



UNIVERSIDAD PONTIFICIA COMILLAS
Facultad de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales

Bachelors Degree in International Relations

Final Degree Dissertation

The bear and the endless plain

Influence of national identity on Russian foreign policy

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Madrid, April 2018

“Russia cannot be understood with the mind alone,
[...] in Russia, one can only believe”
Fyodor Tyutchev, 1866

*To my family, for their patience and good humour,
To Javier Gil, for his guidance and encouragement,
And to Julian, my rock, my castle.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS	7
<u>1. AIM OF THE PROJECT AND MOTIVATION</u>	<u>9</u>
<u>2. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>3. STATE OF THE ISSUE</u>	<u>13</u>
3.1 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF RUSSIA	13
3.2 HISTORY AND CREATION OF THE RUSSIAN STATE	16
3.3 RUSSIA IN THE 20 TH CENTURY (1917-1990): THE SOVIET ERA	17
3.4 POST-SOVIET ERA EVOLUTION: FOREIGN POLICY OF THE NEW RUSSIA	18
<u>4. THEORETICAL APPROACH</u>	<u>21</u>
4.1 FOREIGN POLICY	21
4.2 GEOPOLITICS	22
4.2.1 RUSSIAN GEOPOLITICS	25
4.3 GREAT POWERS	25
4.3.1 WHAT IS A GREAT POWER?	25
4.3.2 RUSSIA AND POWER (SUPERPOWER, GREAT POWER, POTENTIAL SUPERPOWER)	27
4.4 NATION/STATE	28
4.4.1 WHAT IS A NATION?	29
4.4.2 WHAT IS A STATE?	30
4.4.3 CONCEPTUAL CONFLATION BETWEEN THE TWO/TERMINOLOGICAL DEBATE	31
4.5 NATIONAL IDENTITY	32
4.5.1 PROCESS OF CREATION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY	33
<u>5. HYPOTHESIS</u>	<u>35</u>
5.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	35
<u>6. STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION</u>	<u>36</u>
<u>7. SOURCES</u>	<u>36</u>
<u>8. ANALYSIS</u>	<u>37</u>
8.1 RUSSIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY	37
8.1.1 SLAVOPHILES V. WESTERNIZERS	37
8.1.2 RUSSIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY AND GEOGRAPHY	38
8.1.3 RUSSIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY AND STATE FORMATION	40
8.1.4 RUSSIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY, STATE AND EMPIRE	41
8.1.5 MANIFEST DESTINY	43

8.2	THE KREMLIN, NATIONAL IDENTITY AND FOREIGN POLICY	43
8.2.1	NATIONAL IMAGE	43
8.2.2	SYMBOLS AND RITUALS	44
8.2.3	RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES	45
8.2.4	NAMING OF ENEMIES	46
8.2.5	NATIONAL MEDIA AND EDUCATION SYSTEM	46
8.3	IMPACT ON FOREIGN POLICY	47
8.3.1	PUSH & PULL DYNAMIC	48
8.3.2	MULTIPOLAR INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM AND THE STRONG STATE IMPERATIVE	49
8.3.3	RUSSIA AND THE NEAR-ABROAD	50
8.4	FUTURE SCENARIOS	51
8.4.1	THE EUROPEAN UNION	51
8.4.2	NATO	53
8.4.3	CHINA	54
9.	CONCLUSIONS	56
10.	REFERENCES	58
11.	ANNEX	66
11.1	FIGURES AND TABLES	66

ABBREVIATIONS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
EU	European Union
EEC	European Economic Community
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NRC	NATO-Russia Council
US	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

ABSTRACT

In many ways, Russia is unknown – and unknowable – in its vastness and harshness. Its national identity and sense of self have been uniquely shaped by its geography, which has in turn shaped its foreign policy. In this dissertation we will seek to prove how Russian foreign policy is extremely influenced by the version of Russian national identity that the Kremlin has promoted, focusing on the period since the fall of the Soviet Union. Using geopolitics as the main theoretical framework, we will explore Russia's process of construction of national identity and how the government has used it to further its foreign policy agenda. To illustrate this, we will briefly look into Russia's relationship with the EU, NATO, and China, and posit possible future scenarios about what could happen based on all the previous information and analysis done.

KEY WORDS

Russia, national identity, foreign policy, geopolitics, history, Eurasia, Vladimir Putin.

RESUMEN

Rusia es el país más grande del mundo, y la inmensidad y dureza de su territorio han influenciado en gran medida su identidad nacional, que a su vez ha influenciado su política exterior. Este trabajo tiene como objetivo intentar probar que la política exterior de Rusia ha sido extremadamente influenciada por la versión de esta identidad nacional que ha elaborado el Kremlin. El período de tiempo estudiado será desde la caída de la Unión Soviética. Usando la geopolítica como principal marco teórico, estudiaremos el proceso de construcción de la identidad nacional rusa, y como el gobierno la ha usado para avanzar su agenda internacional. Como prueba práctica, se estudiará brevemente la relación de Rusia con la UE, la OTAN y China, y se propondrán posibles escenarios futuros basados en la información y el análisis previo.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Rusia, identidad nacional, política exterior, geopolítica, historia, Eurasia, Vladimir Putin.

1. AIM OF THE PROJECT AND MOTIVATION

1.1 AIM

The **aim** of this dissertation is to study how Russia's foreign policy is affected by its conception of national identity. The timeframe chosen will be the period since the fall of the Soviet Union, especially since Vladimir Putin came into power. We believe the outward-facing nature of foreign policy is the ultimate showcase for national identity. In order to understand Russian foreign policy, we must first look at its national identity and its construction and evolution throughout the centuries. We believe it is there we will find the key to better our understanding of Russian foreign policy.

A parallel goal of this dissertation is to gauge just how unchanging the tenets of Russian foreign policy are. We believe this is due to Russia's unique geographical perspective: as the biggest country in the world, geography and geopolitics play a paramount role in the construction of national identity and Russian politics that is extremely rare in other countries. Due to its largely unchangeable nature, it follows that geography has produced unchangeable foreign policy principles.

Very often Russia is seen and studied through a Western perspective. My intention though is to focus on the Russian perspective, trying to unearth and understand the motivations behind Russia's actions towards its neighbours and the world at large.

This dissertation will thus consist of an exploration of Russian foreign policy since the end of the Cold War and the influence national identity had and continues to have upon it. The exploration of Russian national identity in this dissertation will borrow heavily from the geopolitical tradition.

1.2 MOTIVATION

Russia and its unique circumstances have fascinated me for a long time, having read extensively about Russian art, music, and society, both during the Imperial era and the Soviet Regime. The main **motivation** for undertaking this dissertation topic is the

will to understand Russian national identity and how this affects its relationships with third countries.

We also want to focus this dissertation on Russia's national identity because we feel that too many times mainstream media and academia see Russia through the lens of its troubled relationship with the United States, or its tension with the European continent. Due to the scope and length of this dissertation, it will not be possible to explore Russia's national identity in a comprehensive manner, which would include a broader historical focus and an exploration of its relationship with its neighbours. However, we will touch briefly on its relationship with the EU, NATO, and China to test the impact national identity has on Russian foreign policy. The omission of the US from this analysis is not a mistake or oversight. We wish to explore Russia's relationships with important international actors, whose relationships with Russia are often overshadowed and overlooked by foreign policy experts, but are nevertheless instrumental in understanding Russia itself, and not the American caricature of it.

The time period chosen – since the fall of the Soviet Union until the present – is born out of the interesting and dynamic devolution of democracy that is happening in the Russian Federation right now. This change, which entails the current erosion of political institutions and reinforcement of Putin's power, will be useful in showing how national identity, or more specifically the State's ideal of it, influences foreign policy in a time of political turmoil and uncertainty.

In many ways, Russia is unknown, and unknowable, in its vastness and harshness, and the European cultural imaginary has had trouble conceptualising it (Crankshaw, 1947). It is this drive to know more about our biggest neighbour that is behind the drive to try and understand this crucial aspect of Russian studies.

2. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 OBJECTIVES

This dissertation has **four initial objectives** that will serve as the starting point of research and will guide the dissertation.

- Try to prove that Russian foreign policy is determined by its conception of itself as an empire, which at the same time is determined by geographical factors. The geopolitical aspect of this conception of national identity will be further explored.
- Explore how the Russian government has used the concept of Russian national identity to suit its interests. This is not new, as it follows a pattern that has been common throughout the history of the Russian State. The dissertation will explore this pattern through a historical lens, mostly focusing on the post-Soviet period, but linking it to previous instances of use of national identity by the State.
- Delineate the main tenets of Russian foreign policy, created through this constructed conception of Russian national identity. We will also explore to what extent Russian foreign policy has a series of fixed characteristics that are unchangeable.
- Briefly study how these characteristics of foreign policy instantiate themselves in Russia's relationship with the EU, NATO and China.

The combination of these four objectives buttresses the **main objective** of the dissertation, which is to shed light on an aspect of Russian politics (foreign policy), from a historical and cultural perspective.

2.2 METHODOLOGY

As mentioned before, the aim of this project is to study Russian foreign policy and how it has been affected by Russian national identity, using a wide range of interdisciplinary sources and methods to provide as nuanced an analysis as possible. To do this it is necessary to understand the nature of Russia's constructed ideal of national identity, how it came to be and what it is now, and how that affects its foreign policy.

The method of hypothesis will be mainly historical, and the research process will be diachronic.

The first part of the dissertation, the state of the issue, will use a predominantly **interpretative** methodology, with **qualitative research methods** such as **critical historical analysis**. It will explore Russia's history, focusing on the period since the end of the Cold War, and the complex relationships between nationalistic ideals and political reality.

The second part of the dissertation will use theory and academic works to lay the theoretical groundwork that will be used later in the analysis. Sources will be primarily secondary, using books by respected academic and political scientists, and will draw from different schools of social science and historical research.

The third part of the dissertation, the aforementioned analysis, will be in its majority a case study of Russian foreign policy, and how it has been affected by the Kremlin's ideal of national identity. The analysis will use **primary sources** such as government documents and official speeches, as well as reliable **secondary** ones like journalistic articles relevant to the area of study.

3. STATE OF THE ISSUE

Due to the length and scope of this dissertation, it would be impossible to do a comprehensive review of Russia's characteristics and how each of them informs Russian national identity and foreign policy. Therefore, we will briefly look at the following fields, in order to give a broad overview of the factors that will become relevant in the analysis section of this dissertation: general geography, climate, economy and resources, political organisation and territorial distribution, demography and ethnicity, languages, and finally, religion.

In the next two sections we will give a brief sketch of Russia's history and the main events that have shaped the country. First we will explore the creation and evolution of the Russian state. Then we will focus on the events during the Soviet Era that led to its downfall. Finally, we will look at the period since the turn of the millennium. To help with later analysis, we will highlight how the evolution of political events have shaped Russia's understanding of itself and its foreign policy.

