alternated with periods of cold war; sometimes the priority was given to advancing the revolutionary cause abroad; more often, and increasingly over time, priority was given to the management of interstate relations in a world that resisted Soviet ideological shibboleths. By the early 1980's, the Soviet leadership had succumbed to a fateful overextension, unable to make crucial tradeoffs between ideological and diplomatic imperatives at a moment of economic crisis (Zubok, 2009). Yet this seems much more closely tied with the senescence of the geriatric leadership than with the inherent logic of the communist party-state. Communist China, after all, did make the kinds of choices that the Soviet leaders did not and at about the same time (1979) (Lynch, 2015). If the nature of the Soviet regime meant that the party-state embraced a distinctive dual profile in world affairs—revolutionary and diplomatic—Soviet foreign

policy still could not simply be extrapolated from the nature of the political system to specific international outcomes. International system and domestic regime interacted in framing Soviet foreign policy choices.

4. Post-Soviet Russia

What does this imply for the study of post-Soviet Russia's political system and its effects on the country's foreign relations? First, consider that many of the domestic political elements that we ascribe to the authoritarian Putin period—personalistic rule, contempt for parliament, crass manipulation of elections, massive corruption, anti-Americanism, and others—were already well developed in the Yeltsin years (Reddaway and Glinsky, 2001, pp. 435–530). This does not mean that Putin's regime is simply a change in degree from that of Yeltsin. Keep in mind that by 1999 Russia was a failing state by many classical indices of state capacity. For instance, in that year, debt service absorbed 25% of the country's dollarized GDP. Putin has not only much more energetically exploited the authoritarian possibilities of Russia's 1993 presidentialist constitution but by establishing the supremacy of the Presidential Administration over private economic and financial interests, he effectively changed the nature of the Russian polity without altering the substance of the constitution. Along the way he also improved significantly the government's ability to perform minimal tasks of statehood (By 2006, Putin's government had paid off Russia's sovereign debt *in toto*.). It is nevertheless an error to juxtapose an authoritarian Putin regime to a putatively liberal Yeltsin one and to suppose, by inference, that a change in Russian regime would *in se* lead to a cardinal change in Russia's foreign policy.

Second, the liberal direction in Russian foreign policy was discredited very early on and in some important cases, as in relations with China, was only briefly considered and then abandoned in favor of a pragmatic realism (Radchenko, 2014, pp. 189, 194; Lannon, 2015). By the end of Yeltsin's tenure in office, Russian foreign policy toward the West had already departed from its original liberal-internationalist premises toward statist ones (as we shall develop below).

Third, we can observe considerable variation in post-Soviet Russia's relations with the Western world, and especially with the United States, throughout both the Yeltsin and Putin periods (Stent, 2015). As a consequence, it is not the shift from an allegedly liberal Russia under Yeltsin to a post-liberal Russia under Putin that explains Russian foreign policy since 1999 but rather deeper points of foreign policy consensus among Russian elites, including liberal elites, that predate Putin's rise to power and inform the Russian government's reactions to a world still framed by America's hydraulic power and influence (Stankevich, 1992). It is not that Putin or the regime that he has constructed do not matter but rather that they matter because they have managed to embody and act on key points of consensus about Russia's international interests (Volkov, 2015). Finally, Putin's Russia simply disposes of many more resources of state power than did Yeltsin's Russia, allowing the Russia of 2005–2015 to assert more ambitious foreign and security policies than did the Russia of 1992–1999 (Lynch, 2011; Hill and Gaddy, 2015; Dawisha, 2015).

If we review the central components of Putin's political regime, we can easily see that many represent the consolidation of trends well under way in the 1990's under Yeltsin:

