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The Domestic Context of Russian Foreign Policy

In Russia there is no law. There is a pillar, and on that pillar sits the crown.

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It has become axiomatic that a country's conduct of international relations reflects the influence of domestic factors. Indeed, the link is so strong that one might turn to Carl von Clausewitz's famous maxim to argue that diplomacy is merely the continuation of domestic politics by other means.¹ Yet such generalizations also invite misunderstanding and misrepresentation. They may reinforce crude national stereotypes, tendentious readings of history, and deterministic views of the future. And they are often misused to justify actions that are anything but pragmatic or logical.

These problems are especially evident in the case of Russia. Few countries have been subject to mythmaking on such an industrial scale. Many observers, foreign and Russian, surround it in a cloud of mysticism, in effect agreeing with the nineteenth-century poet Fyodor Tyutchev that "Russia cannot be understood by the mind alone . . . in Russia, one can only believe."² This has led to a host of trite simplifications and sometimes outright falsehoods—about the "Russian soul," the "strong leader,"³ the alleged unreadiness and dislike of its people for democracy,⁴ and Russia's timeless identity as a great power. It has also encouraged a self-serving, relativistic attitude along the lines that since Russia is so very different, it cannot be expected to behave like a "normal" nation.

On the other hand, there are those who treat Russian foreign policy as if domestic influences and considerations were of little relevance. They proceed from a (Western) moralist perspective, talking up universal values, common threats and challenges, and shared interests, only to discover that Moscow's perspectives and priorities often differ substantially from their own. When reality hits home, disappointment leads to accusations of bad faith and

double-dealing. The Obama administration's reset policy exemplified these failings (see chapter 6).

Before discussing Russia's interaction with the new world disorder, it is critical to understand the different elements that constitute the domestic context of its foreign policy. They amount to an amalgam of ideas, interests, and instincts, whose influence varies, not only from issue to issue, but also according to time and circumstance. Taken together, however, they are the foundation of a particular attitude toward the world and Russia's place in it.

The most immediate of these elements is policymaking—that is, the mechanics of who makes policy and how they develop and implement it. This, in turn, ties into the question of political culture. It is not enough to identify the decisionmakers; we also need to know where they are coming from. What influences lead them to think and act the way they do? It has become almost de rigueur to emphasize the connection between authoritarianism at home and an adversarial foreign policy. This chapter argues, however, that deeper structural factors, such as geography and history, are much more influential in shaping Russia's approach to the world.

At the same time, foreign policy is not just the product of long-term realities, but is buffeted by unforeseen events. There is a tendency to exaggerate the inexorability of larger trends. Yet if history teaches us anything, it is that nothing is inevitable. Putin's conduct of foreign policy reveals strong predispositional influences. But it is also the "accidental" and unstable result of contemporary political conditions, economic outcomes, and social pressures. These establish realities that may frequently be short-lived, yet exert a powerful influence on decisionmakers at critical moments.

Policymaking

Analysts have become so accustomed to using generic terms such as "Russia," "Moscow," and the "Putin regime/elite" that they tend to give little thought to what they mean by them. Partly this is an issue of practicality; some generalization is unavoidable in order to communicate information coherently. But it also tacitly acknowledges that in many cases it is impossible to delve much deeper. Trying to understand the inner workings of decisionmaking is a challenging enterprise even in relatively transparent political systems. It is especially so in an environment where there is such a strong culture of secrecy and informal networking, as in Putin's Russia.⁵

In effect there are two broad policy milieus—the real and the virtual. The latter is what outsiders see. This is the world of public policy statements, such

as the Foreign Policy Concept, the Concept of National Security, and the Military Doctrine. Such documents present sweeping visions of Russia's destiny, unequivocal expositions of basic principles, and upbeat assessments of important relationships. They can be important in highlighting trends in Russian foreign policy, but offer few clues as to how it is actually made. Indeed, they convey a misleading clarity and certainty of thought.

By contrast, the real policy world is exclusive and almost invisible. This is where the big decisions are made. The vast majority of the political class plays little role, and public input is minimal. A particular order comes from the Kremlin, but without exceptionally privileged access it is often impossible to know who influenced whom, what, and how. It is often a case of "those who know don't tell, and those who tell don't know."

There is consequently a substantial element of guesswork involved in trying to understand the mechanics of Russian foreign policy. The difficulties are compounded by the fact that decisions rarely, if ever, reflect an "objective" national interest (whatever that means), but are made by individuals with their own particular biases, prejudices, and vested interests. As the commentator Igor Torbakov has noted, "The line between what is generally understood as *national interests* and . . . *group interests* is completely blurred in Russia."⁶

The policy landscape

Nevertheless, there is much to learn even from a brief review of major actors and decisionmaking processes. One way of doing this is to distinguish between different policy functions: decisionmaking; ideational inspiration; implementation; and rationalization. Although there is considerable overlap between these functions, each represents a distinct dimension with its own exponents.

The most important function is *decisionmaking*, and this is reflected in the identity of those responsible for it. They include, most obviously, President Putin, but also other senior regime figures, such as the chairman of Rosneft, Igor Sechin, Prime Minister (and former president) Dmitry Medvedev, Head of the Presidential Administration Sergei Ivanov, and Secretary of the Security Council Nikolai Patrushev. Of course, whereas Putin is the supreme decisionmaker, the influence of the others is fairly limited—both because they are subordinate to him and because their areas of responsibility and interest are narrower. Thus Sechin's role in foreign policy focuses largely on the energy sector, in particular oil cooperation with China and Arctic development. Although as chairman of Rosneft he was the prime mover behind the cooperation agreements concluded with ExxonMobil in 2012 and CNPC (China

National Petroleum Corporation) in 2013, there is little evidence of any larger impact on the bilateral relationships with the United States and China.⁷

Ideational inspiration is not normally associated with policymaking, given the latter's emphasis on bureaucratic institutions and processes. However, its effect on Russian foreign policy has been considerable; ideas matter, even in a society notorious for its cynicism. In the first instance, they inform a general philosophical outlook. Putin has acknowledged the influence of nationalist thinkers such as Konstantin Leontiev and Ivan Ilyin on his view of Russia and its place in world civilization.⁸ Ideas also feed into strategic culture. The thinking of Yevgeny Primakov (foreign and later prime minister under Yeltsin) has underpinned much of Putin's pursuit of a multipolar order, the vision of Russia as an independent center of global power, and notions of geopolitical balancing. Primakov may no longer be closely involved in policy circles, but his ideas have actually become more influential in recent years.⁹ Finally, ideas shape concrete policies. Igor Rogachev, who served a remarkable thirteen years as Russian ambassador in Beijing from 1992 to 2005, was central to the development of a Sino-Russian partnership. Although he died in 2012, his legacy endures.

Implementation is a much underestimated area of foreign policy. It lacks glamor, and those who carry out decisions—principally the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)—tend to be dismissed as actors of little consequence. In fact, while the MFA and organizations such as the Ministry of Defense (MOD) are rarely the instigators of policy initiatives, they retain substantial preventative powers. Their restraining influence is especially important in discussions about strategic disarmament and missile defense.¹⁰ The highly technical nature of these subjects ensures a high level of dependence by the leadership on specialist expertise and advice. Likewise, the Ministry of Economic Development (MED) plays a leading role in foreign economic and trade policy. Without its close involvement, projects such as the Eurasian Union and Russia's World Trade Organization (WTO) accession would not have gotten off the ground. These examples underline the reality that without effective implementation there is no *policymaking*.

The last function, *policy rationalization*, is difficult to pin down. It amounts to more than the public diplomacy performed by the MFA's Information Department, or the skewed news coverage of media outlets such as RT and Rossiya Segodnya¹¹ (which in tone and content are similar to Fox News in the United States). It also goes beyond the standard formulations found in public policy documents, such as the Foreign Policy Concept. Instead, it might be described as the "intellectualization" of foreign policy—the explanation and justification of Russian positions to an outside,

predominantly Western, audience. Its chief exponents include English-speaking Duma deputies such as Alexei Pushkov and Vyacheslav Nikonov, respectively chairman and deputy chairman of the International Affairs Committee; and Sergei Markov, co-chairman of the National Strategic Council of Russia. Revealingly, all three worked as journalists or in think tanks, or both, before they entered formal political structures.

The supreme decisionmaker

The current policy landscape is centered on individuals and their networks rather than formal institutions. This is demonstrated above all by President Putin. No single person in the six decades since the death of Stalin has been so intimately identified with power and policy in Russia.¹² Such is his domination that he has engendered his own “ism.” Putinism has emerged as a hybrid of centralized political power, economic rent-seeking,¹³ social materialism, conservative morality, and an assertive international posture. In this connection, the comparison that is sometimes made with Charles de Gaulle undersells the extent to which Putin has become synonymous with political Russia.¹⁴ For all that de Gaulle towered above his contemporaries, he nevertheless had to operate under far greater democratic and institutional constraints.

Putin’s personal stamp is most apparent in the way decisions are made. Although a strong culture of secrecy existed in Soviet and Tsarist times, this has been systematically reinforced over the past fifteen years following a period of relative openness under Gorbachev and Yeltsin. There are very few people involved in decisionmaking, and the content of their deliberations is almost hermetically sealed. Putin operates on the principle that “fewer is better”—at once more cohesive, more secure, and more effective. The mechanics of his response to the 2014 Ukrainian revolution are instructive here. There was no wide, much less public, consultation process. Neither Kyiv nor Western capitals, and almost no one in Moscow, had any inkling as to how he would respond to the overthrow of Viktor Yanukovich.¹⁵ This meant that when he did decide to act—embarking on the annexation of Crimea, and initiating separatist actions in eastern Ukraine—Russia’s “enemies” were confounded. The surprise was near-total, enabling the Kremlin to sustain the diplomatic as well as military initiative.