3.1 BRIEF OVERVIEW OF RUSSIA

Russia's most distinguishable feature is its unparalleled size. First in the world in terms of area, it spans 17,125,200 km² (Embassy of the Russian Federation, 2018)¹, from the Baltic Sea in Northern Europe to the Japan Sea in Northeast Asia. It neighbours 14 countries, with a dizzying 22.408 km of land borders (CIA World Factbook, n.d.). According to the Federal Land Cadastre Services of the Russian Federation (2001), the land borders are the following: Norway and Finland to the North West; Poland, Belarus and the three Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) to the West; Ukraine to the South West; Georgia, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan to the South; and finally, Mongolia, China and the Korean People's Democratic Republic to the South East. Although it lacks a land border with Japan, it is worth mentioning the border between both countries is

¹ Official sources differ in their estimation of Russia's size. Whereas the source cited here (17,125,200 km²) comes from the Russian government, the CIA World Factbook (n.d.) puts Russia's total area at 17,098,242 km². This could be due to international disputes over certain territories such as the Crimean Peninsula, areas of the Caucasus, and the Kuril Islands in the Sea of Okhotsk, as well as territorial claims in the Arctic region.

somewhat contested: in 1945 Russia seized several of the Kurils – a chain of islands linking mainland Japan with the Kamchatka Peninsula – and no peace treaty has been signed regarding the matter (Clark, 2009).

The uniformity of the land and the lack of natural frontier zones with the majority of these neighbouring countries makes Russian territory especially vulnerable to invasion (Kaplan, 2012), something Russian leaders have been painfully aware of since the creation of the Russian State. Russia's geography is relatively uniformly flat, counting the East European Plain, the West Siberian Plain, and the North-East Asian grasslands (Embassy of the Russian Federation, 2018), although mountainous terrain is found in the Southern borders, the Caucasus and the Ural mountain ranges.

Climate varies throughout the country, from humid continental in Western Russia to subarctic in Siberia, with extensive steppes and tundras (CIA World Factbook, n.d.) throughout its territory. This harsh climate means only 13 % of the land is cultivated (Federal Land Cadastre Services of the Russian Federation, 2001). Half of the country's territory is covered in forests, and this prevalence has been key in the development of national identity – as it offered cover during the Mongol invasion of Russia during the Middle Ages and a base from which to launch attacks to reconquer the land.

The years following the collapse of the Soviet Union were difficult times for Russia, as the economy plummeted and social unrest fuelled by the chaotic dismantling of communist institutions spread throughout the country. However, since the turn of the millennium Russia has risen as a strong developing economy, and nowadays is part of the BRICS, the group of countries with new but advanced economic development (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). Today Russia has the 12th biggest GDP in the world: 1283 billion USD according to the World Bank (2016), and one of the biggest producers of energy sources such as natural gas and oil, which it exports primarily to Europe. There is no doubt that Russia plans to use its considerable energy resources to wield more global power and influence (Dodds, 2014) in the future, as energy scarcity becomes more relevant.

Most sectors of the economy underwent privatisation after the fall of the Soviet Union, although key industries relevant to national security (i.e. energy, transportation and defence development) remain under state control (CIA World Factbook, n.d.). The conditions of life in Russia continue to improve after the chaos the country was plunged

into when the USSR disintegrated, leaving many Russians without social security, healthcare or access to basic commodities and resources. Although economic conditions are currently experiencing a slight downturn (GDP fell by 2.8% in 2015 and by 0,6% in 2016), the government is making efforts to diversify its economy and make it more resilient, and 2017 saw an upturn in GDP growth (CIA World Factbook, n.d.). In fact, the World Bank estimates that the Russian poverty rate will fall in the next two years. All in all, the country is showing signs of recovering from the brief crisis of 2014, which came about due to international sanctions and the exhaustion of the commodity-based growth Russia had relied on since the end of the Soviet Union (The World Bank, n.d.).

According to Article 1 of the Constitution, the Russian Federation is a “democratic federal law-bound State with a republican form of government” (1993). It is a semi-presidential system, with both a head of State (President Vladimir Putin) and a head of government (Premier Dmitriy Medvedev). Its bicameral legislative branch is the Federal Assembly, which comprises the Council of the Federation and the State Duma (Constitution of the Russian Federation, 1993). The 85 different federal entities within Russia are represented in both the legislative and executive capacities at the Council of the Federation, which is non-partisan. 6 different political parties are represented in the State Duma: the party in government at the moment is United Russia, and the two biggest opposition groups are the Communist Party and the Liberal Democratic Party (BBC News, 2016). There are 450 deputies in the State Duma, who are elected for four-year terms (Constitution of the Russian Federation, 1993). The territorial structure of Russia betrays its status as a multinational, multiethnic nation, and the difficulties of managing and governing a country of its size: there are 21 republics, 6 territories (krais) and 50 regions (oblasts), as well as several autonomous areas and cities of federal importance (Moscow, St. Petersburg, Sevastopol)².

Russia has a population of around 147 million people, very low considering its size. Around 77% of its population is located in Western Russia, where the majority of the urban centres are. Apart from Moscow – the capital – the biggest cities are St. Petersburg, Novosibirsk, Nizhny Novgorod and Yekaterinburg. Regarding the makeup of its population, Russia has more than 160 different ethnic groups, which in total speak

² See Figure 1.

around 100 different languages. 35 of them have official status, being Russian the most widespread with 142,6 million speakers. The other major languages are Tatar (5,3 million) and Ukrainian (1,8 million) (Rosstat, 2002). The main religion is Orthodox Christianity, practiced by almost half of the population (Pew Research Center, 2011), although the rates of non-practicing believers and non-believers show the effect of decades of secular Soviet rule. However, the Church's storied tradition and close connection with Russia's identity harking back to the Middle Ages (Buzan & Wæver, 2003) continues, with Orthodox Christianity enjoying a privileged degree of control of public opinion and even the recognition of other religions. It was declared part of the country's 'historical heritage' in 1997 (Bell, 2003).

3.2 HISTORY AND CREATION OF THE RUSSIAN STATE

The first precursor to the modern Russian state was Kievan Rus, born out of the merging of the Slavic and Byzantine cultures in the banks of the Dnepr river valley in the 9th century (Curtis, 1996). This is the moment where the Christian Orthodox church began to exert its influence over the national creation myth. The slowly expanding empire reached its zenith in the 11th century, and then gradually declined due to infighting until it was finally defeated by the Mongol conquest in the 13th century. By then there was already a sufficiently defined Rus identity that this invasion was felt as a challenge to its civilisation. The Golden Horde – an offshoot of the main Mongol invasion – ruled the collections of small territories and principalities that once had been Kievan Rus from their base by the Volga until the late 15th century. This invasion and subservience to a foreign invader was the first of many incursions into Russian territory that fuelled the perennial Russian fear of invasion. The Rus people retreated into the forest, away from the open grasslands the Mongols thrived in (Crankshaw, 1947).

One of the principalities who claimed to be the heir of the Kievan Rus empire after its disintegration was Muscovy, situated in modern-day Moscow (Curtis, 1996). It slowly gained power, absorbing its neighbours. The militaristic nature of its expansion demanded a highly centralised system of power: this served as the base for the enduring Russian characteristic of individual subordination to the state and autocratic style of ruling. The expansion of Muscovy soon went beyond what was considered traditionally

Rus ethnic areas, and by the 18th century, the limits of Imperial Russia – which are roughly the borders of modern Russia – were clearly delineated. This expansion was mainly motivated by the spectre of the Mongol invasion: insecurity. In the featureless and indefensible flatlands of Eastern Europe the best defence was offence, and so the Russian Empire expanded ever on (Colton, 2016).

The Russian Empire was vast and nominally powerful, but it also suffered from chronic underdevelopment and unrest in the non-Russian ethnic areas of the empire (mostly to the Far East, but also in the Caucasus). The expansion of the Russian Empire also brought it face to face with European civilisation, and another enduring debate in Russian national identity was born: what was to be Russia's relationship with Europe?

Russian rulers since Peter the Great in the 17th century had struggled to modernise and push Russia to the next level of development to catch up with its European neighbours, but by the end of the 19th century the economic and social situation was perilous. Tsar Alexander II's emancipation of the serfs in 1861 (Colton, 2016) has been much touted as a genuine liberal effort to modernise the country's societal structure – which by the 19th century was still largely feudal – but in reality, the situation for the majority of the peasant population changed little. Unrest in all levels of society (except the ruling minority, increasingly disconnected from the struggles of Russia's peasantry) was met with repression and a half-hearted series of reforms, but no real change. By the time the First World War came about, the gap between the ruling elites and the majority of the population had become untenable.

3.3 RUSSIA IN THE 20TH CENTURY (1917-1990): THE SOVIET ERA

Much can and has been said about the 1917 Russian Revolution and the decades that followed, but it is not our objective here to dissect the Soviet regime. Instead, we will look at how key events in domestic and foreign Soviet policy shaped 20th century Russia, and eventually brought about the end of the Soviet Union and the transition to democracy.

The October Revolution of 1917 could have been averted if the Romanov Tsars had been more willing to undergo serious reform to modernise the country. Piling

defeats, first in the Crimean War and then in the Russo-Japanese War, stoked support for political outliers of the Marxist tradition, and intensified violent opposition against a repressive, anachronistic state system. WWI caught Russia at the height of a patriotic wave that wanted better things for the country (Curtis, 1996), and then the wave crashed. After the civil war that lasted until 1921, the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics was formed, and the following years would be focused on achieving the level of development and industrialisation that had eluded previous rulers, but at an exorbitant human cost. It would not be until the Second World War that Russia would take on the mantle of international strong man that defined its foreign policy and international image in the following decades. According to Tsygankov (2013), “the Soviet Union was an empire, in which the centre effectively controlled the sovereignty of the peripheral republics” (p. 47). As we will see later on in the analysis, the ideology behind this belief in empire has not changed. It is important to note, however, that here the centre is not Russia or the Russians but the Kremlin, which at once embodies and delineates what Russia is (Tsygankov, 2013).

WWII once again validated the Russian fear of invasion and initiated a patriotic upswing that led the USSR into the Cold War. Subsequent Soviet premiers developed Soviet industry and maintained under their control a collection of client governments from Eastern Europe. However, the Cold War struggle with the US further stretched the economic situation at home, and although Russia was able to exert great power outside its borders, the internal situation continued to be dire for the majority of the population (Zubok, 2009). This stoked social unrest and the increasing demands for democratisation and a market-based economy.

3.4 POST-SOVIET ERA EVOLUTION: FOREIGN POLICY OF THE NEW RUSSIA

By the late 80s, the internal situation of the Soviet Union was critical. Gorbachev’s glasnost and perestroika had backfired: real results were slow to come, and meanwhile the USSR had lost the ‘bogeyman’ figure in the international sphere which had served it so well during the Cold War (Colton, 2016). This loss of international credibility was compounded by the war in Afghanistan, which had proved fatal for Russian foreign policy and military legitimacy, and had spelled the end of the détente it

had enjoyed with the US (Zubok, 2009). Most damningly, it had also exposed the cracks within the higher echelons of the Soviet decision-making structure (Tsygankov, 2013; Zubok, 2009). Imperial overreach had exhausted the Russian economy and military capacities: the planned economic system of the Soviet Union was beginning to buckle. Gorbachev began to withdraw Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1988: the writing on the wall seemed clear. Soviet Republics began to break off from the Warsaw Pact and buck decades of Soviet control. An overstretched and emaciated Soviet government could not stop them, and by the end of 1991 Gorbachev had been ousted from power and the Soviet Union ceased to exist.

Boris Yeltsin – who replaced Gorbachev – had no taste for the “violent and chaotic” Bolshevik revolution and instead named the overhaul of Soviet policies ‘reforms’ (Colton, 2016). This meant reforming political institutions and opening up the economy to a market-based system, but without any kind of reckoning for the key political figures of Soviet Russia (Colton, 2016).