4.1. Arbitrary personal rule

Putin's rule of Russia has been distinguished by the concentration of power around Putin's person, as distinct from the formal political and legal institutions described by the Russian constitution. It is the Presidential Administration, not the government per se, that determines the allocation of public, and many private, resources. And even when Putin stepped down as President and became Prime Minister (2008–2012), his office remained the center of the Russian political system. Yet Boris Yeltsin's tenure in office, during which he never had a working majority in the parliament, was distinguished by rule by presidential decree and open contempt for his political opposition. For instance, in 1997 Yeltsin thrice proposed the unknown Sergei Kiriyenko as prime minister, daring the parliament, which had twice rejected him by large majorities, to vote him down a third time and risk dissolution; finally, parliament acquiesced in preference to facing unknown consequences. Yeltsin, after all, had dissolved the first post-Soviet parliament by admittedly unconstitutional decree in September 1993 and then ratified it a few weeks later by force of arms, flushing the recalcitrant rump out with army tanks and more than 150 killed. Russia's presidentialist constitution was passed two months later in the shadow of this violence and with the obvious manipulation of the State Electoral Administration by Yeltsin's government to obtain the desired outcome. Putin has fully exploited the authoritarian possibilities of that constitution and he has had 15 years to do it. For our purposes, it is enough to keep in mind that a key enabling condition of Putin's political machine was the discrediting of Russia's liberal democrats by the late 1990's amidst socio-economic collapse at home and retreat abroad. Putin was building on quite illiberal foundations.

4.2. Use of force to decide political issues

The use of force to decide difficult political issues was thus established by Yeltsin, not Putin, in dealing with the political opposition and Chechnya, where Russia lost the first stage of the war of Chechen secession (1994–1996). Putin was simply more effective than Yeltsin in waging war in Chechnya. In quotidian politics, Putin has preferred the rapier to the blunderbuss, with selective harassment, arrest and intimidation the preferred means to send the message: don't even THINK of challenging the system! The fate of opposition leader Aleksei Navalny, who helped trigger widespread protests to obvious electoral fraud in the 2011 parliamentary elections, is instructive: in and out of jail and house arrest, Navalny was slapped with trumped up

corruption charges (involving some hundreds of thousands of dollars, petty theft under Putin's regime) and, just to be sure, the regime arrested his brother as hostage to Aleksei's good behavior. The periodic murder with virtual impunity of critics of the regime like Boris Nemtsov, Anna Politkovskaya and dozens of other journalists underscores the dangers of opposition that cuts too close to the core of Putin's nexus of money and power. But the precedent of resolving political conflict by the bullet not the ballot was established under Yeltsin in October 1993.

4.3. Electoral fraud

The 2012 Russian presidential elections are an exemplary instance of the Putin machine exploiting electoral forms to avoid substantive electoral accountability. While Putin faced four challengers, not one was a plausible candidate and several were clear puppets of Putin's administration. Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov had been running for president since 1993 and, while it is the only true political party in Russia, its mainly elderly constituency prevents it from posing a real challenge to Putin, who has ably coopted nationalist and social welfare issues that appeal to potential communist voters. Zyuganov's candidacy today (unlike under Yeltsin in 1996) lends credence to the idea of fair elections without any chance of supplanting the regime. Vladimir Zhirinovskiy had been running for president since 1991; a creature of the KGB at the end of the Soviet era to siphon off nationalist votes from Boris Yeltsin's challenge to Gorbachev, Zhirinovskiy has actually voted in favor of the government on all bills of importance, no doubt the recipient of substantial funds from the administration's off-budget resources. The third opposition candidate, Sergei Mironov, was the head of the Fair Russia party that was created by Putin in the mid-2000's to serve as an opposition party that was, however, also pro-Putin. The last and last-minute candidate, billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov, had a website full of pro-Putin comments the week before he declared his candidacy. So, not one of Putin's opponents was plausible, the Russian public knew this, and Putin won a five-candidate race with an impressive 63% of the vote. Yet the precedent for such machine-like electoral manipulation was established during the 1996 presidential election, in which a last-minute third party candidate, General Aleksandr Lebed, appeared—created, funded and advised by Yeltsin's presidential administration with the connivance of the Clinton Administration—and took 15% of the vote that would otherwise have gone mainly to the communist Zyuganov (Kramer, 1996; Marsden, 2005, pp. 67, 89; Goldgeier and McFaul, 2003, pp. 149, 155). In consequence, Yeltsin outpolled Zyuganov 34–31% in round one and 54–40% in the decisive round two. Unlike Yeltsin, who was acting improvisationally to minimize electoral risks, Putin has perfected the art of machine politics, exploiting his regime's capture of the state to render unthinkable any alternative to the status quo. But once again, Putin has been working well-plowed soil.