It follows from this closed style of decisionmaking that Putin exerts a crucial influence on individual policies. Unsurprisingly, this is most apparent in priorities to which he assigns the greatest importance: Ukraine, Eurasian integration, Russia’s energy ties, and the handling of international crises, such as the Syrian conflict. It is Putin who determines the fortunes, on the Russian side, of key relationships with the United States, Europe, and China. The

political rapprochement with Europe in 2000 (after Kosovo), the post-9/11 “strategic choice” in favor of Washington, and the steady expansion of ties with Beijing all owed a tremendous amount to his direct involvement. Equally, the deterioration of relations with the United States and, to a lesser extent, Europe during 2004–08 was fueled by his anger over Western participation in the color revolutions in Georgia and especially Ukraine, and aversion to American “unipolarity.”¹⁶ Putin’s personal sense of *obida* (offense) at U.S. support for the public demonstrations against him in late 2011 and early 2012 was the single most important reason behind the hardening of Russian policy toward Washington.

The Putinization of Russian foreign policy has never been more evident than in relation to Ukraine. For the past decade Putin has involved himself directly and repeatedly in its affairs. In the run-up to the Ukrainian presidential elections of December 2004, he visited Kyiv on several occasions to support Yanukovich, but above all to oppose the Western-leaning Viktor Yushchenko.¹⁷ Although Putin had previously worked with Yushchenko when the latter was Ukrainian prime minister,¹⁸ he decided that a functional relationship between them was impossible. The subsequent Orange Revolution was therefore not only a setback for Russian foreign policy, but also a personal humiliation. Similar considerations were in play following the 2014 Maidan revolution. Russia’s strategic interests suffered a major blow with the political demise of Yanukovich, but no less important was Putin’s embarrassment at the unexpected turn of events. In the circumstances, he felt that he had no option—*as a man* as well as a national leader—but to strike back. His credibility and legitimacy, not to mention his self-esteem, were on the line.

There are parallels here with the 2008 Georgia war. In both cases Moscow had substantive policy concerns that contributed to the likelihood of conflict, such as the expansion of Western influence in the post-Soviet space, and its perceived impact on the regional balance of power. In both cases Putin was personally invested in outcomes to an exceptional degree. In 2008 his loathing for Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili gave him added incentive to teach Tbilisi a lesson. In 2014 he risked becoming a diminished figure at home and abroad unless he reacted vigorously to the change of power in Kyiv. Most important of all, in Ukraine as in Georgia the victory of Russian arms became portrayed as Putin’s personal triumph—not just over hapless regional (and domestic) adversaries, but also over a shocked West.¹⁹

Putin’s individual contribution has been critical in shaping Russia’s energy diplomacy. His long-time interest in the geopolitics of energy explains his determined opposition to the EU’s Third Energy Package (see chapter 3) and other projects to reduce European dependence on Russian gas, such as

alternative pipelines circumventing Russia. Likewise, Gazprom's charmed existence is due almost entirely to his personal patronage. He has resisted calls to break up the company, which has become synonymous with poor performance—both because Gazprom serves the rent-seeking interests of the elite and because Putin regards it as a vital instrument of geopolitical influence (see below). More concretely, Putin has occasionally intervened to finalize an energy deal. One instance was the thirty-year gas supply contract between Gazprom and CNPC during his May 2014 visit to Shanghai. The deadlock in price negotiations looked set to continue before a last-minute compromise was reached—an outcome that would have been impossible without his direct involvement.²⁰

All that said, Putin's reach or level of interest in foreign policy should not be exaggerated. There are many areas where his role is superficial or nonexistent. Anecdotal accounts suggest, for example, that he has very little involvement in managing Russia's G-20 agenda, and the often highly technical issues associated with global rebalancing and a "new financial architecture."²¹ On nuclear disarmament and WMD proliferation Putin adheres firmly to the principle of strategic parity with the United States, but leaves the details of how this is to be achieved to the specialists in the MFA and MOD. Similarly, he is committed to realizing the vision of a powerful Russia in the world, but is not directly engaged in issues of military reform and procurement.

Like any top manager Putin delegates everyday decisionmaking to trusted subordinates. In foreign energy cooperation, particularly with China and the United States, the key player is Igor Sechin; on Syria it is Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov; in defense matters it is Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu; and on the G-20 agenda it is First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov. Crucially, though, Putin has the final say on the big decisions that are ostensibly taken by others. He approved the agreement between Rosneft and ExxonMobil; the decision to go to war with Georgia (even though he was in Beijing watching the Olympics); and, most likely, the controversial call to abstain on UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1973 regarding the NATO no-fly zone over Libya.

This last decision has been the subject of controversy, with some claiming that then president Medvedev followed his own line against the wishes of (Prime Minister) Putin.²² Such an account, however, runs against the grain of recent Russian policymaking. It is improbable that Medvedev would have made the critical decision to abstain without at least tacit endorsement from his nominal subordinate but actual boss. Putin may have had reservations about abstention, but would have taken other considerations into account, such as the utility of sustaining the improvement in Russia's relations with the

United States and Europe.²³ Of course, this calculus soon became redundant, leading later to the revisionist view that abstention had been a grievous blunder. The Kremlin PR machine moved quickly to absolve Putin of any responsibility, and to blame Medvedev instead²⁴—an illustration of the classic get-out clause, “the good Tsar let down by his venal [or incompetent] subordinates.”²⁵

Such episodes underline that Putin’s contribution to Russian foreign policy is not limited to matters of substance. Putin the symbol has become as important as Putin the decisionmaker, whether it is in running rings around a slow-footed Barack Obama over Syria, or in seizing the initiative in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. His public self-confidence and unapologetic demeanor have become metaphors for a buoyant Russia—a far cry from the weak, humiliated nation of the 1990s, led by a disoriented Yeltsin. Unsurprisingly, the attempt during 2004–08 to create a second personality in the form of President Medvedev was always going to be difficult to sustain. In the hyper-personalized world of Putin’s Russia, there can only be one icon—which is why Medvedev has cut a sometimes forlorn and humiliated figure.²⁶

The personalization of policy

Putin stands at the apex of a tall and thin pyramid of personalized power. Institutions still matter, but much less so than during the Brezhnev era (1964–82), when the scourge of “departmentalism” (*vedomstvennost*) often paralyzed decisionmaking.²⁷ While the Putin system is scarcely a model of efficiency, its ability to get things done is considerably greater than that of its predecessors. This is particularly the case in foreign policy, where there are fewer interested parties than in domestic affairs, and which benefits from being an area of broad elite consensus. Compared with the often bitter disagreements over economic reform, it has been largely free of acrimony or serious controversy. Russia’s destiny as a great power and unique civilizational identity are accepted as self-evident truths, while resentment of Western policies and actions is evident across the political spectrum. It helps too that the wider population shares these sentiments (see below).

In Putin’s Russia individuals make institutions, not institutions the individual.²⁸ This is not only true of the president himself, but also of other senior figures. Sechin’s influence comes not from being chairman of Rosneft, but from having been Putin’s closest colleague for two decades, ever since he was chief of staff to the then deputy mayor in St. Petersburg in the early 1990s. The influence of Alexei Kudrin on Russia’s approach to international financial institutions owed something to his incarnation as a long-serving (2000–11) and very successful finance minister. But more important still was his friendship with Putin going back to their St. Petersburg days, when Kudrin

was the other deputy mayor. Tellingly, although he was sacked by Medvedev in September 2011, Kudrin's continuing close ties with Putin mean that he retains some influence on economic policy.

It also works the other way around. Whereas well-connected individuals can drive policy, those without such "gifts" are unable to achieve meaningful outcomes. The process of Russia's accession to the WTO was so protracted because, among other reasons, there was no supporter powerful enough to push it through the various political and technical hoops. It was only when Putin gave his full backing to membership in 2010–11 that serious progress began to be made.²⁹ It has been much the same story with Russia's relations with the non-Western world. The Westerncentric bias of the political elite has meant that a "geographically balanced" foreign policy has been a rhetorical conceit rather than genuine aspiration. The exception to the rule, the "strategic partnership" with China, has happened because Putin and Sechin (on the energy side) have been personally committed to it.

The primacy of personalities over institutions applies also in instances where individuals who are not personally close to Putin may have impressed him by their competence and, no less important, toughness. A case in point is Sergei Lavrov. Already Russia's longest-serving foreign minister since Andrei Gromyko, he clearly enjoys Putin's trust and confidence.³⁰ Unlike his predecessor, Igor Ivanov, who was very much a pure executor of decisions, he is more involved in developing policy, notably on Syria.³¹ Although Putin claimed personal credit for the initiative in September 2013 to remove chemical weapons stockpiles, Lavrov's fingerprints were everywhere—most evident in the idea of trading progress on chemical disarmament for a de facto American guarantee of no military action against President Bashar al-Assad.

One of the features of policymaking under Putin is that influence may wax and wane as individuals gain and lose favor. When Medvedev was sitting in the Kremlin, he was nominally in charge of foreign policy—a function traditionally associated with the institution of the presidency. Despite this advantage, his influence declined steadily over the course of his presidential term. During 2008–10 he was an important player in the U.S.-Russia reset. He was able to gain some traction in Moscow for his initiative on a "new European security architecture." He was prominent over Libya, and launched the so-called "partnership of modernization" with the European Union.