In terms of Russia’s relationship with the West (the European Union and the US) after the collapse of the Soviet Union, scholars like Sakwa (2009) distinguish three clear periods of fluctuating closeness and fraying of diplomatic relations. The three periods detailed by Sakwa and Freire (2012) range from 1992 to 2010 (1992-1995, 1996-1999, 2000-2010), and based on their characteristics we have added a fourth period that covers from 2011 until 2016. The first foreign policy period shows Russia beginning to push its own interests in the international arena, but still very much conditioned by Western policy interests. With the second period begins a withdrawal from the West-Russia post-Cold War collaboration and the development of ‘competitive pragmatism’. The third period, beginning with the first Putin premiership, shows a clear assertiveness of Russian interests, and a noticeable autonomy from the West’ policy lines (Freire & Kanet, 2012). The fourth period is marked by what scholars such as Marcel Van Herpen, Jeffrey Mankoff and Charles Clover define as ‘new imperialism’ or ‘new nationalism’ of the Russian government.

The feeling of ‘lost empire’ and the drive to regain lost power starts to be relevant during the first Putin premiership (1999), when Chechen separatists bombings in Moscow resulted in the invasion and annexation of Chechnya, who had been locked into a struggle for independence since its annexation by the USSR in 1920 (Van Herpen,

2014). Russia's renewed sense of imperialism gained momentum throughout the subsequent Putin presidencies and premierships. The country's foreign policy regained the strongman status it had lost after the collapse of the Soviet Union and began being more assertive and aggressive in its international pursuits: the Russo-Georgian war of 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 are examples of a Russia that seeks to regain its global power position and extricate itself from Western influence.

This new imperialist drive to regain the glory of the Russian state was first seen in seminal texts of Russian nationalists such as Alexander Dugin and Igor Panarin (Clover, 2017). The main pillar of this new imperialism is the territorial integrity of the Russian state, which had been severely compromised by the collapse of the Soviet Union. Putin himself referred to the end of the Soviet Union as "a major geopolitical disaster of the century" (Putin, 2005), and mentioned the plight of many Russians who saw themselves cut off from the motherland when the Soviet Republics broke off overnight. It is impossible not to follow this strand of reasoning directly to the Crimean annexation, the Second Chechen War and the ongoing tension in South Ossetia. The concept of 'territorial integrity' has permeated Putin's policies, and is the first objective of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (2016), a roadmap for what Russian foreign policy must look like.

Today, Russia still struggles with economic malaise and social unrest. The devolution of democratic values – free speech, free press and right of assembly, among others – and the continued persecution of any form of meaningful political opposition, as well as ongoing human rights violations, demonstrates that Russia has forfeited internal stability for foreign policy, much like in Soviet times.

4. THEORETICAL APPROACH

4.1 FOREIGN POLICY

Foreign policy is a dynamic field of political science that encompasses a state's policy towards other states, be it neighbours or the entirety of the international system. It is affected by a variety of factors that shape it and make it difficult to predict long-term, and in many occasions, short-term as well (Donaldson & Noguee, 2002). According to Donaldson & Noguee (2002) there are two types of factors that affect foreign policy: internal and external.

- **Internal factors** are: the government apparatus and the political elites, demography, culture, economy, and geography of the country.
- **External factors** are: political vacuums and imbalances of power, changes in the international arena, and foreign threats.

The concepts of foreign policy, national interest and national identity cannot be divorced from one another (Freire & Kanet). They inform and are informed by each other. To this list Kaplan (2012) proposes to add geography, as according to him, "to know a nation's geography is to know their foreign policy" (p.6). Therefore, foreign policy could be described as the result of the combination of internal and external factors of a country that affects its relationship with other countries.

Due to its focus on the state and its actions, it is tempting to see foreign policy through a strictly realist or statist lens, but to do so would be to disregard the importance of non-state groups and individuals in the process of policy-making. Nonetheless, foreign policy itself does not have a significant theoretical tradition, as it is highly specific and case-oriented (Hudson, 2012): it is in foreign policy analysis where we find the theoretical underpinnings for the study of foreign policy and foreign policy behaviour. Depending on the theory we follow, actors, context, goals or consequences will vie for prominence in the analysis of a country's foreign policy (Smith, Hadfield, & Dunne, 2012). Nevertheless, the main theoretical base of foreign policy analysis is always human decisions, be it individual or group-based (Hudson, 2012).

Foreign policy analysis can help us understand both the structure of the international arena as a whole and specific cases of important foreign policy decisions.

This is a crucial aspect of foreign policy and its analysis: the level and the subject of analysis often differ from those in international relations, and can give a more comprehensive understanding of a government's foreign policy (Singer, 1961). This level of analysis lends itself to 'middle range' types of theories like those developed in foreign policy decision-making, which "avoid both excessive abstraction and narrow empiricism" (Stuart, 2010, p. 577).

Hudson (2012) further draws on foreign policy analysis tradition to detail several levels of analysis, ranging from the most internal (cognitive processes and leader's personality and orientation) to the most abstract (systemic effects on foreign policy). In the interest of narrowing down research and analysis in this dissertation, we will focus on the following levels of analysis:

- **Culture and national identity:** Russian national identity formation.
- **Domestic political reaction:** activist groups, protests, media intervention and intra-institutional responses.
- **Country characteristics related to foreign policy:** Russian geography and resources.
- **Regional balances of power:** Russia's relationship with its immediate neighbours.

4.2 GEOPOLITICS

Geopolitics was born out of a conflation of several disciplines, such as geography, human geography, sociology and economics (Dodds, 2014). The first one to use the term to denote a distinct discipline was Rudolf Kjellen, who described it as "a more realistic approach to international politics that lays particular emphasis on the role of territory and resources in shaping the condition of states" (Dodds, 2014, p.21). This focus on geography has been touted as overly deterministic and partly responsible for German ambition during the Second World War and the rigid divides of the Cold War (Owens, 1999). However, precisely because geopolitics – and specifically classical geopolitics – has been so closely linked with imperialist drives and dualist world views of 'us' versus 'them' is its study important.

The main exponents of geopolitics all came before the Second World War, as the discipline fell out of favour following its use by Nazi Germany (Agnew, 2003). This pre-war geopolitics is dubbed 'classical', whereas the eventual revival in the second half of the 20th century is 'critical'. **Classical geopolitics** seeks to classify and encompass the world, understanding it as a limited space with a limited amount of resources. The aim of this strand of geopolitics was essentially to divide up the world in a hierarchical order of usefulness or importance, so that the players involved (i.e. empires) could prosper and thrive. It was born alongside colonialism and imperialism, and indeed served as one of the main intellectual justifiers of both orders (Betti, 2016).

Although there are several geopolitical intellectuals that have moulded classical geopolitics such as Mackinder, Kjellen, Ratzel, Mahan and Haushofer, in the interest of narrowing down geopolitics to suit the constraints of this dissertation we will briefly explore the thought of the latter two. These geopolitical thinkers have most influenced the study and wider understanding of Russia's geopolitical circumstances and can shed light on the Russian geopolitical imagination.

Rudolf Kjellen was the first person to use the word 'geopolitics', but it was Mackinder and his Heartland Theory who brought geopolitics to the forefront of foreign policy of empire. Mackinder believed that history could be divided into big epochs based on the transportation system prevalent at the time: the creation of the railway heralded a new era in which control of the Heartland would be paramount to obtaining control of the world (Mackinder, 1904). Although his theories are deeply flawed, imperialist in nature and overly simplistic, they placed incredible strategic significance to the Russian sphere, which did not go unnoticed by Russian geopolitical scholars and helped build Russian identity.

Thomas Mahan posited that the most important element in geopolitics is sea power, and the strengths of a nation's navy would determine their survival in the international sphere (Betti, 2016). He was not the only scholar who put an emphasis on seafaring capabilities as important for power in international politics: Fredrick Ratzel, a German professor, wrote *The Sea as a Source of the Greatness of a People* and was one of the first proponents of 'Lebensraum', the infamous belief that a nation must continually grow to 'feed' itself and survive (Flint, 2006).

Lastly, Haushofer brought classical geopolitics to its peak, and subsequently tied the discipline to Nazi ambition for decades. Drawing on Ratzel's social Darwinism and Mackinder's Heartland theory, Haushofer saw relationships between states as a continual fight for survival which could not be won unless countries secured their living space. Although the extent of Haushofer's involvement with the Nazi regime continues to be debated, it is undeniable that his reductionist and highly masculinised ideas about power and politics inspired Hitler a great deal (Tuathail, 1998). This, along with the de-colonisation process after WWII, made classical geopolitics anathema and propitiated the rise of critical geopolitics.

The '60s and '70s saw a revival in the interest in geopolitics, but with a renovated focus. The end of the Cold War further relaxed the rigid intellectual political environment (Betti, 2016), and world events and the onset of globalisation drew the focus away from the state and towards non-state actors and ideologies (Flint, 2006). The new geopolitical analysis began to 'unpack' the state and gave rise to **critical geopolitics**. This strand of geopolitics encompasses many different school of thoughts, from Marxist to feminist and environmentalist, but they are all interested in identifying and analysing power relationships inherent in geopolitics. It makes a conscious effort to focus on the influences and effects of ideologies instead of the material aspects of international relations. Therefore, discourse analysis and representational politics become central to geopolitics: the international arena is no longer a rational space with clear cut distinctions between concepts, but an irrational space shaped by human interaction (Croft, 2008). Geopolitics is no longer the sole purview of governments, but is influenced by non-state actors, popular narratives and actions beyond the State itself (Agnew, 2003).

Critical geopolitics is relevant to our subject of study because it provides, rather than a concrete ideology, a useful methodology of critical analysis through which to understand Russian geopolitics and Russian foreign policy. The importance of non-state actors and the construction of national identity and narratives of power cannot be understated.

4.2.1 Russian geopolitics

“The Russian fashion for geopolitics [...] is a way to discuss identity”

(Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 408).

Russian geopolitical thinking is extremely influenced by the realist tradition of classical geopolitics, which views power and the relationship states have with it as the main tenet of geopolitics: that there is an international hierarchy of states determined by who has power and how much; that state power comes from the physical territory of the state (resources, strategic potential); and that states must continually fight to retain that power, lest it be taken away from them (Owens, 1999). Following this line of reasoning we can understand how Russia’s geopolitical understanding hinges on two facts: it has limited access to warm waters, and no natural land borders.

As we have seen, for Mahan sea power was inextricably linked to territorial expansion (Dodds, 2014), and the colonial history of most empires would support this statement, except in Russia’s case. The expansion of the Russian Empire was made almost exclusively by land, and to this day Russia lacks direct access to oceans through warm water ports (Marshall, 2015). This lack of direct access has hampered Russian international power and helps explain the paradox of Russia being the biggest country in the world, but not the most powerful (Marshall, 2015).

Although Klaus Dodds cautions against fixating on “territorially defined states, big powers, and particular agents like politicians” (Dodds, 2014, p.17), to ignore these concepts in the case of Russia would render the analysis incomplete. It is simply impossible to disassociate Russian politics from its geography (Crankshaw, 1947). Nevertheless, its singular focus on geography as the ultimate explainer of the world can lead to oversimplified views, and ‘erase’ geography. Therefore, a responsible use of geopolitics makes it a factor within a bigger framework of analysis.