4.4. State control of television news

From the very beginning of his rule, Putin sought to bring all Russian television news under his control. He succeeded, as all channels broadcasting political news on a Russia-wide basis are directly or indirectly controlled by the government. Recalcitrant news barons, like Boris Berezovsky, prudently fled the country. Yet the foundation for the mobilization of the media was again established during the 1996 presidential election campaign. All major television stations supported Yeltsin's candidacy against the communist Zyuganov and conspired to give nearly monopoly, and always positive, coverage to Yeltsin. To encourage any laggards, state-controlled Gazprom made substantial funds available to, for instance, the "Independent" television network (NTV), whose executive Igor Malashenko quickly found a lucrative sinecure with Gazprom. Under these circumstances, the Russian public did not learn that Yeltsin had suffered a heart attack between the first and second rounds of the election. Putin has simply collected media souls that had been sold under Yeltsin (Pomerantsev, 2014).

4.5. Corruption

The chief difference in corruption under Putin and under Yeltsin is that under Putin the government dominates the private sector; in consequence the government is getting a much larger share of the take. The main contracts for the Sochi winter Olympics (2014), for instance, were awarded on a no-bid basis to Putin's entourage. The result: although the winter games involve less than one-third the number of games as the summer games, Putin's winter spectacle cost at least 20% more than the 2008 Beijing summer games (\$50–60 billion), until then the most expensive Olympics by far at \$42.5 billion. It cost Russia four times as much as it did Beijing to put on each event (\$520 versus \$132 million) (International Olympic Committee, 2014). By contrast, in the 1995–96 loans for shares scheme, Yeltsin's government raised just \$5–6 billion (mainly to finance Yeltsin's reelection bid) from a handful of private sources in exchange for title to half of Russia's natural resource and industrial economy.

4.6. Anti-Americanism

Finally, in the area of most direct relevance for foreign policy, Putin has in recent years been cultivating an anti-Americanism that was first stoked by the Yeltsin government in the late 1990's in reaction to NATO wars against Russia's client Serbia in Croatia and Bosnia (1995) as well as Kosovo (1999). For Russian elites and publics, those wars, especially the 1999 NATO intervention, illustrated their worst fears about NATO expansion: that in spite of NATO's assurances, the U.S.-led alliance would take offensive action, in the absence of a direct threat to any NATO member state, in defiance of Russian

interests and outside the UN Security Council, where Russia wielded a veto (Zimmerman, 2002, pp. 187–215; Hopf, 2002, pp. 213, 225). Often hysterical Russian commentary depicted an American plot to dismember Russia, linking Western economic policy toward Russia in the 1990's with ambitions in Chechnya and along Russia's southern borderlands more generally. Where would NATO draw the line? Russian foreign policy officials called increasingly for a multipolar world order to counter "NATO colonialism." Yet as soon as Putin decided that Russia's interests were better served through cooperation with the United States, as over Afghanistan after September 11, 2001, the Russian government dropped all such rhetoric. Russian opinion took the cue (Lorrain, 2002, pp. 16–39).

Putin has since then inflamed and moderated anti-American and anti-Western rhetoric in conjunction with the prospects for results in Russian–American and Russian–Western relations. Key moments occurred in: 1999 – over NATO's war against Serbia (a Russian client); 2003– over the U.S.-led war in Iraq; 2008 – over Georgia's efforts to join NATO and the resultant Russo-Georgian war; and, most intensively, since late 2013 over Ukraine (Volkov, 2015). At the most fundamental level, Putin's objectives are comparable to Yeltsin's after 1993: how to square Russia's interest in profitable and harmonious relations with the Western world with its intense desire to be recognized as a great power, meaning first of all that Russia be granted the status of dominant power along its historical borderlands. Both leaders tried to manage Russian diplomacy so as to avoid having to make the painful choice between those two compelling objectives. Yeltsin's Russia failed but did not have the power to do much about it. Putin's Russia does.