By late 2010–early 2011, however, his influence and standing were on the slide. In part this was the result of unfavorable external circumstances—the Arab Spring, growing tensions with Washington, and the lack of Western interest in his proposals for Euro-Atlantic security. But his fading fortunes also had domestic causes. These included the competing political interests of key

players such as Sechin and Sergei Ivanov,³² his own unimpressive public persona, and Putin's determination not to countenance any other center of power, however nascent. This last consideration was decisive in ensuring that Medvedev's influence on foreign policy had been virtually nullified by the time Putin announced his impending return to the Kremlin in September 2011.

Complex decisionmaking

In contrast to the concentration of power at the top, Russian society has become increasingly diverse. This, in turn, has meant that policymaking can be messy in areas where there are domestic interests in play, as in the case of WTO accession. One reason why Putin took so long to throw his weight behind the bid was his fear that opening up parts of the economy to foreign competition could undermine his support among key constituencies. The issue was not so much direct pressure from the public or from special interests, but his uncertainty as to whether WTO membership was worth the political price that might have to be paid in, say, single-industry cities and towns (*monogoroda*). This led to prevarication and policy fluctuations, and, in the final stages of WTO negotiations, intense bargaining to protect vulnerable sectors, such as the auto industry and agriculture (see chapter 3).

The complications arising from a more variegated society are present, too, at the level of elites. One should avoid speaking in overly schematic terms about the influence on foreign policy of the *chekisty* (security and intelligence figures), the military, or big business. Although members of particular groups share a professional background, they are ultimately individuals, motivated by personal self-interest more than by corporate solidarity or an abstract national interest. Sometimes they will work to a common objective, such as building up Russia's security and military establishment. But at other times the enemy or target may be one of their own.³³ An example here is Rosneft's determined campaign to undermine Gazprom's near-monopoly of gas exports, which has acquired an added edge from the personal tensions between Sechin and Gazprom chief Alexei Miller.

In this case, as in others, policy outcomes may be an untidy compromise between different parties and their agendas. Such divisions are replicated across the Putin system. The Soviet tradition of cumbersome administrative bargaining has been eroded by Putin's political dominance, but it is still influential. As the Australian scholar Stephen Fortescue has observed, throughout the Putin era there has been a constant tension between "consultation and sign-off" (*soglasovanie*) and "hands-on management" (*ruchnoe upravlenie*).³⁴ This is especially pronounced in domestic policy, where the stakes are higher

and the issues more contentious, but it is also relevant to the management of foreign relations.

Crucially, though, such intra-elite tensions do not challenge core foreign policy assumptions; differences are personal and interests-based, not ideational. Nor do they contradict the central reality of Russian politics, which is that all big decisions go through Putin in some form or other.³⁵ One of the Obama administration's more unfortunate misperceptions during the reset was the belief that there were two distinct policy camps in Moscow: a progressive, Westernizing wing led by Medvedev and a reactionary, conservative establishment under Putin. Yet without Putin's say-so there would have been no positive Russian response to the reset.

Political Culture

Political culture is an elusive phenomenon with many dimensions. It encompasses institutional habits, such as personalized decisionmaking. It may describe allegiance to particular principles, for example, centralized government. It is often associated with different types of regime; thus, authoritarian states and liberal democracies give rise to contrasting political cultures. And it is also used in a looser sense, referring to a set of instincts about human existence and the way of the world. Moreover, political culture is not a static phenomenon, but is susceptible to changing internal and external conditions.³⁶

The elusiveness of political culture makes it difficult to judge its influence on foreign policy. However, this has hardly deterred people from trying. Democratic peace theory, for instance, is based on the premise that democracies are inherently more peaceful than non-democracies, and so do not wage wars against each other. Their political culture is said to encourage benign and positive aims: boosting economic growth and international trade, improving global governance, and promoting universal norms and values.

Authoritarian regimes, on the other hand, are allegedly inclined toward more aggressive foreign policies. Their preoccupation with maintaining tight political control at home translates, in the international arena, into an emphasis on military capabilities, vigorous power projection wherever possible, and asserting status. Such attitudes do not necessarily result in confrontation, since authoritarian regimes may be pragmatic (or fearful) enough to eschew the risks of overtly threatening actions. But their underlying political culture conditions their behavior nevertheless.

In the case of Russia, it is sometimes claimed that the winner-takes-all nature of domestic politics encourages a combative and paranoid mindset.

Just as Putin and leaders before him have had to struggle to hold on to power, so they believe that a “forceful” foreign policy is the only possible course in a dog-eat-dog world. In other words, their survivalist instincts at home set the tone for the conduct of foreign policy.³⁷

Authoritarian peace and insecurity

The evidence to support such propositions is mixed. The collapse of the USSR was remarkable for its relative absence of conflict,³⁸ while Putin’s growing authoritarianism during his second presidential term (2004–08) did not engender an obviously militarist foreign policy. Georgia was the first time Russia had waged war on another sovereign state since the demise of the Soviet Union. (Indeed, the rarity of such action in the past may have caused Tbilisi to underestimate Moscow’s resolve.) Over the past two decades Russia has been involved in far fewer conflicts than the United States, which has undertaken military action in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Somalia. Although there are good reasons for this, not least the fact that the United States possesses vastly greater force projection capabilities than any other country, it would be absurd to claim that Moscow has behaved more aggressively than Washington during this period. And there are many European countries that have been more involved than Russia in wars beyond their borders.³⁹

All that said, the consolidation of authoritarianism has seen a revival of Lenin’s “besieged fortress” syndrome. Following the killing of 334 people at School Number One in Beslan in September 2004, Putin not only blamed international terrorism for the outrage, but also held the West responsible for its allegedly compliant attitude toward Chechen insurgents.⁴⁰ The bogey of a conspiring West arose again in the aftermath of Ukraine’s Orange Revolution, following the popular demonstrations against Putin’s return to the presidency during 2011–12,⁴¹ and, most acutely, in response to the Maidan revolution and Western sanctions against Moscow.⁴²

It has been suggested that the annexation of Crimea and Russia’s subsequent actions in eastern Ukraine were motivated in large part by the authoritarian requirement for a “short, victorious war.” By late 2013 economic growth had stalled, and there was the imminent prospect of a prolonged recession. This threatened the stability of the Putin system and pushed the Kremlin to tap into other sources of legitimacy, such as popular nationalism and anti-Westernism.⁴³ The toppling of Yanukovich offered a perfect occasion to distract public attention from the deteriorating situation at home.

This theory is, however, unconvincing. A direct correlation between authoritarian rule and an adversarial approach to international relations is

difficult to prove, given other plausible explanations. The hardening of Russian foreign policy over the past decade can just as easily be portrayed as a logical, if ill-advised, reaction to perceived *external* threats: the loss of Ukraine as a strategic buffer and sphere of influence; Western “encroachment” into the post-Soviet neighborhood via EU and NATO enlargement; and U.S. missile defense plans. In the 1990s, President Yeltsin, a figure regarded by many in the West as the embodiment of Russian democracy, reacted no less allergically to NATO enlargement, missile defense, and Western military intervention over Kosovo. This opposition did not translate into armed responses, but largely because of Russian impotence, not acceptance.⁴⁴

Conversely, Putin’s first presidential term, during which he tightened his political grip, saw a marked improvement in relations with Europe and the United States.⁴⁵ He clearly believed then that he could insulate cooperation with the West from developments in Russian domestic politics. And even when relations with Washington began to sour in the lead-up to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, his reaction was more restrained than that of French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder—both U.S. allies. Putin also responded calmly to Washington’s unilateral withdrawal from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, and to the impending accession of the Baltic states to NATO.

“The mind of the chekist”

Much has been written about the *chekist* mindset and its influence on domestic politics and foreign policy under Putin. Its defining features are said to include militarism, secrecy, professional and moral likemindedness, consequentialism (the ends justify the means), and anti-Americanism.⁴⁶ Yet it is problematic to separate out a *chekist* mentality from Russian political culture writ large. For one thing, as noted earlier, representatives of the intelligence agencies do not constitute a monolithic group. Not only do they compete with one another for rents, privileges, and access to Putin, but they also display a range of attitudes and opinions.⁴⁷

Another difficulty is that even if one were to recognize such a thing as “the mind of an intelligence officer” (or, relatedly, a military mindset), this is likely to have been formed not only by professional upbringing, but by deeper societal influences as well. When U.S. Senator John McCain looked into Putin’s eyes and saw KGB,⁴⁸ the object of his contemplation was actually much more complex. Individuals are the product not just of their immediate circumstances, but also of their wider environment and accumulated life experience.

Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy suggest that Putin’s political conservatism may have been reinforced by the fact that he “missed” *perestroika* because he

was serving in the late 1980s as a counterintelligence officer in the Soviet consulate in Dresden, East Germany. Yet as they acknowledge, there is more to Putin's wary view of the world than missing out on Gorbachev's reforms or operating within the narrow confines of the KGB. His regret at the passing of the USSR arose out of a larger sense of Russia's physical and historical identity, an identity he felt had been betrayed by the shortcomings of the Soviet system, the incompetence of its rulers, and the machinations of the West.⁴⁹

From this comes a deep hankering for order. It is not just the authoritarian in Putin that leads him to support the Assad regime, or to abhor the grassroots democracy movements of Kyiv's Maidan and the Arab Spring. It is a visceral fear of instability and what it may mean for the system he has constructed, and for Russia's position in the world. In this, he and other intelligence officers, past and present, are far from being alone. Such anxieties resonate among the population at large.⁵⁰

In attempting to understand the influence of political culture on foreign policy, we should therefore eschew deterministic, normatively driven theories that regard authoritarianism (or an intelligence background) as inherently incompatible with a sensible approach to international relations. There are plenty of examples that prove otherwise, notably China in the decade after the 1997 Asian financial crisis, just as there are liberal democracies that have pursued unwise and aggressive policies. Instead, we should look beyond the narrow confines of the Putin system and its principal actors to examine long-term structural influences, such as geography and history.

The importance of geography

Of the many drivers of Russian foreign policy, geography is the most self-evident. It is geography that has defined Russia as one of the world's leading powers since the mid-eighteenth century. Covering more than ten percent of the earth's land mass and stretching almost the length of Eurasia, Russia retains a near-global presence by virtue of size alone. This has fostered the belief that it has a direct stake in developments from Europe to Northeast Asia and the Pacific, and from the Arctic to the wider Middle East. And it has ensured a globalist perspective on international affairs in general.

Russia's vastness has also been critical in establishing and reinforcing its identity as an empire. "Empire" and "imperialism" are pejorative terms these days, so it is unsurprising that policymakers in Moscow should deny the existence of an imperial mentality. Nevertheless, they see Russia as possessing a special status and aura—no longer an empire in the traditional sense, but certainly more than an "ordinary" nation-state. This translates into a power-

ful feeling of strategic entitlement, one that demands equal consideration from even the strongest nation in the world, the United States.⁵¹

Along with physical size and extent comes a self-identification based on multiplicity, ubiquity, and exceptionalism. The Russian Federation comprises more than a hundred distinct nationalities, several of the world's major religions, and multiple civilizational traditions. Russia is not European or Asian, Christian or Muslim; it is *all* those things, a civilization unto itself. Successive rulers—in Tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet times—have exploited the transcending nature of Russian identity for concrete ends. Thus Putin holds up Russia as a European civilization when engaging with the EU; emphasizes its Eurasian identity and “Asian-ness” when talking about the shift of global power to the East; highlights Russia's large Muslim community (15 percent of the population) when looking to project influence in the Middle East and Central Asia; and has in the past portrayed Russia as America's key transatlantic partner.⁵²

A multiplicity of identities reinforces the idea of Russia's “specialness.” As the journalist Konstantin von Eggert once put it, “all peoples are unique, but Russians think they are more unique than the others.”⁵³ This feeling of exceptionalism operates in both an offensive and defensive mode. On the one hand, it provides a quasi-moral basis for involvement in any regional or global issue, and for Russia to be a member of virtually every significant international body. On the other hand, it serves to resist the intrusion of subversive foreign ideas, such as Western democratic liberalism. Since Russia simultaneously partakes of many civilizations, it is not bound by any single one of them, but may pick and choose as it sees fit, thereby preserving its independence. When Putin speaks of pursuing a path of development that takes into account Russia's particular circumstances and traditions,⁵⁴ he is, in effect, using geography as an instrument of legitimation. The notion of *spetsifika*—literally meaning “specificity,” but really implying a combination of “specialness” and exceptionalism—supplies the intellectual and moral justification for the regime to function according to its own rules.

At the same time, geography has complicated Russian foreign policy-making. The advantages of physical reach are counterbalanced by the disadvantages of overextension. The small size of Russia's population—143 million in 2013—relative to its huge territory has been a constant source of anxiety to Moscow since the conquest of Siberia in the early seventeenth century. As Russia morphed from Muscovy into the world's largest land empire, it acquired new vulnerabilities and anxieties as well as new opportunities. The conquered lands were sparsely populated, and difficult and costly to defend. During the Soviet period the Far East became one immense fortified camp, a European redoubt in an alien and hostile environment.⁵⁵

This insecurity persists today as a result of several factors, including the depopulation of the Russian Far East (RFE),⁵⁶ Russia's demographic decline for much of the last two decades, and the degradation of defense capabilities over the same period. In short, geography has nourished a security outlook dominated by threat perceptions and geopolitical calculus.

There are two other elements of geography that have contributed to Russian political culture. One is the location of resources. As Russians are fond of pointing out, their country possesses the full Mendeleev (periodic) table of elements. This has not only shaped its economic development, but also encouraged a view of natural resources as critical to Russia's persona as a great power. Such attitudes have been accentuated in the post-cold war period. Russia's position as the world's leading producer and exporter of energy, precious metals, and other commodities has become the main (and sometimes only) reason why many countries wish to engage with it. And although there is a strong aversion to ending up as a "raw materials appendage" to the West and now China,⁵⁷ the availability of such riches remains critical to perceptions of national power.

Second, the uneven distribution of Russia's population, with barely 30 million people living east of the Urals, has ensured a thoroughly Western-centric outlook. This is apparent in every dimension of public life: political structures and processes, economic orientation, social and cultural norms, and national self-identification. It is testament to the enduring power of geography that even during the worst periods in relations with the West, Russians have preferred to live, study, work, and invest in Europe and the United States. This geography is the foundation of a Russian foreign policy that, for all the talk about a reorientation to the East, is still fixated on the West.

The impact of history

History—and historical memory—plays a crucial and multidimensional role in Russian foreign policy thinking: as the source of atavistic fears and humiliation; as the basis for national pride and assertiveness; and as an instrument of legitimation.

History and insecurity. Russia has enjoyed few periods of sustained peace and stability, but the last century has been extraordinarily turbulent by any standards. During this time it has suffered two world wars, absorbing colossal human and material losses; seen two empires collapse; experienced unspeakable levels of domestic repression; and at virtually no stage enjoyed a comfortable relationship with its neighbors or the wider world. It would be surprising indeed if these historical circumstances had not resulted in an abiding sense of insecurity.

The most existential fear is that of losing sovereignty and territorial integrity. This is a natural reaction to having been subject to repeated invasion: the Mongol onslaught in the thirteenth century, followed by three centuries of occupation (the “Mongol yoke”), Napoleon’s invasion in 1812, and Hitler’s devastating offensive in June 1941 and the ravaging of vast tracts of the western Soviet Union. At other times Russia has been attacked and occupied by Poles, Swedes, Turks, and Persians.

But historical insecurities also assume psychological forms, and these are arguably more influential still. The breakup of the Soviet Union into fifteen independent republics was traumatic not because it heralded the further disintegration of Russia or threatened economic penury and social anarchy. Although there were justified fears on these counts, for Putin and his associates—and many ordinary Russians—the real disaster was the transformation of the world’s second superpower into an impotent also-ran. Virtually overnight everything they had taken for granted had been turned on its head and invalidated.

The troubles of the 1990s underlined these feelings of disorientation and insecurity. They revealed deep divisions within the body politic, hugely dysfunctional governance, military weakness (brutally exposed in Chechnya), failing economic performance culminating in the 1998 financial crisis and default, and acute social demoralization. In foreign affairs the “new Russia” was reduced to the status of supplicant to the West—constantly scrabbling around for money, while being endlessly criticized and patronized. Meanwhile, NATO expanded into areas that Moscow had controlled for decades. This expansion did not pose a physical threat, but it drastically altered the dynamic of Russia’s international relations. One-time allies and client-states deserted *en masse*, presenting it with an unpalatable choice: either integrate with the West on the latter’s terms or face growing isolation and backwardness. Given the circumstances, the Russian elite and public could not help but feel profoundly anxious about the future.

The return of political stability and economic growth under Putin alleviated this mood, but did not dispel it. Putin’s frequent references to the need for a strong Russia owe much to a strategic culture in which hard power is paramount (see chapter 2). But they also reflect a darker view of a world in which security is invariably fragile, and enemies and threats are never far away. In this, history plays a hugely important role, not just in influencing the overall context and mood of policymaking, but also in the formulation of individual policies. For example, the “strategic partnership” with China has gained considerable impetus from the Russian fear of ending up on the wrong side of the strategic triangle—as occurred in the early 1980s, when the

Soviet Union faced a hostile Reagan administration in the United States and an unfriendly Chinese leadership under Deng Xiaoping, as well as mounting economic problems.

Such insecurities are closely bound up with a national humiliation complex that has deep roots. Originating in the Mongol occupation, this has been a near-constant of Russian attitudes toward the outside world. In the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries it was apparent in a feeling of backwardness relative to the rest of Europe, and was a primary motivation behind Peter the Great's determination to open a "window to the West."⁵⁸ In the post-cold war period the national humiliation complex has become enshrined in the belief that the West set out to abase Russia by exploiting its (temporary) weakness. According to this view, the economic "shock therapy" prescriptions of the early 1990s were designed to undermine it from within, while NATO took advantage of the Soviet collapse to absorb the former Warsaw Pact countries.⁵⁹

The ongoing crisis over Ukraine fits snugly within this narrative. The Kremlin's allegation that NATO aims to bring Ukraine into its fold is a self-serving falsehood. What is real, however, is that Moscow sees resolution of the crisis in zero-sum terms: triumph or humiliation. The West, and specifically the United States, cannot be allowed to get away with the removal of a key Kremlin ally—both because of the geopolitical implications for Russia and because it would represent a national humiliation of the first order.