4.3 GREAT POWERS

4.3.1 What is a great power?

The current international politics theory categorisation of powers in superpowers, great powers, middle powers, and small powers (Nossal, 1999) is heavily influenced by Cold War ideology and US-centric international politics. This is far from

the only way to categorise states and their differing degrees of power, but it is the most widely used. The bipolar international order during the Cold War – when both the US and Soviet Russia were considered superpowers – cemented the concept of superpower, great power and hyperpower in both mainstream politics and the academic world. Following Nossal's (1999) definition, a superpower is:

“a political community that occupied a continental-sized landmass, had a sizable population [...]; a superordinate economic capacity [...], including ample indigenous supplies of food and natural resources; enjoyed a high degree of non-dependence on international intercourse; and, most importantly, had a well-developed nuclear capacity”. (p. 3)

This definition has much in common with Kenneth Waltz' (1993) definition of power in international relations, which includes five aspects that determine a country's power: “size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence” (p. 50). Writing in a time of incredible international upheaval after the end of the Cold War, Waltz's definition set the model by which countries who fit or aspired to fit the ‘great power’ definition modelled themselves.

Although written after the end of the Cold War, the hierarchy was deeply rooted in Cold War ideology and second-strike capabilities. Today nuclear capacity could very well be substituted for cyber-security capabilities. Based on this theory, the collapse of the Soviet Union left the US as the sole global superpower. Today this position is widely seen as threatened or already inaccurate. The bipolar order of the Cold War gave way to a theoretical American unipolarity, which threatened to be overtaken by a multipolar order thanks to globalisation. This is when the concept of great states, or major states, began to develop separate to the concept of superpower. In this order, great states had a global role to play, and were equally committed to not let unipolarity win.

The sole difference between superpowers and great powers is the ‘membership’ criteria and how demanding they are. Superpowers have an undisputed global reach, being able to exert influence and power anywhere in the world, on multiple fronts at any given time (Bremmer, 2015), as well as high performance in all areas mentioned before (economy, population, territory...). Great powers are countries that might excel in several areas, but not all: the criteria they follow are less demanding (Buzan & Wæver,

2003). Furthermore, great powers are different from regional powers in that their international relations with other countries are more proactive than reactive, and they are taken into account by other smaller powers. It is no surprise, then, that there is no definitive list of great powers, although they are typically understood to be those with veto power in the UN Security Council (apart from the US): Russia, United Kingdom, China, and France; as well as 'big' European countries like Germany and Italy; and finally, Japan (Sterio, 2013). This list is highly susceptible to change, and to a degree, arbitrary. Why not include India, who in less than a decade will surpass China in both GDP growth (IMF, 2017) and population (UNDESA, 2017)? Why not include Indonesia, one of the proposed BRIIC countries?

Increasingly, competition on a global scale between great powers is taking on a civilisational dimension. This implies the fight is not only between different foreign policy outlines or economic gains, but between differing (although not necessarily opposing) "value systems and development models" (Freire & Kanet, 2012, p. 4). This can be clearly seen in the conceptions of state power of Russia (i.e. 'big government') and the United States (i.e. 'small government'), but also between the social democratic model of EU countries versus the authoritarian model of the Gulf countries or China.

4.3.2 Russia and power (superpower, great power, potential superpower)

Over the centuries, Russia has experienced fluctuations in its international world order status: from the might of Kievan Rus, to the Mongol invasion, followed by the expansion of the Russian Empire, its progressive decline and the rebuilding of Russian power by the Soviet Union, and finally the end of the Soviet Union, the chaotic 90s and Russia's resurgence since the turn of the millennium. Russia's evolution in the international order follows Kenneth Waltz's (1993) rationale that a great power (see, superpower) cannot maintain itself by excelling in one or two fields, but by striking the correct balance between all of them. Therefore, Soviet Russia, which for decades was a superpower alongside the US, crumbled due to internal imbalances, especially regarding economic capabilities versus military and territorial ones.

After the Cold War, Russia remained a great power, but not a superpower. Nowadays Russia's foreign policy is geared towards maintaining and ensuring the

multipolar world order. Russia knows that in order to keep a degree of independence and power in the international sphere the US cannot be allowed to become a hyperpower or remain a superpower. In a multipolar world Russia has more opportunities to steer international policy to their greatest advantage. Furthermore, there are some who believe there is the possibility of Russia re-attaining superpower status due to its natural resource wealth and geopolitical position (Rosefielde, 2004). Long cut off from main maritime trading routes, the melting of the icecaps opens up a new world of Arctic maritime routes that Russia is already exploring (Sinovets & Renz, 2015), and that could boost the perpetually lopsided economic aspect of Russia's power. However, current official Russian government statements on the matter run contrary to this aspiration of Russia as a superpower: Putin made clear Russia's unwillingness to become a global superpower, choosing instead to be a 'force of moral good' and guarantor of international law, state sovereignty and national self-determination (The Kremlin, 2013). Nevertheless, it would be unwise to take such statements at face value. Even if the Kremlin does not actively seek it, it is difficult to believe Russia would not seize the opportunity to become more powerful in the international arena.

Russia is not the only country considered a 'potential superpower'. All great powers, plus the BRIICS countries, have in theory the potential to attain superpower status. Even the European Union is considered to be a candidate for superpower, if it manages to overcome its 'nation-state nostalgia' and finish its political integration (Stubb, 2008).

There are those who believe that due to the technological advancement brought about by globalisation, the jump from great power to superpower is much more difficult now than it was in the past (Brooks & Wohlforth, 2016). However, due to the growing unpredictability of the international order and the further crumbling of the United States' soft power, the rise of Russia's cyberwarfare capabilities, and China's economic growth, this assertion remains wildly speculative.

4.4 NATION/STATE

The terms nation and state are essential to any study of national identity and international politics, but their conceptualisation in the academic community has been

fraught with debate. Mainstream politics and media often use them as interchangeable terms, and the nuances of both terms get lost in the political discourse, except when it suits the interests of a political party or state. To understand this conceptual conflation between both terms, and what it implies, we will first review terms separately, and then jointly.

4.4.1 What is a nation?

According to Hutchinson and Smith (1994) a nation is “a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological makeup manifested in a common culture” (p. 20). The emphasis on a common psychological makeup between peoples, a sort of oneness of experience that unites the inhabitants of a nation, is a hallmark of romantic nationalist thought, and can be seen in early Russian nationalist scholars such as Chaadaev. This sense of unity is used to unify the population of a territory. This unification is crucial in modern politics, as national sovereignty is regarded as the main locus of state power. However, as we will see later on, there is much debate in the current international academic community about the true definition of a nation.

The concept of a shared territory or homeland is also central to the concept of a nation. Although not all nations line up with the territory the state controls, all nations have at least the memory of a shared territory to which they belong and must return to (Kelman, 1997). This ‘centrality of territory’ shows up in Russian national identity and the debate over what constitutes the Russian nation and the Russian state.

Sheila Croucher (2004) argues that the sense of shared community and experiences that defines a nation always serves the interests of a given party, most usually the governing elites, and that it is these governing elites who – with the aid of symbolism, mythology and sometimes religion – shape the ideal of a nation. Of course, the idea of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ is intrinsic to any identity building, and it is no exception in the case of nation building, since it ultimately seeks to shape the national identity of peoples.

4.4.2 What is a state?

In its simplest form, a state is generally understood as a political organisation with a defined structure that rules over a territory and has a monopoly on the use of force (Derman, 2010). This definition was first put forth by Max Weber towards the dawn of the 20th century. However, there is no clear consensus on the definition of state, and in certain intellectual traditions it is both synonymous with nation and with government.

The concept of state is especially relevant in the context of international relations. Although there exist a multitude of theories dealing with the importance of the state in the international order, the mainstream realist school of thought of authors such as Kenneth Waltz argues that the state is the primary actor in international relations, and in the absence of an overarching authority it must act in its own interest instead of collaborating with others (unless it suits its interests) (Rae, 2002). This is the school of thought that dominates Russian political thought. Putin's government, and the ones before it, viewed Russia's interests as above any other consideration of international politics, and acted accordingly. In this view, the Russian state is a main actor in international relations. This is backed up by theory: foundational international relations theory teaches us that the state is the most important actor in the international sphere and – despite recent globalisation bringing to the fore some non-state players – it will continue to be so in the foreseeable future (Lake, 2010). Following this line of thought, states are understood to be both the object and the subject of international relations, as well as a unit of analysis. Although there are limits to such state-centric approaches, policy-makers and state leaders tend to adhere to them because of the clarity and straightforward roadmap they afford (Krasner, 1978).

However, according to neorealist theorists such as Waltz or Krasner (1978), the interests of a state cannot be reduced to the sum of the individual or collective interests of elements within the state. This is because the external demands of the international system on states as a whole usually do not correlate with the interests of domestic elements. This is where a realist view of statehood slightly frays because it does not take into account how international state behaviour might affect internal politics (Rae, 2002).

4.4.3 Conceptual conflation between the two/terminological debate

Leading academics in the field of sociological studies, such as Anthony D. Smith, have struggled to clearly define and differentiate between the concepts of nation and state (Guibernau, 2004). They are both constructed concepts, and when conflated they refer both to the population living within the boundaries of a state, and the territory the state occupies (Kelman, 1997). There is some debate about the accuracy of characterising the nation as a group of people living within the boundaries of a state's territory, and the current trend of globalisation and simultaneous rise of nationalism is bound to deepen the conflict.

With the onset of globalisation, the concept of nation-state increasingly began to feel like a "cultural or discursive construction, [...] an imagined political community or site of governmental rationality rather than as a solid institutional apparatus with defined borders and functions" (Jessop, 2010, p. 41). Despite the apparent crisis of the concept of nation-state, it remains the "primary provider of human dignity" (Kelman, 1997, p. 165) for two main reasons: it encompasses the ethnic and cultural identity of the majority of the population, and it provides the population with a sense of protection and individual participation (Kelman, 1997). In these statements we can see a total conflation of the terms nation and state, which implies that there cannot be one without the other, but the reality is that perfect correlation between the ethnic nation and the state is almost impossible to find. Most states have more than one nation within their territory, and some nations are divided between multiple states. The definition Walker Connor gives of the distinction between state and nation seems to be the one closest to a true separation and delineation of both terms: a state is a tangible political entity which can be easily described with objective quantitative data (population, landmass, geographical location, etc.), whereas a nation is an intangible concept that can only be described through subjective criteria (common culture, feeling of belonging, etc.) (Connor, 1978). There can be both nation-states and nations without states, with the latter having their access to power and resources greatly diminished (Guibernau, 2004).

Nevertheless, national self-determination and state sovereignty remain two sides of the same coin, and there is ample data to suggest this continues to be so because it is effective. Conflating nation and state is a powerful tool for the ruling elites

because it rallies the unifying strength of nationhood with the tangible material might of states (Croucher, 2004).

In the analysis section of this dissertation we will explore the complex relationship the Russian government has with the narrative and continuum of Russian nationality, and how concepts such as ethnic nationalism and state sovereignty can be twisted and used by political elites to further their interests.

4.5 NATIONAL IDENTITY

National identity is intrinsically tied to the concepts of nation, patriotism and nationalism. As with the nation/state conceptual debate, different academic sources draw on different aspects to construct their definition of national identity, and how it is created. For the conceptual work we want this theoretical framework to perform, we will look at several definitions of national identity and how they approach national identity construction, as well as the relationship with nationalism, nation building and statehood.

At its most basic, national identity is the sentiment that unites one group of people who believe themselves to be a nation (Emerson, 1960). National identity can also be defined as “a collective identity creating the assumption of community at the national scale and the correspondence of that identity with the spatial organisation of society into nation-states” (Flint, 2006, p. 30).