5. A fascist Russia? Does it matter for foreign policy?

Is Putin's Russia then fascist, as some have argued (Motyl, 2010, 2012, 2015)? Clearly, Putin has consolidated an authoritarian political machine exploiting the forms of electoral democracy while minimizing the risks of transparent political accountability. He has asserted the power of the state, or at least the Presidential Administration, over the bulk of the Russian raw materials and industrial economy; he has succeeded in transforming the parliament, including key "opposition" parties, into conveyor belts of presidential preference; he has reduced the courts to agencies of the presidency in all matters of political interest; and he has successfully asserted a cult of personality reminiscent of Mussolini's obsession with hyper-masculinity: indeed, electoral studies demonstrate that the single biggest predictor of voting preference for Putin is sex. The category of "woman" is a much better predictor of a vote for Putin than are the traditional categories of class, age, occupation, region, ethnicity, or even political party (McAlliuster, 2014, p.104).

Yet where is Putin's fascist movement (Paxton, 2004, pp. 206–220)? His regime is based not on mobilizing the masses in active support of projects of state glory but rather on immobilizing them, through a deft interplay of populism, nationalism and media manipulation. The macro message that his media campaign sends daily to the Russian populace is that there are no objective truths in politics, that all is cynical manipulation on behalf of private interests (Pomerantsev, 2014). Putin has not prepared Russian society for a call to arms to absorb the greater "Russian World" because he knows, certainly after the failure to replicate throughout eastern Ukraine what he had accomplished in Crimea, there is no stomach for it among his chief electoral constituencies at home (Karatnycky, 2015). He has consistently lied about Russia's military involvement in eastern Ukraine not just to confuse the West but to appease a Russian public with no stomach for aggressive war. If the mobilization of society by a personalist regime for the waging of aggressive irredentist war is one hallmark of fascism, Putin's Russia remains far from that mark.

Even if we were to concede the point, the relationship between regime type (fascist or otherwise) and foreign policy is far from direct (Recall that the fascist Mussolini was at first ready to conclude an alliance with liberal France against fascist Germany.). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has pursued four distinct patterns of foreign policy in relationship to the Western world, in particular toward the United States and NATO: a "bandwagon" strategy of maximizing Russian interests by trying to join the Western world, 1991–1995; an increasingly confrontational rhetorical strategy as the Western option failed domestically and NATO began its surge toward Russia's borderlands, 1996–1999; a strategy of "negative balancing" from 2001 to 2004, as Russia sought to achieve in tactical alliances, first with the United States and then with France and Germany, what it failed to achieve either through the integrationist or confrontational approach; and a "positive balancing" approach since 2005 or so, as Putin's Russia has sought through developing its own internal power resources to achieve Russia's chief foreign policy interests (Anonymous, 2015). Without going in the details, the Russian government's choice of balancing strategy has tended to correspond to (a) the power resources available to the state combined with (b) the nature and intensity of threat perception from abroad. This can be represented schematically as follows:

In other words, external factors (degree of perceived foreign threat) and internal factors have interacted to shape Russian foreign policy toward the West. Moreover, the principle internal factor involved has been the degree of power available to the Russian state, not the particular nature of the Russian state political regime. Indeed, there has been remarkable consensus about Russia's overall foreign policy objectives among liberals and nationalists since early in the Yeltsin period. What

	State power: Low	State power: High
Threat perception: High	Rhetorical confrontation, 1996–1999	Positive balancing, 2005–present
Threat perception: Low	Bandwagon, 1991–1995	Negative balancing, 2001–2004

distinguishes the Putin period is the much greater power at the disposal of the Russian state and the much greater energy that Putin's regime has displayed in exploiting the possibilities of the implicitly authoritarian constitution that it inherited from Boris Yeltsin.