This complex is roughly analogous to China's "century of humiliation" (1842–1949), which was characterized by successive regime failures, foreign invasion and occupation, and socioeconomic disintegration.⁶⁰ In China, the century of humiliation has become a parable about the costs of weakness and virtues of strength. Russia's modern Time of Troubles⁶¹ in the 1990s was much shorter, lasting barely a decade, while the collapse of the Soviet Union came largely from within. Nevertheless, the motivational aspect is similar. When Putin reiterates Stalin's slogan that the "weak get beaten,"⁶² he is tapping into the view of many that Russia cannot trust in the good intentions of others, but must concentrate on building up its own strength. This includes consolidating political authority, tightening state control over the "commanding heights of the economy," maintaining social order, and enhancing its military capabilities.

History as triumph. Given these insecurities, it may seem odd that Putin and others should be so keen to trumpet Russia's importance to the world. However, what comes across sometimes as over-confidence and triumphalism reflects a history that has boasted great victories and achievements, along with tragedy and disaster. Russia has lost many battles, but few wars. Moreover, it has succeeded in reversing most of its defeats. It was overrun by the Mongols,

but later expanded its empire to the farthest reaches of Asia. It suffered humiliating setbacks against Napoleon, but occupied Paris and led the restoration of absolute monarchies throughout Europe. It was devastated by Hitler's invasion, but raised the Soviet flag over the Reichstag. This pattern of eventual victories has imbued successive generations of rulers with the belief that Russia generally finds itself on the right side of history, even if it must undergo huge torments in the process.⁶³

It also underpins the apparent complacency about Russia's shortcomings. Sometimes, of course, the attitude is precisely that. But often it reflects faith that solutions will somehow be found and Russia will again emerge successfully from its troubles. Events in recent years have tended to reinforce this view. The diplomatic isolation Moscow experienced following the 2008 Georgia war soon gave way to the U.S.-Russia reset and rapprochement with Europe. The global financial crisis only briefly interrupted a pattern of consistent economic growth since the late 1990s. The opprobrium heaped on the Kremlin over its support for Assad turned into gratitude for Russia's role in initiating the removal of chemical weapons from Syria. And its vigorous response to the overthrow of Yanukovich is seen in Moscow as critical in preserving Russian influence in Ukraine. In this last instance much of the political class acts on the assumption that the West, sooner or later, will be forced to accept Putin's realities.

This "winning" mentality—or, more accurately, belief in eventual success—has another aspect relevant to Russian political culture. Confidence in its essential rightness has meant that the leadership is hypersensitive to any suggestion of inferiority. It is insulted by the claim that the West won, and Russia lost, the cold war,⁶⁴ and the lack of credit Moscow has received for achieving a relatively peaceful post-Soviet transition. It is especially disturbed by the implications of such messages. The West's appropriation of victory in the cold war is viewed as a plot to justify unfair treatment of Russia, one that takes the form not only of ill-warranted criticisms about its domestic politics, but also of attempts to marginalize it in the Euro-Atlantic space and meddle in its neighborhood.⁶⁵

History as legitimization. In a country where history plays such a central role in public consciousness, it is to be expected that its rulers should attach primary importance to the cultivation of national narratives. This is exemplified by the debate over Stalin. To most foreigners (and some Russians) he was a monster who caused the extinction of tens of millions of his fellow citizens, enslaved Eastern Europe, and was largely responsible for the onset of the cold war. In Russia, however, his reputation is much more positive; the Chinese Communist Party's official evaluation of Chairman Mao as "70 percent good,

30 percent bad” might equally be applied to Stalin. Many Russians credit him with establishing the Soviet Union as a global power and developed industrial society. They hold him up as the great leader who crushed Nazi Germany and saved the Motherland. And they view him as the ideal of the strong ruler, harsh certainly, but the only possible kind for a country that would otherwise descend into chaos and be picked off by foreign powers.⁶⁶

Stalin’s intimate association with Russian national greatness means there is little political (or popular) will to arrive at a full reckoning of his crimes. To do so might be to admit that many of “his” achievements are tainted, above all the Soviet Union’s victory in the Great Patriotic War. While there is an obvious distinction to be made between the Soviet people’s heroism and the tyranny of Stalinism, in practice de-Stalinization has often been conflated with a liberal Western conspiracy to delegitimize Russian achievements. Accordingly, Moscow has condemned “attempts to rewrite history” and “revise the outcomes of World War II.”⁶⁷ It has taken the view that to subject such events to critical scrutiny, let alone admit fault, could encourage others to take advantage of Russian “weakness,” and undermine its own legitimacy in the process. It is telling that Putin has reacted to the worsening crisis in relations with the West by defending the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and comparing it favorably to the appeasement of Hitler by Neville Chamberlain and Edouard Daladier at Munich a year earlier.⁶⁸ It is also revealing that the human rights organization Memorial, founded to remember and rehabilitate the victims of Stalin’s purges, is threatened with imminent closure—ostensibly on technical grounds, but really because it challenges the Kremlin’s narrative and is therefore seen as an agent of Western influence.

Political Conditions

The evidence of the post-Soviet era suggests that the impact of domestic politics on Russian foreign policy is more apparent in the *manner* in which it is conducted than in its content or orientation. A country in uncertain transition is rarely consistent in the pursuit of objectives, whereas one that enjoys stability and prosperity has a more secure basis on which to develop and implement long-term plans. During the 1990s, political uncertainty, economic crisis, and a loss of national self-confidence resulted in a disorganized and incoherent Russian approach to external relations. The Yeltsin administration veered erratically between seeking integration with the West and pursuing ambitions of strategic balancing and a new multipolar order. Decision-making became almost entirely ad hoc and reactive.⁶⁹

The nexus between domestic political conditions and foreign policy has also been a feature of the Putin years. For much of this period there has been a fair measure of stability and optimism, and the Kremlin has presented an assured, if sometimes overconfident, face to the world. But at times when it has felt under domestic pressure, its anxiety has translated into a febrile approach, particularly vis-à-vis the United States. As a result, far from proceeding in linear, deliberate fashion, Putin's foreign policy has witnessed several major fluctuations.

Political consolidation

Putin's first presidential term (2000–04) was notable for the recentralization of political power and an impressive economic recovery. The existence of a "Putin consensus"⁷⁰ at home translated into the steadier management of foreign policy, centered on the mending of ties with the West post-Kosovo.

His second term (2004–08) saw a sustained downturn in relations with the United States, and strident reactions to developments in the post-Soviet space, in particular the Orange Revolution. On the home front, however, Putin benefited from the consolidation of his personal authority, and rapid economic growth supported by the boom in global energy and other commodity prices.⁷¹ Thus empowered, he pursued an ever more assertive approach in foreign affairs. His (in)famous speech at the February 2007 Munich Security Conference was partly the result of mounting exasperation at Western policies, but also stemmed from the belief that he had little to lose by calling out Washington and its NATO allies.⁷² A Russia growing at 6–7 percent per annum, with vast financial reserves and no public debt, could ride out Western retaliation—especially since the Bush administration was pressing ahead anyway with missile defense deployment and NATO enlargement.

Putin's confidence was boosted by elite and public approval of his approach. Differences were largely limited to matters of detail and degree. There was no divergence on core principles, such as the reassertion of Russia's claims as a great power and as the leading actor in the post-Soviet space, and there was plenty of admiration for the energy Putin brought to the task. During this time ideational consensus was supplemented by institutional discipline—a significant change from the Yeltsin era, when there was open discord between various parts of the foreign policy establishment.

The end of certainty

The years of the Putin-Medvedev tandem (2008–12) witnessed the reemergence of uncertainty. The global financial crisis had the effect of demystifying the Putin system, throwing the spotlight on a stagnant polity, endemic

corruption, the absence of rule of law, and growing economic inefficiencies. It challenged lazy assumptions about guaranteed prosperity and stability. Discomfited by the slump in growth from 8 percent in 2008 to -7.9 percent in 2009 (the worst of any G-20 country), the regime found itself under pressure to maintain the Putin “social contract”—rising incomes and higher living standards in return for the population’s acquiescence.⁷³

The economy soon recovered, but Moscow’s earlier bullishness gave way to a more cautious and nuanced attitude, evident in the functioning of the tandem itself. The latter was essentially a political show designed to convey the impression of a more diverse and accountable leadership. Yet the fact that Putin invested serious effort in this elaborate pretense reflected an appreciation that his system could no longer simply coast along.⁷⁴

In foreign policy too there was a shift away from complacency. Dissenting voices began to be heard about the costs of deteriorating relations with the United States and Europe, and about Russia’s vulnerability in the international system.⁷⁵ The magnitude or impact of these criticisms should not be exaggerated; by and large the Putin foreign policy consensus held firm. But Moscow’s receptiveness to Western initiatives, such as Obama’s reset initiative and the EU’s “partnership for modernization,” pointed to greater self-awareness and a concern to mitigate the vulnerability it felt in the wake of the global financial crash.

Political crisis and reaction

The nexus between domestic politics and foreign policy was never more evident than following the anti-Putin demonstrations of late 2011 and early 2012. Most immediately, the shock felt by the regime, and Putin personally, gave rise to a series of highly emotional responses. Putin accused the United States of directly interfering in Russia’s internal affairs, including funding and organizing the opposition. This reaction went well beyond the scope and tenor of previous attacks against Western governments. It indicated a level of insecurity not seen since Putin first entered the Kremlin in January 2000. The much-cited analogy with the Orange Revolution is apposite—to a point. Putin viewed this as a cautionary tale about the dangers of allowing a grassroots, or indeed any other, democratic movement to challenge the established order. However, whereas in 2004–05 he was able to quarantine Russia from events in Ukraine, in 2011–12 everything was so much closer, and the threat to his rule seemed far more serious.