For Montserrat Guibernau (2004) nationalism is merely the expression of national identity. Although drawing from Anthony D. Smith’s fundamentals of national identity [“a political community, history, territory, patria, citizenship, common values and traditions” (Smith, 1991, p.20)], she stresses that the territorial dimension of national identity cannot be tied solely to a state, since there are nations and national identities that do not have a state of their own. However, this does not mean that territory is not an important element of national identity: as mentioned before, the territory a nation ‘belongs to’ does not have to be a physical reality in the present time: it can be an ancestral home or lost territory to which that group belongs (Dodds, 2014). This dissonance is one of the main causes of nationalist conflicts (i.e. Kurdish, Scottish, Catalan, Palestinian, etc.) but it will also help in the analysis of Russian national identity

and its relationship with former Soviet Republics, as well as the concept of Eurasianism. Indeed, in the Russian case geography cannot be separated from national identity due to the uniqueness and expansiveness of the Russian landscape, as well as the concept of the Russian motherland that extends beyond the borders of contemporary Russia.

Besides the geographical focus, national identity is closely tied to citizenship (of a state), but it is not always so. Minority national identities within a state can lack citizenship of their own state, or people with the same national identity can be scattered in several states. Again, this is worth taking note of in the Russian case.

National identity is not monolithic: it is felt and experienced in different ways and to different degrees by every individual who makes up that nationality. Furthermore, national identity is not affected in the same way by every individual – that is, it is more than the sum of its parts. Leaders, elites and particular subgroups can define national identity in a much more effective and direct way than the majority of individuals (Kelman, 1997). This process of shaping and reshaping of national identity is complex and entails both “a combination of historical realities and deliberate mobilisation” (Kelman, 1997, p. 171).

4.5.1 Process of creation of national identity

National identity, like any other social concept, is a construct of human interaction (Dodds, 2014). Although there are many aspects that go into this process of creation, we will focus on the strategies and actions that the State employs to create a sense of national identity in its population. The creation of the Russian state predates the creation of the Russian national identity: the expansion of the Russian Empire amalgamated several ethnicities and groups into a sole political organism, and Russian monarchs and political elites employed and continue to employ these strategies to unify the population. As detailed by Guibernau (2004), there are five broad avenues the state can explore to create national identity:

- The engineering, construction, and spread of a **national image** by and for the ethnic majority, which includes several common uniting factors: history, culture, language, territory.

- The engineering, construction, and spread of a series of **symbols and rituals** in order to strengthen the feeling of community.
- The granting of civil, legal, socio-economic and political **rights and liberties** to a certain group – the citizens – which in turn helps to demarcate between ‘us’ and ‘them’.
- Following the creation of a clearly delineated ‘us’ and ‘them’: the **naming of enemies** of the nation. These enemies do not have to be real, direct or urgent threats for them to act as a unifying agent.
- And finally, the creation of a **national media and national education** system.

These strategies of national identity construction will be used in the analysis to analyse the Kremlin’s strategy.

5. HYPOTHESIS

The main hypothesis this dissertation seeks to verify is that **Russian foreign policy is extremely influenced by the version of Russian national identity that the Kremlin has promoted.** This is because foreign policy is determined by a country's ideal of its national identity, which in the case of Russia is heavily influenced by geography. We will use the case study of Russia's relationship with the EU, NATO and Central Asia to further demonstrate this hypothesis.

5.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

We will work with four research questions:

- **How was the Russian national identity created, and what has been its evolution?** How do historical and geographical factors contribute to the creation of a collective identity? Develop the concept of Russian national identity, which will then serve as starting point for the rest of the analysis. Bring special focus to the role of geopolitics in this creation.
- **What is the Kremlin's idea of Russian national identity?** Understood not as the 'real national identity' – previously defined – but as the ideal of national identity the Putin administration is using to justify its agenda. Formulating answers through theory and official documents, review how Russia can and has used this idea of national identity to suit its interests.
- **What are the main tenets of Russian foreign policy?** Study them and how they relate to Russian national identity, taking into account real-life events and Kremlin use of national identity
- **How does this ideal of national identity affect its relationship with the EU, NATO and Central Asia?** Explore the relationships as informed by this ideal of national identity and propose three possible future scenarios for how this constructed concept will affect Russia relations with these parties.

6. STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

We will first define the Russian government's ideal of national identity, using geopolitics as the main theoretical framework. We will review the process of construction of this national identity, and then analyse how it is used by the Kremlin to suit its purposes. Following this, we will explore the impact this conception of national identity has had on Russian foreign policy, and, finally, briefly posit possible future scenarios about what could happen to the relationship between Russia and the EU, NATO and, China based on all the previous information and analysis done.

7. SOURCES

The sources used in this dissertation will mostly be secondary, written by leading experts in the fields of national identity, foreign policy and Russian studies. The sources come from books, academic articles, journalistic articles from reputable sources and information from official websites of the Russian government and international organisations. We will also use primary sources such as Vladimir Putin's annual speeches to the National Assembly and other government bodies, and official government documents such as the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation and the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation.

8. ANALYSIS

8.1 RUSSIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

Russian foreign policy is much more affected by conceptions of national identity and national interest than what has traditionally been understood. Through a constructivist approach that sees national identity as a way to understand foreign policy, Laenen (2012) doubles down on the importance of national identity to understand how the relationship between internal and external factors shapes Russian foreign policy.

Thus, to understand the extent to which Russian national identity, and the Kremlin's version of it, has shaped foreign policy, we first need to understand what Russian national identity is and how it came about. We will explore different key elements of this national identity, such as the role geography plays in the Russian psyche and the idea of the 'special destiny' of the Russian nation, as well as the links between state formation, empire and national identity.

However, we do not presume to give a comprehensive account of Russian national identity, or in fact an account that is shared by all Russian citizens. The factors analysed below were chosen because of their influence in the later analysis of foreign policy.

8.1.1 Slavophiles v. Westernizers

Russia's process of construction of national identity as we understand it today was marked by the debate between Westernizers and Slavophiles in the early 19th century. The former compared Russia to European powers and proposed the ways in which Russia needed to change to reach their level of political, economic and intellectual development. On the other hand, Slavophiles viewed Russia as a unique subject that did not and should not need to be changed (Young, 2012). However, as Howe (2002) points out, although the Slavophile sentiment viewed Russia as 'enough', and rejected Russia's supposed inferiority when compared to Europe, it had no qualms about labelling itself the civilizer of the easternmost reaches of the Russian empire. For the first Slavophiles – Aksakov, Kireevskii and Chaadaev, among others – there existed an impassable gulf between Russia and the West, and they concluded that the Russian way of life (and thus,

the Russian identity) triumphed over the hollow principles of the West (Aizlewood, 2000).

The first person to explore a 'Russian national identity' in a comprehensive manner was Chaadaev (Young, 2012). Although he was not the first one to explore what it meant to be Russian, and what 'Russia' itself was, his work coincided with the Romantic nationalist explosion that swept through Europe during that time. The development of key questions about Russian identity was done mainly through philosophic and literary writings. The great Russian novel was the vehicle through which national identity and politics were debated and shaped, since most political writing was banned at the time (Young, 2012).

On the other hand, the Westernizers measured up the Empire against Europe, and found it lacking. Russia had great natural resources and opportunities for improvement, but they were suffocated by an inefficient and repressive central government, corrupt and excessive (Howe, 2002). Marxist thinkers were among these Westernizers, and seized the opportunity for change following several Russian defeats in WWI. Although the Slavophiles played a key role in articulating a Russian national identity separate from the influence of the West (Young, 2012), the inferiority complex of Westernizer thought has plagued Russia for centuries. The collapse of the Soviet Union was perhaps the lowest point of this self-perception, and it renewed the drive for a resurgence of empire and national greatness, harkening back to the mighty Russia depicted in the great Russian novel.

8.1.2 Russian national identity and geography

"Geography, not history, has dominated Russian thinking"

(Kaplan, 2012, p. 158)

The identity of a population within a nation state is oftentimes intimately linked to their landscape. This is especially true of the Russian people, in whom the exacting conditions of their landscape (i.e. the Eurasian Steppe) "arouses a sense of cosmic consciousness and the emotions associated with the large and insoluble problems of human existence" (Crankshaw, 1947, p. 23). Such romanticised statements about how the surrounding landscape shapes national identity are common in identity construction

processes (Dodds, 2014), but the ubiquitous nature of them does not make them any less true (to the extent a socially constructed truth is equal to an empirical one). Nevertheless, this preoccupation with the troubles of human existence and the ‘wholeness of being’ (Kireevskii, 1852) permeates Russian thought, literature and politics.

The traditional social structure of feudal, agricultural Russia revolved around the community exploiting the land they were in. Harsh climate and generally rough living conditions made sharing the most useful tool a community had to survive (Kireevskii, 1852; Kaplan, 2012). Therefore, there was no reason for enterprising individuals to own property beyond what they needed to survive: society itself did not consist of private property owned by people, but by people who owned private property (Herzen, 1991). Marxism was thus able to capture the imagination of Russian intellectuals because it correlated with pre-existing social formations. The estrangement between property and the individual facilitated the transition into a system of State ownership.

Another way in which geography has shaped Russia is in the deep insecurity the successive foreign incursions into Russian territory have ingrained into the Russian psyche. Russian leaders decided long ago that the only strategy to avoid being overrun was continual expansion and offence. The current Russian trend of slowly and methodically capturing back ex-Soviet territories (i.e. Chechnya, Crimea, North Ossetia), or tying ex-Soviet Republics into the tightest net of politics, security and commerce possible (i.e. Eurasian Economic Community, Eurasian Union, Commonwealth of Independent States and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation³), as well as securing its pre-eminence in the energy sector and its use of information warfare are all signs of this insecurity (Kaplan, 2012). Devoid of hard land barriers, Russia needs a buffer zone to protect itself. This drive has been a mainstay of Russian foreign policy since the days of the Empire, and it is not going to change.

Furthermore, Russia remains haunted by a very distinctive element of its geography: a lack of access to warm water ports with direct access to the ocean (Marshall, 2015). The biggest ports – St. Petersburg in the Baltic Sea, Novorossiysk in the Black Sea, Vladivostok in the Pacific (ITE, 2017) – either freeze during winter or do not

³ See Figure 2

have direct access to the ocean. Without this kind of port, Russia is denied a role in the kind of big scale international commerce that made empires such as the Spanish or the British. Many Russian foreign policy decisions become much easier to understand when taking this factor into account. Russia's puppet government and subsequent invasion of Afghanistan was in part motivated by the possibility of obtaining access to the Indian Ocean; Crimean Sevastopol houses a Russian military port, and Yanukovich's rapprochement to Europe could have put the lease of the land it is on in jeopardy; finally, the country's only naval facility outside of its borders is in Tartus, Syria⁴. The very existence of Kaliningrad is further proof of this search for open water ports.

8.1.3 Russian national identity and state formation

Apart from, the geographical aspects of Russia itself, the process of formation of the Russian empire, which coincided with its state-building process, profoundly influenced Russia's view of itself: Russian national identity is inextricably linked with the process of state formation and expansion. The continual expansion of the Russian state started in earnest by Ivan the Terrible has, in a way, continued until our day (Kaplan, 2012). Thus, the Russian national identity came to be defined by a never-ending expansion in order to gain security and power over potential invaders. As Kaplan (2012) points out, this resulted in Russia being eternally at war.

The centralised nature of warfare demanded a strong government with extremely centralised powers: throughout the centuries, Russia has expressed a tendency towards authoritarian governments (Longworth, 2006), full of 'strongman' figures able to rally a wide and impossibly dispersed country against its enemies. However, it is important to note that such a style of ruling has resulted in pervasive social malaise and is increasingly becoming one of the biggest foils to Russian foreign policy, as the international community pushes for democratic reform.