6. What is independent of Putin?

At the very outset of the post-Soviet era, Russian liberals were emphatic in their claim that Russia deserved a special role in the affairs of the other 14 newly independent post-Soviet states. They saw no contradiction between this claim and their concomitant desire to achieve full economic, political and security integration with the Western world. Sergei Stankevich developed this point eloquently for a Western audience in an influential 1992 article in the *National Interest*. The liberal Russian Ambassador to the United States, Vladimir Lukin, explained to Americans in 1992 that relations between Russia and the former Soviet states "should be treated as identical to those between New York and New Jersey" (Stent, 2015, pp. 18–19). Russian officialdom coined the phrase "near abroad" to indicate that Russia would not be bound by strictures of international law in dealing with its post-Soviet neighbors. Others used terms like "*Monrovskaia doktrina*" ("Monroe Doctrine") to characterize Russia's aims in this "near abroad." In so doing, Russia's post-communist liberals were reflecting the age-old dilemma that their Soviet- and Tsarist-era predecessors faced in calling for liberal reforms: such reforms, taken to their logical conclusion, undermined not only Russian autocracy but also Russian empire and therewith Russia's claim to global significance (Ulam, 1981; Wesson, 1985). In this light, a post-Soviet Russia that strictly followed the rules of international law and gave full allowance to its neighbors' sovereignty would soon find itself isolated in world politics. Non-Russian nationalism is, in effect, a formula for escape from Russian hegemony for most of its neighbors (special cases like Armenia excepted), whereas for Russia, nation-state nationalism reduces rather than expands the scope of the Russian polity. That is why it has always been more accurate to term the historical Russian polity an imperial state-nation rather than a nation-state. Because of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the core Russian heartland is juridically severed from more than 20 million ethnic Russians living outside the borders of the Russian Federation and finds itself competing with the western world and China in borderlands that for centuries have been under uncontested Russian domination. The notion that Russia is by rights and historical tradition a "great power" has become a cornerstone of contemporary Russian political legitimacy and it is intimately connected to justifying Russian hegemony through central Eurasia. For those Russians who doubt, there is Zbigniew Brzezinski's widely quoted remark

"Ukraine, a new and important space on the Eurasian chessboard, is a geopolitical pivot because its very existence as an independent country helps to transform Russia. Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire. However, if Moscow regains control over Ukraine ..., Russia automatically again regains the wherewithal to become a powerful imperial state, spanning Europe and Asia." (Brzezinski, 1998)

How can Russians doubt what leading Americans appear to take for granted (Tsygankov, 2004, pp. 61–112; Dugin, 2014)?

If most Russians, including liberals, agree that Russia has special rights along its historical borderlands in general, they tend to be emphatic about the special Russian interest in Ukraine. Putin was merely giving special expression to a typical Russian sentiment when he told George W. Bush in Bucharest in April 2008: "You have to understand that Ukraine is not even a country. Part of its territory is in Eastern Europe and the greater part was given to us" (Stent, 2015, p.168). Quite apart from specific economic and security interests, most Russians find it hard to accept the implications of Ukrainian sovereignty or even that Ukrainians can be truly civilized without fully embracing Russian tutelage. That Crimea was, is and should remain Russian—international treaties notwithstanding—is not seriously disputed anywhere in Russia. In annexing Crimea virtually bloodlessly, Putin ensured himself the role of ruler for life, should he desire it.

The annexation of Crimea and the incitement of rebellion in far eastern Ukraine were only the latest in a series of Russian interventions outside of its borders that have been aimed at securing Russian interests in the wake of the Soviet collapse. In the aftermath of the failed Soviet *coup d'etat*, Russian armed forces acted to detach border regions of Moldova (Transdnistria, 1991–present) and Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia, 1993–present), so as to preserve Russian influence along the far-flung post-Soviet periphery. Since the early 1990's, Russian military support has been essential in sustaining Armenia in its annexation of the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, thereby guaranteeing Russian influence throughout the south Caucasus. In none of these instances did the United States or any of the European powers seriously protest, not to mention penalize, Russia and its clients for such transgressions. In the case of Armenia, the U.S. Congress, under the influence of the Armenian-American lobby, actually imposed an economic embargo on Azerbaijan, the victim of the aggression, thereby indirectly supporting Russia's influence in the region (Lukic and Lynch, 1994, pp. 352–369).

Finally, most Russians concluded that Russian–American and Russian–NATO relations were a zero-sum game by the end of the 1990's, before the Putin period began. NATO military interventions under Russian protest in Bosnia (1995) and Kosovo (1999) persuaded virtually all Russians, liberals included, that Russian–Western relations were transacted not on the basis of commonalities of values and interests but rather on the basis of vectors of raw power. Russian elites were in a genuine panic by mid-1999, unsure whether NATO might extend its writ even to the Russian–Chechen conflict, then exploding into its second stage. By November 1999, with the second Russo-Chechen war in full rage and Putin now as Prime Minister, Bill Clinton stated at an OSCE meeting in Istanbul—the same at which the Americans engineered an oil pipeline running from Baku through Tbilisi to Ceyhan on the Turkish Mediterranean, bypassing Russia—that the Chechen war was not exclusively a matter for Russia to decide. The United States, which had met officially with several Chechen rebel leaders, appeared to be

pressing Russia at its point of maximum vulnerability. It is thus all the more remarkable that Putin offered the United States a wide-ranging alliance on Afghanistan, the Taliban and al-Qaeda after the September 11, 2001 terror attacks, a step taken against the virtually unanimous opposition of his national security advisors and the Russian military.