Putin’s anti-Americanism also contained substantial elements of calculation. It recognized that many of the pillars of legitimacy the Kremlin had taken for granted—dominant political control, elite consensus, economic

growth, and broad public support (or compliance)—were crumbling, and that new sources of legitimacy would have to be found and old ones revived. In these circumstances the distinction between domestic and foreign policy evaporated. Attacking Washington was no longer part of managing the United States, but became an extension of domestic politics by other means. The risk of a new crisis in bilateral relations paled into insignificance compared with the imperative of preserving power at all costs. Accordingly, Putin's 2012 presidential campaign played up "foreign policy" to a greater degree than in any other election in Russia's history, fingering the United States as all-purpose bogeyman—arrogant superpower abroad and subversive influence inside Russia. In adopting anti-Americanism as a tool to claw back lost authority, Putin was acting in the tradition of previous rulers, such as Tsar Nicholas I, Lenin, and Stalin, who exploited the idea of a Russia besieged by enemies abroad and traitors within.

The merging of domestic and foreign policy was also apparent in the distancing of the Putin elite from Western-led norms, and the reversion to "traditional values." This was partly a reaction to the discrediting of Western institutions as a result of the global financial crisis, a process that had been under way for some time. But the anti-Putin protests accelerated the normative shift away from the West. No longer able to rely on a materialist "social contract," Putin looked to a national moral renaissance that might supply him with a new and deeper form of legitimacy.

Asserting the new "normal"

During 2012–13 Putin recovered much of his previous swagger. The protests lost momentum, the liberal opposition became demoralized, and popular figures such as Alexei Navalny were persecuted and marginalized. The regime reasserted its dominance of political life, and expanded into new areas, such as social media.⁷⁶ The clear and present danger that had appeared to threaten its survival receded. In this calmer atmosphere, the connection between domestic politics and foreign policy became looser for a brief time. The Kremlin felt better able to compartmentalize different baskets of issues; it could consolidate its grip on power and ideological discourse at home, while engaging with the outside world on its own terms.

But such "normality" is by its very nature fragile. Recent events in Ukraine have exposed the artificiality of separating the foreign from the domestic. As noted earlier, the Kremlin's forceful response was not motivated by a conscious desire to divert attention from its defective management of the economy, since it would scarcely have annexed Crimea had Yanukovych managed to cling on to power. However, Putin recognized that a compliant approach

toward regime change in Kyiv could have critical consequences for his own popularity and credibility. He felt he needed to reaffirm that he was strong, that Russia was very much a great power, and that the West could not take liberties at its (and his) expense. The lure of domestic approbation, centered on the image of a besieged yet indomitable Russia, proved irresistible, and easily trumped concerns about the consequences for relations with the West.

This very nexus precludes an early softening of Kremlin policy. For as long as the Russian public attributes the problems of a plummeting ruble, stagnating incomes, and rising inflation to the actions of Western governments rather than the shortcomings of its own, Putin will pursue an uncompromising course. In this he acts on the presumption that Russians are well used to enduring great hardship and making huge sacrifices, but will never forgive weakness in those who rule them.⁷⁷

Economic Factors

The issue of regime confidence, and its relationship to foreign policy, is intimately tied to the condition of the Russian economy. Economic factors are at once sources of power, vulnerability, and engagement, and in recent years their influence on foreign policy has increased markedly.

The state of the economy

The most obvious impact is in supplying the wherewithal to pursue national interests abroad. During the 1990s successive crises destroyed Russia's standing as a serious international actor. In the following decade, by contrast, rapid growth offered a launch-pad for an active foreign policy. The effect was not only material but also psychological. Whereas under Yeltsin Russia's misfortunes had fostered a mood of demoralization, under Putin a flourishing economy became emblematic of a power on the way up.

Throughout the Putin era, there has been a clear correlation between the state of the economy and the handling of foreign policy. Putin's first presidential term was a period of significant reforms and impressive growth. However, it was not yet clear whether this success was sustainable or whether it reflected a bounce-back following the 1998 financial crash and the fourfold devaluation of the ruble. Global oil prices were rising, but still at a modest rate. Cautious optimism tempered by uncertainty about Russia's longer-term prospects was conducive to a judicious foreign policy, largely free of excess.

By Putin's second term, these doubts had more or less disappeared. The Kremlin believed that the economy would continue to grow rapidly and for the foreseeable future. Oil prices quadrupled between January 2004 and July

2008;⁷⁸ Russia paid off its last remaining foreign debt in 2006; and global energy demand soared as a result of the booming Asian economies. Moscow saw no reason to listen to Western homilies about human rights and democracy when European and American companies were queuing up to access Russia's resources. For the Kremlin it was a good time to assert Russia's independence without worrying too much about possible downsides.

The global financial crisis dampened this hubris. The very factors—high global energy and commodity prices—that had underpinned regime confidence now became sources of vulnerability. After the price of Urals crude fell from US\$129 to US\$38 per barrel during 2008–09, the government was forced to spend a third of its gold and foreign currency reserves to keep the economy afloat,⁷⁹ and to turn to the Chinese for urgent credit to bail out Rosneft and Transneft.⁸⁰ The crisis demonstrated that Russia, far from being independent, relied heavily on the West—a U.S.-led international financial system and trade with the European Union. By exposing the myth of Russian economic exceptionalism, it ensured that Moscow would be amenable to improving relations.

But the crisis also conveyed other messages. First, Western economic leadership and moral authority had been seriously weakened. Second, although Russia had suffered during 2009, its subsequent recovery was notably faster than that of the leading Western economies—a point Putin never tired of reiterating. The eurozone countries, in particular, struggled to emerge from recession. Third, to minimize the fallout from future problems in the global economy, Russia would need to diversify its commercial ties beyond the West, and especially to the Asia-Pacific region.⁸¹

The diverse and contradictory influence of economic circumstances on foreign policy is evident today. With the onset of recession, Moscow would like to maintain partnerships with Western companies, and to quarantine these as much as possible from political disagreements. It understands too that for some years yet the United States will dominate the global economy, and the EU will remain Russia's principal source of foreign trade. But it is acutely aware that close dependence on the West exposes Russia to forces beyond its control, and makes it vulnerable to pressure from Western governments. The latter's sanctions in the wake of the Crimean annexation have aggravated these concerns.

Russia's economic fragility has increased the pressure to give substance to its "turn to the East" (chapter 5). This is not about choosing a mythical "China model" in preference to Western-style capitalism, but about spreading the economic and geopolitical risk. The Kremlin recognizes China's growing footprint in the global economy and the importance of expanding

bilateral economic ties. Yet it is no less averse to relying on Beijing than it is to dependency on Brussels, Berlin, or Washington.

Ultimately the big lesson of recent years is that domestic economic performance is integral to Russia's capacity to sustain an independent foreign policy, and to the long-term stability of the Putin system. The Kremlin's strategic task is to translate this self-evident reality into positive policy outcomes. For the time being, though, its attention is focused almost entirely on the political exigencies of the conflict in Ukraine and the crisis in relations with the West. In this fraught context it has resorted to the usual survivalist expedient of blaming Russia's economic difficulties on malign outside forces.⁸²

Economics as power projection

Much has been written about the "energy weapon"—the exploitation of energy exports and pipelines for geopolitical ends. Until the 2014 Ukraine crisis, this was the most high-profile issue in Russia-EU relations, and it has played a vital role in policy toward the post-Soviet space (see chapter 4). But the regional geopolitics of energy is only part of the story. More significant still is the comfort that the Putin regime derives from Russia's pivotal position as a *global* energy producer and exporter. Energy and other strategic resources, such as gold, platinum, and aluminum, are seen as the twenty-first-century equivalent of the Soviet Union's nuclear arsenal—the guarantor, along with military might, of Russia's international influence and status.⁸³ This helps explain why, despite frequent talk of diversification, the economy has become increasingly reliant on natural resources. (The contribution of energy exports to the federal budget has grown from under 10 percent at the beginning of the Putin era to about half in 2013.)⁸⁴ The Kremlin is more concerned to play to Russia's comparative advantages than to pursue what it sees as the somewhat abstract aim of a "balanced" economy.⁸⁵

The use of economic tools to project power is not limited to energy. In the post-Soviet neighborhood (including the Baltic states) and central and eastern Europe, Russian investments in banking, finance, manufacturing, and transport have grown. In many instances, the motivations are principally commercial. But it would be naïve to disregard the geopolitical dividend. While Russian companies are not mere instruments of the Kremlin, their participation in these often fragile economies can and does serve wider purposes.

In several of the ex-Soviet republics Russia's position as a leading source of trade and investment translates into a political influence similar to that enjoyed by the United States in Latin America from the 1950s to the 1970s. And even in countries where Russia is just another outside player, substantial

economic participation ensures that its noneconomic interests are taken into greater account. It is no coincidence that Cyprus is Russia's most enthusiastic supporter within the EU, or that Hungary and the Czech Republic have been relatively sympathetic toward Moscow in recent years. The Kremlin recognizes that cultivating the corporate sector *in any country* maximizes its chances of influencing politicians. In Germany, for example, Angela Merkel's coalition government abhors many aspects of Russian domestic and foreign policy, yet for a long time was constrained by a powerful industry lobby broadly sympathetic toward Putin. The same is true in France and, to a lesser extent, the United Kingdom. During the Ukraine crisis French manufacturers and British energy and financial firms worked hard to counter or at least soften Western sanctions against Moscow.⁸⁶ Conversely, the modest level of business ties with the United States is a major reason why Russian interests have so little traction with the American political establishment.