⁴ The naval facility in Tartus is crucial for the Russian navy because it allows warships to refuel and do any necessary repairs without having to cross Turkish-controlled waters to enter their bases on the Black Sea (Kramer, 2012). Since Russia's lease contract for the base is with the Syrian government (the contract for the Sevastopol base was with the Ukrainian government), a change in regime could potentially endanger the base. Although the base was evacuated in 2013 (RT, 2013), it was later re-manned and resumed its duties.

As we have previously seen, in the Russian collective imagination the state is a synonym of order, as demonstrated by Putin's millennium speech: "For Russians a strong state is not an anomaly which should be got rid of. Quite the contrary, they see it as a source and guarantor of order and the initiator and main driving force of any change" (Putin, 1999). This tendency towards statism can be – and has been – misused to frame any criticism against the State as an attack on the Russian people or their identity as a whole. The targeting by officials of human rights organisation Memorial in response to their humanitarian work in Chechnya (Denber, 2018) is only the latest example of this.

8.1.4 Russian national identity, state and empire

According to the definitions of national identity by Emerson (1960) and Flint (2006), national identity is above all a sentiment of community among a group of people who live within the borders of a geographical nation-state. The breakup of the Soviet Union was thus a traumatic event in several ways, as it separated 'ethnic Russians' from the motherland. Putin pointed this out in his 2005 Presidential speech to the Federal Assembly, and it was repeated in 2014 as a justification for the invasion of Crimea (Pinkham, 2017). It was not the first time Russian ethnicity has been used as a trump card for Russian incursions into foreign sovereign territory, and the 'liberation/rescuing of Russians abroad' is one of the main reasons for the ongoing fear of Russia invading the Baltic countries (Treisman, 2016).

Russia has not been an Empire for more than a hundred years now, but only by name. The Soviet Union was for all intents and purposes an imperialist power, controlling huge swaths of territory outside of its traditional borders, and with designs to expand. Before that, Muscovy and Kievan Rus began the process of imperialistic expansion at the same time as they underwent a process of state formation [this goes counter to European countries, which only became Empires after this process of state formation was finished (Van Herpen, 2014)]. The post-Soviet Russian Federation struggled in the beginning with this legacy, but under Putin's leadership it has made policy moves that betray the longing for imperialism. This need for empire is so ingrained in the Russian psyche that, for Russia, "the identity to which the state makes reference

is therefore empire and civilisation rather than nation” (Prizel, 1998, p. 27). This draws links between the concept of nationhood, empire, and Russian identity.

It is undeniable that, since the end of the Soviet Union, Russia has been less and weaker than what it was, and that despite its best efforts to rein in neighbours’ yearning to become part of Europe, several countries have broken free – at least in part – from its influence (Trenin, 2000). This sense of loss and wrongness has inspired Russian hardliner nationalists into asking for a renewal of Russian greatness, a return to the ‘Empire’. Van Herpen (2014) argues that the Russian imperialistic drive is not done yet, due to its unique circumstances: the need for security that resulted in the expansion to neighbouring lands; the geographical continuity of conquered lands; which in turn facilitated the repression of rebellions, which impeded a complete decolonisation.

Eurasianism is the latest manifestation of this striving for greatness that drives the Russian national identity (Kotkin, 2016). Russia is effectively the only truly Eurasian country, straddling both Asia and Europe but not fully belonging to either of them. However, Russia’s immediate neighbours are also part of this region. There was a drive in the Putin government – inspired by intellectuals and advisors such as Trenin and Dugin (Clover, 2017) – to push for further integration via the creation of a Eurasian Union, mimicking the success of the European Union. This integration would achieve a dual objective: first, it provided an outlet for Russian economic growth, as increased commercial exchange and reduction of trade tariffs would be a boon for the country’s economy; and second, it would provide Russia with the security of controlling the near-abroad, which is what drove the creation of the Russian Empire in the first place (Richardson, 2017). Although the idea of a ‘unified Russia’ through Eurasianism isn’t new – it was born in the 1920s by the heirs of the Slavophile movement (Kotkin, 2016) – it has gained new momentum since Putin came into power. Although the current efficacy of the Eurasian movement can be debated, it remains a pervasive idea in Russian foreign policy, and the regional network of countries might be useful as a partial commercial substitute if tension with the European Union continues to escalate.

8.1.5 Manifest destiny

The United States is not the only country whose national consciousness hinges on a manifest destiny. “Russians have always had an abiding sense of living in a providential country with a special mission” (Kotkin, 2016, p. 3). Although this feeling of righteousness is found in most great powers, Russia’s idea of a manifest destiny has endured throughout the highs and lows of the past five hundred years. Russia has a focus on a regional and global level, before a domestic one, because of this belief in a transcendent mission (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). This focus beyond the domestic sphere also harks back to the necessity to control the near-abroad to ensure security.

Furthermore, this need to dominate due to a ‘special mission’ has made Russia reluctant to join international bodies or alliances if it does not have a deciding voice. Therefore, Russia is a great promotor of regional organisations where it is the driving force and main member (i.e. the Warsaw Pact during the Cold War and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation nowadays).

8.2 THE KREMLIN, NATIONAL IDENTITY AND FOREIGN POLICY

Drawing from the theoretical framework of Guibernau (2004), it is understood that the state can create national identity, or a version of it to suit its interests, through a series of strategies based in the following elements: a national image, symbols and rituals, granting of rights and liberties, naming of enemies (‘us’ v. ‘them’ binary structure), and the creation of a tailored national media and education system. In this section we will briefly outline the main policies and acts that the Russian government under Putin has made to create the version of Russian identity that best serves its interests: a “high-octane Russo-centric nationalism with civilisational subtext” (Colton, 2016, p. 228). The synthesis of these factors into a coherent national narrative is key to frame the conceptual motivation of Russian foreign policy.

8.2.1 National image

More than many of its Western neighbours, Russia has a clear grasp on the importance of a cohesive state narrative and a strongly defined national image. The Putin government has continually used a particular narrative of past glories lost and

regained, the rebuilding of the national dignity lost when the Soviet Union disintegrated, and ties to pre-Soviet Russia. This heady mix of culture, history, religion, territory and language crops up repeatedly in Russian foreign policy. We will focus here on religion, a pillar of the Russian national image at home and abroad.

During the Crimea invasion of 2014, Putin referred to the peninsula as ‘the spiritual origin of Russia’. Vladimir the Great, the Kievan Rus monarch who adopted Christianity in 988, had been baptised in Khersones, Crimea (Colton, 2016). The 1025 anniversary of the adoption of Christianity had been in 2013, and in 2015 a colossal statue of the Rus monarch was commissioned to stand outside of the Kremlin (Walker, 2016). There are several things to note here. First, that the Russian government considers Kievan Rus not a historical precursor of Russia but Russia itself, despite the fact Kievan Rus is also claimed by Ukraine as part of their heritage (the capital of Kievan Rus was in modern-day Kiev). Secondly, the role the Orthodox Church has played since the fall of the Soviet Union has been of tacit and sometimes overt support for the government. One of the main criticisms against the West during the Putin government has been its “spiritual derive” and “misguided embracing” of liberal and secular values (Putin, 2013; Lichfield, 2016). The rehabilitation of religion in the post-Soviet world brought back the Orthodox Church as one of the pillars of nationhood. In many ways, to be Russian is to be Orthodox Christian, and ethnicity and religion are tied in such a way that non-Orthodox Christians are considered ‘less Russian’ (Pankhurst, 2012). Therefore, Orthodox Christianity is used by the Kremlin as a quintessentially Russian characteristic, and it uses it freely in its cultural diplomacy: a Kremlin-funded Orthodox cathedral (tellingly nicknamed ‘St. Vladimir’s’) was recently opened in Paris. The cathedral, located in a prestigious location on the bank of the Seine and very near the Eiffel Tower, is to be the ‘spiritual centre’ of Russia in France (Lichfield, 2016).

8.2.2 Symbols and rituals

The most interesting thing regarding symbols and rituals in the Russian Federation is the post-Soviet rehabilitation of Imperial symbols such as the double-

headed eagle as coat of arms⁵ (Khutarev, 2014), or the changing of the celebration of the October Revolution for Unity Day, which celebrates the expulsion of Polish forces from Moscow in the 17th century (RT, 2015). Although this de-Sovietisation process started with Yeltsin, it was Putin who changed this holiday in 2005, as part of an ongoing PR effort by the Russian government (CBC News, 2006). The official burial of the last Russian royal family during the Yeltsin government marked another symbolic gesture towards the reconciliation with pre-Soviet Russia (BBC News, 1998).

A symbol that has remained throughout the transition from Soviet Russia to the Russian Federation has been the 'Russian bear' as a symbol of Russia. Although its use goes back to the 16th century, the government has used the bear, originally a symbol of Russia's power (although occasionally, also a symbol of its slowness and clumsiness), in a sanitised way, for example during the 1980 Moscow Olympics, where Misha the bear was depicted as a friendly teddy bear. The bear is also the symbol of the political party United Russia.

8.2.3 Rights and liberties

Perhaps the most damning example of Russia using the granting of legal rights to further its foreign agenda is the wholesale 'passportisation' of 'ethnic Russians' in South Ossetia and Ukraine (Artman, 2014). First during (and before) the Georgian war of 2008, and then in Crimea, Russia distributed passports to foreign nationals. This handing out of passports exists in a legal grey zone, but it becomes politically suspect when taking into account the fact the Ukrainian constitution prohibits double nationality (Mankoff, 2014). By giving passports to South Ossetians and Crimeans, the Russian government bestows upon them a series of rights and liberties as Russian citizens, and thus believes itself justified to intervene in their favour whenever these rights are not respected (Treisman, 2016). However, it is interesting to note that the Russian government itself did not use the phrase 'ethnic Russians' during its annexation of Crimea, instead preferring 'Russian citizens' (i.e. all the people who had been given passports previous to the invasion) and 'Russophones' (i.e. most Ukrainians).

⁵ The double-headed eagle has been used for millennia by different states, empires and governments to serve as their emblem. It was an element of the coat of arms of Imperial Russia and is the current Russian coat of arms, replacing the communist symbol of the hammer and sickle (Khutarev, 2014).

8.2.4 Naming of enemies

The pervasiveness of Russian mistrust towards Europe and the US is not new. Any criticism of Russia from these countries, every snub, has been used by Russia to further delineate the West as the enemy of Russia. Of course, this exercise in the 'us v. them' rhetoric cannot go beyond posturing and thinly veiled animosity (Russia still depends on Europe for most of its imports and exports). However, the system created is fool-proof: no negative comment can be levelled against Russia that the State propaganda machine cannot turn on its head (Holdsworth, 2008). A recent poll by Russian Levada Center showed that 66 percent of Russians believe the US is their biggest enemy, followed by Ukraine (24%) and the EU (14%) (The Moscow Times, 2018). Interestingly, this poll also showed that a quarter of Russians believed they are 'surrounded by enemies on all sides'. This type of thinking, while paranoid, lines up with the traditional Russian thinking of perennial anxiety about threats from neighbouring territories. There is a real sentiment that Russia is constantly and continually under siege, and that the only method of defence is a pre-emptive offence.

Like Guibernau (2004) points out, the enemy of the State does not have to pose an immediate or even real danger for them to fulfil their purpose as creators of a common national identity.