7. Conclusion

This review of Russian foreign policy demonstrates that there is no simple relationship between domestic regime type, at least as normally conceived, and specific foreign policy outcomes. While Putin's government embraced a decidedly anti-Western nationalist tone after public challenges to the falsified December 2011 parliamentary elections, one that has been intensified with the outbreak of the crisis with Ukraine in late 2013, such steps are consistent with the progressive alienation of Russia's ruling elites from the idealized, and frankly unrealistic, pro-Western policies adopted by the Yeltsin government in the early 1990's. Very quickly upon achieving independence after the Soviet collapse, Russia's Westernized liberal elites discovered that the Russian state lacked the capacity at home as well as the power abroad to make a meaningful "transition" to a liberal market democracy integrated with the Western world. Long before Putin came to power, Russia had rejected liberal internationalism for a classical foreign-policy realism adapted to Russia's specific circumstances. Moreover, the development of an authoritarian regime based on presidential prerogative was well under way by the time Putin came to power as a Prime Minister in August 1999. While building on this illiberal foundation, Putin reversed the dependence of the Russian state upon private finance and eliminated meaningful political opposition, even while observing electoral forms. Putin's state has been able to capture sufficient funds from Russia's fuels complex to much more fully realize authoritarian possibilities inherited from Yeltsin. As a consolidated personalist regime, Putin's Russia can be regarded as a distinct type from that of Yeltsin's halfway house of unconsolidated democracy/unconsolidated authoritarianism amidst a failing state (Sobchak, 1999, p.129). At the same time, Russia under Putin, as under Yeltsin, may also be regarded as a state-nation rather than a nation-state, and one with a decided imperial imprint. For purposes of foreign policy, it is arguably this latter aspect of Russian political development that matters more than where we classify Russia along the democracy-populist-authoritarian-fascist spectrum.

Putin's foreign policy has not been a hostage to regime type or anti-Westernism. On several occasions, most dramatically after the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, he has tried to cement a partnership with the United States or its European allies, at times in the face of fierce resistance from Russia's national security bureaucracy. While such a partnership rejected the premises of liberal integration with the Western world, it assumed that a stable Russian–Western relationship could be built on two foundations: (a) a pragmatic adjustment of Russian and Western interests, bilateral but also multilateral; and (b) Western recognition of the primacy of Russia's economic and security interests along its post-Soviet borderlands. Yeltsin's government too sought to reconcile these objectives, for the most part unsatisfactorily. The Ukraine crisis of 2013 to the present is just the latest and most dramatic evidence that Russian partnership with the West cannot satisfy these concerns.

Here we come to the nexus between Russian regime type and foreign policy. Virtually all of Russia's elites—liberals as well as communists, statist as well as Eurasianists, pro- and anti-Putin forces—accept the premise that, as the prime successor state to the Soviet Union as of Imperial Russia, contemporary Russia is a state-nation confronting powerful legacies of empire. Following this logic, a Russia that allows its neighbors the "freedom to choose" is a Russia that will be reduced to marginal status in world affairs. On no point is this consensus stronger than on Russia's relationship with Ukraine. Replacing Putin will not change this primordial fact.

In this light, a stable Russian–Western relationship, insofar as the crisis over Ukraine is concerned, can be achieved under two circumstances:

- (A) The EU and the United States, working closely with Ukraine, convince Russia's political class to abandon all hope of a special relationship with Ukraine and to accept the full implications of Ukrainian sovereignty; or:
- (B) The EU and the United States, working closely with Ukraine, proceed from the premise that Ukraine cannot be stabilized without Russian agreement.

A Hobson's choice? Perhaps; but recall that the most influential book on imperialism, one that inspired Lenin's eponymous tome, was written by Hobson (1902). Whatever the choice, replacing Russia's current political regime will not yield the solution, so long as Russia's *deep* political regime—the Russian state-nation of the imperial type—remains imprinted on the country's political imagination.

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