The personalization of foreign economic policy

Russia's foreign economic policy bears the mark of competing domestic interests and priorities. Indeed, in no other area of external relations is the distinction between private and public interest so blurred. Putin's energy diplomacy, in particular, serves the vested interests of the ruling elite. The case of Gazprom illustrates this well. It has become obvious that the company is in desperate need of reform. Its business model is obsolete; its export monopoly has weakened Russia's negotiating positions with foreign customers; and it operates in a virtual universe of permanently high prices and no shale revolution.⁸⁷ The sensible response to these problems would be to restructure the company and allow other firms, such as Novatek and Rosneft, to compete with it in exporting gas. Yet Putin has been averse to meaningful reform, in part because of Gazprom's importance as a source of rents to the elite.⁸⁸ He has vigorously defended it in the face of the EU's Third Energy Package and the European Commission's anti-trust suit (see chapter 3). Economic efficiency may be desirable, but keeping the elite happy is critical to the survival of the Putin system.⁸⁹

Paradoxically, the best chance of Gazprom reform comes from competing interests within the ruling circle. One of Putin's closest confidants, Gennady Timchenko, is the leading shareholder in Novatek, while Igor Sechin is the driving force behind Rosneft's campaign to expand into the gas sector. Their individual priorities will be much more influential than any Western actions or a theoretical "Russian national interest" in determining Moscow's energy politics.

Foreign policy and the modernization agenda

Russia's modernization agenda has been something of a weather vane for its relations with the West. It has featured prominently whenever these have been more or less positive, and disappeared during times of strain. In Putin's first presidential term, major reforms in tax, land ownership, and conditions for small and medium-size enterprises coincided with efforts to reach out to the West, initially to Europe and then to the United States.⁹⁰ During the years of the tandem, an upturn in cooperation with the West went hand in hand with a renewed, if largely rhetorical, emphasis on modernization. By contrast, Putin's second presidential term saw him talk up Russia as a global energy power, while tensions escalated with Washington and Brussels. And after his return to the Kremlin in March 2012, the demise of the modernization agenda accompanied a sharp downturn in relations with Washington.

Historically the reform agenda in post-Soviet Russia has been framed in terms of matching up to Western norms and standards. These might be interpreted in ways that were peculiarly Russian, as in the notion of "sovereign democracy" promoted by Kremlin ideologue Vladislav Surkov from 2006.⁹¹ Nevertheless, the basic message remained: the West represented the benchmark. Recognizing this did not indicate pro-Western feeling so much as an appreciation that Russia had to emulate the West in key aspects if it was to "catch up and surpass" it.⁹² Modernization was the ticket to international competitiveness; the choice was to "modernize or be marginalized."⁹³

However, since late 2011 when Putin signaled his intention to stand for a third presidential term, the notion of modernization has been substantially redefined—that is, when it has been mentioned at all. The Kremlin sees "modernization" as, at best, a resource to support the political status quo. This is not to say that it has no interest in addressing corruption, the lack of rule of law, and poor governance. But these efforts are relevant only insofar as they strengthen existing power relations and the stability of the Putin system. In foreign policy this approach translates into a desire to import Western technology on a purely business basis, without any political conditionalities.

Moscow has come to view "Western-style" modernization as both subversive and an infringement on Russian sovereignty. It blamed Washington for the Rose and Orange Revolutions in 2003–04, and its determination to avoid a repeat scenario in Russia in 2011–12 saw it clamp down not just on the anti-Putin opposition, but also on many of the norms and values that, for the West, are intrinsic to true modernization. The 2014 Ukraine crisis confirmed this trend. Meanwhile, economic modernization has been caught in the political crossfire. A more open and competitive economy would threaten the

rent-seeking interests of the elite, and it is a similar story with combating the institutionalized corruption that is at the heart of the Putin system.

Faced with these tensions, Putin has responded in ways that make little distinction between domestic and foreign policy. In prioritizing “stability” over reform, he reminds his audiences of the impact of Western policy prescriptions during the Yeltsin years, and of the continuing problems of euro-zone countries. He expounds on Russia’s traditions and the need to preserve the country’s independence. He questions the viability of Western liberal capitalism in light of the global financial crisis and the rise of China. Above all, he emphasizes it is the Kremlin, and no one else, that will decide what Russia needs and under what terms.

Social Forces

Although Putin has moved politics in a steadily more authoritarian direction, Russian society has become more diverse and demanding. The clichéd portrayal of an anaesthetized people is out of date, and its long-term support for the regime cannot be guaranteed. The changed social dynamics are reflected less in direct action such as the protests of 2011–12 than in a more generalized discontent about the government’s failure to combat corruption and provide decent public services.⁹⁴

So far, however, this discontent has been limited to domestic affairs. The Russian population has shown little interest in foreign policy, and has supported the Kremlin in any case. It enthusiastically approved the annexation of Crimea, and has been highly receptive to Putin’s account of developments in eastern Ukraine and relations with the West. More generally it buys into the official narrative of a wronged Russia. A 2012 Pew Global Attitudes survey found that 73 percent of respondents believed that Russia deserved more respect from “other countries,” in other words the West.⁹⁵ Subsequent Western sanctions have only strengthened such sentiments.

This synergy means that social forces have had relatively little impact on foreign policymaking. Such influence as exists is concentrated in three main areas: nationalism, religion, and public mores. These are not game-changers—at least not yet—but buttress an already strong institutional and philosophical conservatism within the Putin elite.

Nationalism

Nationalism in Russia comes in various guises. There is the official nationalism that stresses Russia’s great power identity and indigenous political and social traditions. There is an ethnic nationalism, which revolves around the

idea of “Russia for the Russians”—*Russkie* (ethnic Russians) instead of *Rossiyanе* (citizens of the Russian Federation). And then there is an ultra-nationalism that is virulently xenophobic, and that expresses itself in violence against ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities.

By far the most important of these variants is *official nationalism*. During the post-cold war period, many regimes in central and eastern Europe have sought alternative sources of legitimacy to fill the ideological void left by the demise of communism. Nationalism, with its roots in a country’s geography and history, and simplistic messages, is a ready candidate. That said, in the first decade of the Putin era it was understated, with none of the extremism that infected the regime of Slobodan Milošević in Serbia during the 1980s.

But since late 2011 the climate has changed. Putin’s resentment over Western criticisms of his return to the presidency, and his desire to refresh his popular legitimacy, have led him down the nationalist route. Thus in response to the protests of 2011–12, Putin promoted a retro vision of Russian national values, in which he assumed the position of defender of the faith against the corrupting influence of foreign ideas. He fed on popular anti-Western sentiment (including among some of the protestors), and accused the liberal opposition of colluding with outside forces to betray Russia.⁹⁶

Official nationalism has acquired a more aggressive dimension that goes beyond the usual reiteration of Russia’s “rights” in the international system. This raises the specter of territorial revisions on the basis of concepts such as Novorossiya (“New Russia”),⁹⁷ and arrogates to Moscow the right to intervene forcibly on behalf of expatriate Russians, especially those living in the post-Soviet neighborhood. The ongoing Ukraine crisis has highlighted this new strain.

At the same time, for Putin nationalism is a resource to be used selectively. There is an implicit understanding that it can be difficult to manage and is potentially destabilizing. He has been especially anxious to ensure that nationalism, of one kind or another, is not allowed to derail key priorities—political control, social order, and geopolitical influence. The government has from time to time tolerated ultra-nationalist violence, particularly when perpetrated against “people of Caucasian nationality” (*lyudi kavkazkoi natsionalnosti*)—Chechens, Ingush, Dagestanis, and others. But it has also ensured that occasional pogroms are not allowed to coalesce into a larger, more coordinated movement.

The Kremlin’s contradictory attitude toward popular nationalism is illustrated by a couple of examples. In 2003 it created a nationalist party, Rodina (“Motherland”), to tap into nationalist constituencies at the Duma (parliamentary) elections. The ruse succeeded almost too well, with the party com-

ing from nowhere to gain nearly 10 percent of the popular vote. By 2007, however, it had disbanded and its charismatic leader, Dmitry Rogozin, was packed off to Brussels as ambassador to NATO, where he could annoy Western governments instead of worrying the Kremlin.

The rise and fall of the Nashi youth movement is similarly instructive. It was originally set up to counter the contagious influence of grassroots democracy following the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. There were some parallels with Komsomol, the youth arm of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), in that it was intended to inculcate the values of the ruling system into young people, and to encourage their activism in support of it. Unlike Komsomol, however, Nashi's value was short-lived. Although it was deployed to harass foreign embassies,⁹⁸ influential figures in Putin's circle became unimpressed by its utility and increasingly concerned by its lack of discipline. Nashi's fate was sealed when the unsympathetic Vyacheslav Volodin replaced its principal advocate, Vladislav Surkov, as deputy chief of staff of the Kremlin administration in December 2011.⁹⁹ The organization was effectively disbanded in 2012, and the government concentrated its efforts instead on a mass campaign for "patriotic education" in schools.