8.2.5 National media and education system

The last element of creation of national identity by the state according to Guibernau (2004) is the articulation of national media and an education system. Due to length constraints, we will focus on the global PR campaign that the Russian government has put in place over successive Putin governments through news outlets and social media.

The masthead of this effort is the State-funded news agency RT (originally called Russia Today), which offers a variety of content and broadcasts globally in several languages: its main objective was to counteract the flow of negative news about Russia in the Western media (Holdsworth, 2008), and put forward a 'Russian point of view' that benefits the country's external image (Pomerantsev, 2015). RT's original appeal came

from its critical view of American policies and actions abroad, which resonated not only with a Russian audience but with a wider international one (Bidder, 2013). Although the government has assured that the news outlet operates with editorial independence (CBC News, 2006), over the years it has been accused by foreign media and politicians alike of propaganda, fake news and information control (Crowley, 2014). Perhaps most tellingly of all, Russian news outlets not supported by the State have consistently suffered persecution and limits on free speech, and the list of Russian journalists murdered or dead under mysterious circumstances grows constantly (Journalists in Russia, 2018).

Russia has experimented in information control and Internet propaganda for decades (Earley, 2007). The fall of the Soviet Union did not erase the Kremlin's desire to control its population and shape perspectives of Russia abroad. Furthermore, Russian cyberwarfare also includes data theft and the interference with information databases and even the blocking of sensitive information during armed conflict (Hart, 2008). In recent years Russia has been accused of using social media to meddle in a number of foreign election campaigns and political processes, most notably in the American election of 2016 (Ward, 2018), but also in the Catalanian independence campaign (Emmot, 2017) and the Brexit referendum (Burgess, 2018). Russian interference and trolling has become commonplace on social media websites like Twitter, Facebook and Reddit. Russia is willing to manipulate the truth in a very overt way to benefit their foreign agenda, and silence those who could compromise it.

8.3 IMPACT ON FOREIGN POLICY

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation has been headed by Sergey Lavrov since 2004. It is interesting to note the existence of a Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Cultural Cooperation, whose aim is "rendering state services and managing state property to support and develop international relations between the Russian Federation and the member-states of the Commonwealth of Independent States and other foreign countries, as well as in the sphere of international humanitarian cooperation" (Government of the Russian Federation, 2018). The Ministry is the main

body charged with Russian the development and enactment of Russian foreign policy, although there exists a plethora of smaller cultural and security bodies both within Russia and abroad.

In this last section of the analysis we will explore the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation. First made in 2008, this document has had several iterations, but its core principles remain the same throughout them (Chirkova, 2012). What interests us here is not the whole of the document, but the sections in which the link between national identity and national interest is clearest. More specifically, we will focus on: the push and pull dynamic that Russian foreign policy has followed throughout its history and its state now; Russia's obsession with a multipolar world order and how that lines up with its 'special mission'; and the importance of the regional organisations, which harks back to Russia's eternal anxiety about its neighbours and its resulting imperialistic tendencies.

8.3.1 Push & Pull dynamic

Historically, Russia's foreign policy has been influenced by two cyclical patterns: the expansion and contraction of the Russian Empire, and the rapprochement or separation from its surrounding regions (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). Right now, Russia is experiencing a moment of expansion of the 'Empire', and an increased involvement with its Eastern neighbours, at the expense (to a certain degree) of the relationship with its Western ones. It is true that Russia's foreign policy "can be largely understood in the context of the country's relations with the West" (Tsygankov, 2013, p. xxv), but increasingly we are seeing Russia turn away from its European neighbours and towards the East.

This kind of push and pull dynamic towards and away from Europe is repeated in Russian geopolitical culture and foreign policy, although it adds a third option (Dodds, 2014). According to this view, Russia has three main geopolitical traditions: first, Russia as a European country (and thus, completely legitimated in its adoption of Western values, culture, etc.); second, as a unique Euro-Asian territory which is fully part of neither continent; and third but closely related to the previous tradition, as a bridge

between Asia and Europe (usually a unidirectional bridge for European influence over Asia).

Some authors believe that this conflict within Russian national identity has not been solved today, and in fact Russia picks and chooses which approach is most beneficial to its interests at any given point. The changes in foreign policy strategy since the end of the Soviet Union appear to back up this claim: Yeltsin's early integration with the West and later Great Power Balancing was followed by Putin's change between pragmatic cooperation and Great Power Assertiveness (Tsygankov, 2013). At this point Russia appears to have reached a hybrid between outright assertiveness and rapprochement to the West (Pavlickova, 2012): Putin's insistence of 'Russia's unique path' has resulted in a foreign policy "which appreciates the value of international cooperation in a globalising world but is also sensitive to Russia's local conditions and the country's special position in the international system" (Tsygankov, 2013, p. xxvii)

8.3.2 Multipolar international system and the strong state imperative

Russia's foreign policy has also been driven by its quest to become a strong state (Kotkin, 2016). Despite its extensive landmass, Russia lags behind in key aspects of development, and has done so for centuries. This disconnect between the perceived greatness and mission of the Russian people and its real circumstances causes great stress to the Russian political machine and precipitates an ambivalent behaviour in regard to other states. Buzan & Wæver (2003) posit that failures in the international arena and the retreat of Russia from the 'global superpower' position would cause an identity crisis, since the state's position as guarantor of order could appear to be compromised.

It is undeniable that Russia occupies a 'special place' in world politics, which relates not only to the size and location of the country itself, but also to the particular will of the Russian government to ensure Russia's place as a global power. Therefore, one of its key aims in foreign policy is to maintain the multipolarity of the international order, and so safeguard Russia's position as a global power (which they see as Russia's transcendent mission). "Multipolarity implies a world of states more or less equal" (Mankoff, 2009, p. 15), and so more chances of Russia having a privileged position.

Relations with immediate neighbours are always thought of in terms of their impact in Russia's position as a world leader (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 435).

The main result of this obsession with attaining global power status is that the global and regional arena are more important to Russia than the domestic one, which goes against the majority of states, which regard domestic and regional as their primary focus (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 398). A good example of this is Russia's willingness to suffer international sanctions instead of bending to the international community's will – even at the expense of domestic living standards.

8.3.3 Russia and the near-abroad

It is difficult to support the notion that Russia's imperialist designs are done and over with. As discussed throughout this dissertation, Russia's unique geopolitical position makes it impossible for the country's rulers to ignore the near abroad. Constant fear of invasion translates to a hyper-focus on its neighbours, and a need to eliminate them, or at the very least, control them.

We have already talked about the importance of Eurasia in the Russian imaginary, and the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept makes several mentions of Eurasianism and the Eurasian region. The very first priority of the Russian Federation in foreign policy is the increase of cooperation and integration with the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Eurasian Economic Union (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2016). It also stresses the importance of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, the Russian-led response to NATO, and vows to pursue further integration with Belarus.

This focus on the near abroad can appear benign, but in reality, most ex-Soviet republics consider Russia a threat, and they can do little to diminish it (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). Countries who try to shift out of Russia's circle of influence tend to come to regret it (i.e. Georgia, Ukraine, the Baltic republics).

The truth is that the Eurasian project is only the newest way in which Russia seeks to justify its propensity for outward expansion (Kaplan, 2012). This propensity has taken on different forms since Russia's inception, and after communism, the nominally democracy-driven regional integration model pioneered by the European Union seemed

to be the best option: however, Russia never had any intention of having a true equal relationship with any of the countries in its near abroad.

8.4 FUTURE SCENARIOS

In this final section of the analysis we will use the knowledge and insight gained from our exploration of Russian foreign policy to posit three brief possible future scenarios about the relationship between Russia and the European Union, NATO, and China. The three subjects chosen are by no means meant to represent a comprehensive analysis, but instead are used as paradigmatic examples of how Russian foreign policy is affected by its national image⁶.

8.4.1 The European Union

Russia's relationship with the EU is riddled with contradictions and complexity. There has been a slow but steady decline of the relationship between both parties since Putin reached power, but since 2014 the deterioration has accelerated. The background reasons for this decline, beyond the Ukraine invasion, are: "Russia's authoritarian drift, tensions over the expansion of the EU and NATO, Moscow's interference in the affairs of its neighbours and disputes over Russian energy supplies to Europe" (Mankoff, 2009, p. 145).

Since Crimea's invasion, sanctions and countersanctions have taken a toll on both sides. Tension over Crimea (and to a lesser extent, the Baltic countries, Moldova and the region of Transnistria) permeates all aspects of the relationship with the EU. Furthermore, it is not only the Crimean issue that is affecting EU-Russia relations: Russia's involvement and support of Bashar Al Assad's regime in the war in Syria has caused further conflict. The European Union has put in place a series of sanctions in response to the violation of Ukraine's sovereignty: diplomatic measures (suspension of Russia-EU bilateral summits and negotiations for the accession of Russia into several international bodies); individual sanctions (freezing of assets and travel bans for specific

⁶ The US has not been featured in this analysis because it is our belief that its relationship with Russia is often prioritised in international political analysis over other relationships that are nonetheless crucial to understanding Russian national identity.

Russian individuals); restrictions on trade relations with Russia and Crimea (since it is now a *de facto* part of Russia) such as import and export bans; restrictions on investment and access to EU capital markets; and reduced access to oil-production technologies (Consilium, 2018).

However, it is impossible to deny the interdependent nature of their relationship: Russia is still the main exporter of gas, oil, uranium and coal to the EU (Dodds, 2007), and the EU is the biggest importer of goods to Russia. According to statistics from the European Parliament (GlobalStat, 2016), in 2016 Russia's biggest trading partner was the EU (44.8%), a volume more than three times bigger than its trade with China (12.1%), while the EU's biggest trading partner was Russia (54.4%). The EU's next biggest trading partner is the US, with 17.6% of total trade (GlobalStat, 2016). Although these numbers will have changed in the last couple of years, the economic relationship is still incredibly valuable to both parties. Security cooperation is also necessary in areas such as the fight against terrorism and to stop the potential spread of Islamic extremism in the South of Russia (Colton, 2016).

Surprisingly, the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept is clear in its desire to improve and build on the European relationship in every way: from economic to cultural and legal (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2016).

Although Russia increasingly seems to be turning away from Europe, its foreign policy is still majorly influenced by its European neighbours: on an ideological level, Russia's inferiority complex and historical grappling with the question of Russia's 'European-ness' are still present in both popular and political thought (Koshkin, 2016), and will be for some time. Europe is still the mirror against which Russia measures itself, even if it believes it is not part of it (Geifman & Teper, 2014). On a more practical front, Russia recognises the importance of maintaining a civil relationship with the EU, and so the future will probably see a relaxing in the current tension. Although tension in certain topics will linger, it is in the best interest of both parties to maintain an overall positive relationship, at the very least in economic terms. The most likely scenario is a gradual shifting away from the close relationship Russia and the EU had enjoyed since the end of the Cold War, to a predominantly economic, less interdependent one.

8.4.2 NATO

There is a chronic mistrust of NATO in Russia due to NATO's plans to expand Eastward into what Russia considers its sphere of influence (Chirkova, 2012). Although the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) aims to soften this lack of trust and build a fruitful relationship between both parties, true mutual understanding is still a long way away.

On NATO's part, the next biggest threat to members of its organisation is considered to be a Russian invasion of the Baltic countries. After the Crimean crisis NATO re-evaluated the security of both its Nordic-Baltic flank and ramped up its military presence and exercises in the area (NATO Review, 2016). 2017 war games by Russia augmented tension in the region, with Baltic countries calling for increased NATO presence: previous Russian war games had simulated attacks on Stockholm and Warsaw (Peel & Milne, 2017).