Putin's top-down approach has ensured that unsanctioned forms of nationalism have had little impact on foreign policy. Thus, while he pays lip service to the problem of illegal migration, he recognizes that enforcing tight controls on the more than ten million workers from ex-Soviet republics would exacerbate Russia's growing labor shortage. It would also weaken Moscow's leverage across the post-Soviet space; the free movement of goods and labor is critical to the viability of the Eurasian Economic Union and to Putin's ambitious plans for Eurasian integration. Although a recent crack-down (late 2014) suggests a new responsiveness, the real deterrent to illegal migration is likely to be the recession in Russia, which makes it a much less attractive destination for migrant workers.¹⁰⁰

The determination to exploit and mobilize nationalist sentiments, rather than be driven by them, is evident elsewhere. Until February 2014 Putin ignored public pressure to effect the reunification of Crimea with Russia, aware that this would negate efforts to build a symbiotic relationship with Kyiv. Once Yanukovich was overthrown, however, he shifted to a different calculus. Crimea was absorbed into the Russian Federation with breathtaking speed, while the Kremlin actively encouraged Russian ultra-nationalist paramilitary elements to destabilize eastern Ukraine.

Moscow's willingness to turn the nationalist tap on and off is demonstrated by its approach to the United States. The strongly anti-American tenor of official pronouncements during the 2012 presidential campaign gave

way in the following year to a milder approach—still critical, but couched in more moderate language. However, following events in Ukraine, the United States resumed its position as public enemy number one, a status that seems likely to last for some time.

Such manipulation can backfire. There is a danger that popular nationalism, once loosed, may be difficult to control. But in some areas the Kremlin's management of nationalism has worked out quite well. Sino-Russian partnership has benefited from determined efforts to alleviate anti-Chinese sentiment among the Russian population,¹⁰¹ and hose down the once contentious issue of Chinese “illegal migration” in the Russian Far East. Putin has also ensured that Islamophobia is a nonfactor in Russia's interaction with Muslim countries. Importantly, he has not surrendered to fears that Russia is losing its Slavic and Orthodox identity as a result of the higher birth-rates in predominantly Muslim areas of the Russian Federation (such as the North Caucasus and Tatarstan).

Religion

Although Putin and other senior figures attend church services and are often seen in the company of religious leaders, religion itself has little influence over Kremlin decisionmaking, and even less in foreign affairs. There are occasional exceptions; the Kremlin has always respected the Orthodox Church's opposition to a papal visit. But the church is an instrument rather than a driver of policy. For Putin its chief value is as a legitimating symbol, highlighting Russia's (and his own) virtues in contrast to a spiritually and morally bankrupt West.

Orthodox Patriarch Kirill is especially useful to this purpose. He supplements Kremlin efforts to tap into a constituency that is politically and socially conservative, while emphasizing the distinctiveness of Russia's identity and values to an international audience. Kirill has also played a leading role in promoting closer ties with Ukraine and Georgia, an important consideration in countering pro-European tendencies in those countries. (The Sunni grand mufti in Kazan performs a roughly analogous function, boosting Russia's Islamic bona fides, particularly in Central Asia.)

The current relationship between church and state bears some similarities to the Tsarist era, notably the reign of Nicholas I (1825–55) when Orthodoxy (*pravoslavie*) was one of the three pillars along with autocracy (*samoderzhavie*) and nationhood (*narodnost*). However, it also resembles the very unequal interaction of Soviet times. The church's situation is far more secure and prosperous today, but its impact on policy is much less than under Tsarism. It serves at the pleasure of the Kremlin, in return for which it is handsomely rewarded.

Suggestions, therefore, that it acts as a malign influence on Russia's relations with the West are wide of the mark. The well-documented problems here have much more secular and concrete causes. The church is not responsible for the "turn to the East" or Putin's Eurasian Union. On the contrary, Kirill's ecumenical diplomacy has meant that relations with the Roman Catholic Church are better than they have been for decades.¹⁰² While the Orthodox Church is scarcely a progressive force in Russian society,¹⁰³ its brand of conservatism has had little discernible influence on public attitudes toward Putin or the outside world. Opinion surveys routinely confirm that it is the most trusted institution in the country, but also that most people believe it should stay out of politics.¹⁰⁴

Public mores

The influence of public mores on foreign policy is very limited. Although a strong social conservatism has occasionally complicated Russia's relations with the West, its effect on specific policies has been peripheral and fleeting. Such conservatism was not responsible, for example, for the disproportionate punishment meted out to the members of the Pussy Riot punk band for their performance protest at Christ the Savior cathedral in February 2012. The Kremlin claimed to be responding to public outrage. But in reality it exploited the incident to justify a more general clampdown on public dissent, and to discredit the anti-Putin opposition across the board. In rejecting U.S. and European criticisms of the verdict, Putin framed the argument as the West impinging on Russia's sovereignty, disrespecting its values, and corrupting its people. In other words, morality, like nationalism and religion, is a policy tool, to be used and managed as the regime sees fit.

Likewise, homophobic attitudes in Russian society have not forced the government to introduce anti-gay legislation; they have just made it easier to carry out repressive measures against its political opponents. The behavior of law enforcement agencies is frequently in breach of Russia's obligations as a member of the Council of Europe, and is criticized by European politicians, NGOs, and media. But homosexual rights as such are a marginal preoccupation for the Kremlin and, dare one say it, for Western governments as well—except on high-profile occasions such as the Sochi Winter Olympics.

The Nature of the Domestic–Foreign Policy Nexus

Four main sources of domestic influence have played a decisive role in Putin's foreign policy: individual actors and their personal predilections; political culture shaped by long-term structural factors, such as geography and his-

tory; concrete political and economic interests; and circumstances and events.

Individuals are key to decisionmaking in all regimes, from the authoritarian to the democratic. But there are few countries where they are more important than in present-day Russia. While Putin is far from being master of all he surveys, his personal influence is felt at every level of domestic and foreign policy. Sometimes this takes the form of direct involvement in particular issues. At other times it is more indirect or muted. But either way, Putin has reinforced the template whereby individuals, not institutions or big ideas, are paramount. Moreover, this personalized model is not limited to him alone but is replicated at all levels of power.

At the same time, individuals are not self-standing entities but products of their environment and upbringing. They introduce to policymaking all kinds of baggage—memories, preconceptions, biases, instincts—that together form what might loosely be described as a political culture. The impact of this culture, however, cannot be reduced to oversimplifications about the alleged predispositional influence of an authoritarian or liberal mindset. The experience of the Putin period suggests that there is no automatic link between domestic authoritarianism and an adversarial foreign policy. Longer-term geographical and historical influences are far more relevant—Russia’s physical immensity, the Westerncentrism of its political elite, the multiplicity of identities, and an abiding sense of insecurity.

But even these influences are by no means absolute, fixing once and for all the character of Moscow’s engagement with international society. While Putin is influenced by Russia’s physical and historical context, he also exploits this in the service of less lofty aims, such as holding on to power and defending the interests of the elite. Having recourse to history is in some ways the modern-day equivalent of the medieval *Dieu le veult* (“God wills it”)¹⁰⁵—enlisting God on one’s side. Concepts such as Russia’s “permanent national interests” are more useful to the Kremlin as legitimating devices than as the intellectual foundation for decisionmaking.

Contrary to accepted wisdom, different conceptions of historical destiny and national identity may arise under the influence of changing circumstances.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, this has happened several times in Russia’s past, fundamentally altering the principles and practice of its foreign policy. Under Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, Russia transformed itself from a quasi-oriental and introspective backwater into a mainstream European power. Two centuries later Stalin presided over its rise as a global power. And in the 1980s Gorbachev challenged the notion that Russia can only function within an adversarial paradigm.

If there is any permanence in Russian foreign policy, it lies in the continuing primacy of tangible political and economic interests. Without these, ideas are mere abstractions. It is Putin's determination to consolidate his authority that gives real purpose to the notion of Russia as an independent center of power, one that brooks no "interference" from subversive outside forces. Thus opposing Western moral interventionism in the Middle East is motivated principally by the fear of democratic contagion. And the Kremlin's defense of Gazprom makes little sense until one recalls that the company serves as a cash-cow for a rent-seeking class on whose loyalty the Putin system depends.

The most variable domestic drivers of Russian foreign policy are events. The influence of such uncontrollables is extremely powerful, yet difficult to grasp. They disrupt seemingly linear trends, and rarely lead to clear-cut outcomes. They ensure that foreign policy is not only the continuation of domestic politics by other means (as suggested at the beginning of this chapter), but also a never-ending exercise in responding to unpredictable developments—the new world disorder. The economic slump of 2009 discredited the narrative of Russia's seamless resurgence as a global power and pushed the regime to adopt a more calibrated, less hubristic approach to foreign relations. Conversely, the anti-Putin protests of 2011–12 radicalized the context of Russia-U.S. interaction. The Kremlin's shock at the turn of events led it to ramp up anti-Americanism to levels not seen since the Georgia war—supplementing excoriating rhetoric with a series of measures targeted specifically at Washington.¹⁰⁷

The interconnectedness of actors, culture, interests, and events suggests that the emergence of a new type of foreign policy in Russia will be highly problematic. As the Ukraine crisis has shown, the stars are not aligned in favor of change. The conservative and survivalist persona of Putin himself; a political culture dominated by historical insecurities and mythologies; the vested interests of the elite; and a reactionary reflex in the face of events—all point to the reaffirmation of traditional principles of power and policy. If there is to be change, it is unlikely to come from internal factors alone. The external context will be crucial, and it is to this we now turn.