The Russian Military Doctrine of 2010 follows the same lines as the 2008 National Security Concept, with the characterisation of NATO as a threat maintained over time. The general consensus in the document is that Western 'containment policies' keep Russia from asserting its global position, and so NATO expansion is seen as a primary threat to Russian interests (Freire & Kanet, 2012). In its 2016 Foreign Policy Concept Russia makes it clear that although it is willing to improve its relationship with NATO, it will do so only on an equal footing and with the assurance of no further NATO expansion (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2016). The document further signals the expansion of both NATO and the EU as the main problem affecting Russia's relationship with the Euro-Atlantic bloc.

In terms of possible future scenarios, the tense relationship could still get worse: The European Parliament (2016) released a brief on the Russia-NATO relationship that stated that "a return to cooperation in the near future seems unlikely". Russia is certainly emboldened in its territorial expansion after Crimea, and a simulation by the RAND Corporation in 2016 found out that Russian forces could seize the Baltic countries in less than 60 hours (Shlapak & Johnson, 2016). However, such an action would have such far-reaching consequences that it would not be worth Russia's while. A much more likely future scenario for NATO would be the gradual worsening of relations and the

eventual ending of the NRC, as Russia turns away from Europe and the US and towards China.

8.4.3 China

Since the end of the Cold War, Russia's relationship with China has improved tenfold (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). China's meteoric economic growth and its similar rocky relationship with the US positions it as a very interesting future partner in the international sphere. The 2016 Foreign Policy Concept makes note of this, dedicating an entire paragraph to lay out its intention of further Russia-China collaboration in all main areas of foreign policy. It is also worth noting that both countries are members of the BRICS, and by and large act jointly in Central Asia through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). Russia is also present in APEC and has strong ties with ASEAN, where China is a key member, and the Foreign Policy Concept signals the building of a Russian presence in and cooperation with in both organisations as priorities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2016).

It is almost certain that in the coming years Russia will seek to strengthen economic, political and cultural ties with its Asian neighbours, especially China. Russia has had no qualms about reciprocating EU sanctions with their own (Gros & Di Salvo, 2017), and China's ever-expanding market can prove a good substitute for the losses incurred. In terms of energy supply, the EU's 2007 New Energy Strategy and subsequent energy strategies had the objective of diversifying energy supply and reducing European dependency on Russian oil. Meanwhile, China's energy demands are estimated to reach 11 million barrels of oil per day before the decade is over (Dodds, 2014): this demand, coupled with China's less exacting standards regarding human rights, democratic values and national sovereignty – all areas in which the EU has butted heads with Russia – can make Russia's largest neighbour a very lucrative partner in the coming years. However, there is an increasing worry that Russia "is becoming locked in a kind of neo-colonial economic relationship, exporting primary commodities [...] and importing Chinese finished products" (Mankoff, 2009, p. 195). Therefore, Russia must be careful to maintain its footing with the country, lest it become "China's periphery" (Falyakhov, 2017).

As a final note on the Russia-China relationship, it is important to take into account the Central Asian dimension, and Russia's Eurasianism. As mentioned throughout the thesis, Eurasianism is the latest form that Russian imperial designs have taken, and official documents such as the Foreign Policy Concept (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2016) make special emphasis on how important the improved relations between Eurasian countries and Russia is for the Kremlin. China also has a Eurasian project of its own, and announced the One Belt and One Road Initiative in 2013 (Berzina-Cerenkova, 2016), now the Silk Road Economic Belt: a reinvention of the Silk Road that once connected China with Europe. It envisions the development of a massive land infrastructure project that will connect China and Central Asia with Europe (the 'Silk Road Economic Belt') and a parallel maritime route (the 'Maritime Silk Road')⁷ (McBride, 2015). Russia has a vested interest in the success of this project, as it could give Russian peripheral and isolated zones a much-needed economic boost.

⁷ See Figure 3.

9. CONCLUSIONS

The hypothesis explored throughout this dissertation, that **Russian foreign policy is extremely influenced by the version of Russian national identity that the Kremlin has promoted**, has sufficiently proved to be true, although the true extent of the Kremlin's idea of national identity remains a contested question (due in part to the difficulty of quantifying any kind of influence upon a subjective concept such as national identity). The Putin government and Putin himself are acutely aware of Russian history and national identity and are no strangers to using it to attain their goals. The Kremlin has consistently used a pre-existing sense of national identity to further foreign policy objectives. Examples of this include Russia's 'special mission' to occupy a preferential place in the world order; the need to control the near-abroad and to reclaim 'lost' Russian territories to satisfy territorial anxiety; the ongoing PR drive to 'fix' Russia's image abroad while at the same time being pioneers in cyberwarfare and misinformation campaigns; and the gradual shifting away from the West under the assurances that Russia is not really Europe. All these are part of a series of strategies of national identity formation by the state.

To a certain extent, all states are prisoners of history and geography. Russia is a unique case because of the sheer size of its geography. This vastness is its greatest strength, but also a source of weakness. Constant fear of invasion or encroachment has driven Russia to expand ever outward to defend itself. The prioritisation of the regional and global sphere in detriment of the domestic situation has been the foil of both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, and little has changed.

In terms of its relationship with the European Union, NATO and China, the future scenarios vary: tension over disagreements with the EU will likely continue, but most likely neither party will be willing to completely discard their relationship, due to their economic dependency; Russia's relationship with China will continue to intensify in all areas, as Russia explores and expands the concept of Eurasianism, the newest iteration of its need for empire, although risks remain regarding the equal standing of both parties; finally, Russia's relationship with NATO is the one most likely to deteriorate further, since their territorial designs are inherently at odds with each other.

Due to the length constraints of this dissertation it was not possible to delve further into the evolution of Russian national identity throughout the Soviet Era. The initial creation and evolution of that identity before the Soviet revolution was prioritised because it shares great parallels with Russia's situation today regarding an imperialistic drive after a 'low' period. Nevertheless, the rejection of the West and rapprochement to the East that Russia is undergoing right now responds to a cyclical pattern within Russian foreign policy, which was repeated several times during the Soviet Era.

In further investigation it would be interesting to explore the influence of public opinion and the human cost (both domestic and international) of Russia's foreign policy. Another interesting avenue of research, grounded in the geopolitical tradition, would be to study the influence geography has had on the development of Russia society and economy.

It would be amiss to not note the lack of focus on external influences of foreign policy. As seen in the theoretical framework, foreign policy is the result of the interaction of internal and external influences, but we believe it is still possible to separate and analyse the two. However, our main hypothesis was that foreign policy is primarily the result of internal forces and influences, the results of which are then further justified with external events and influences. In other words, internal influences such as culture, geography, democracy and the domestic political apparatus inform the responses to external factors. As we have seen here, in some cases national identity can paint a more illuminating picture of foreign policy of a country than a study focused solely in interactions with external agents.

10. REFERENCES

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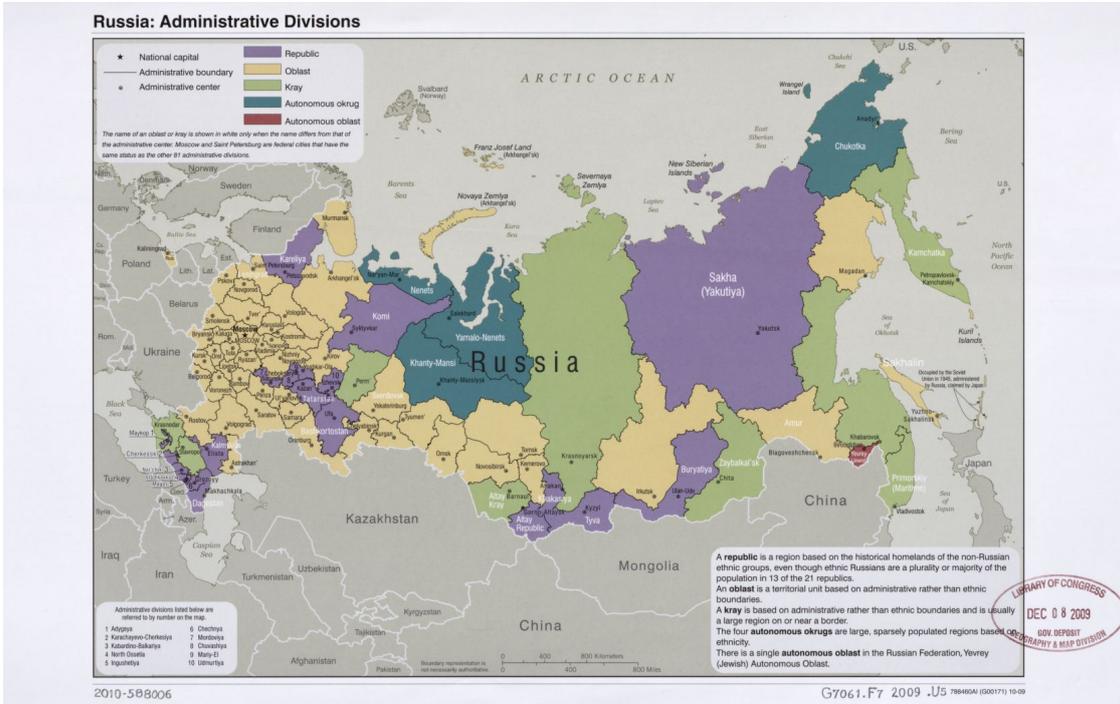
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11. ANNEX

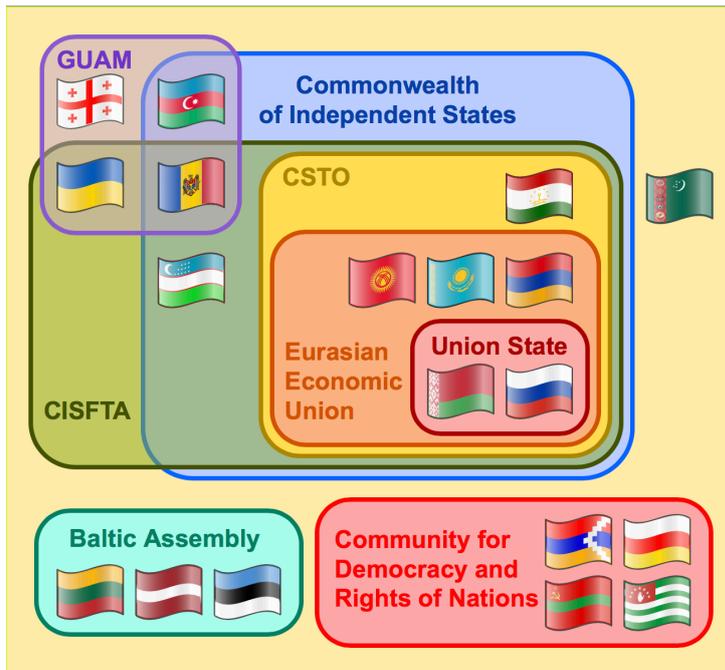
11.1 FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1:



Source: Central Intelligence Agency. (2009). *Russia – administrative divisions*. Retrieved from <https://www.loc.gov/resource/g7061f.ct003111/>

Figure 2:



Source: Katsaris, A. (2014). *Supranational Post-Soviet Bodies*. Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license. Retrieved from

Figure 3:



Source: Xinhua (2015). China's Proposed New Silk Roads. In Building the New Silk Road. Council of Foreign Relations. Retrieved from <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/building-new-silk-road>