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RUSSIAN IRREDENTISM: BALTIC STATES NEXT? MENACE-MYTH-MANTRA

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RUSSIAN IRREDENTISM: BALTIC STATES NEXT? MENACE-MYTH-MANTRA

by

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The gulf between the West and Russia has widened again since the annexation of Crimea, leading to worries that Moscow will use Crimea as a blueprint for the Baltics. This thesis argues that Russia does not, in fact, view both regions equally. When scholars report Vladimir Putin uses tools of the past for today, they prove how Russia's democratization failed. But the discourse on Russia's strategy abroad underrates how this path affects Moscow's foreign policy. This thesis explains how Moscow projects its domestic mindset beyond Russia. The analysis compares Crimea and the Baltics by unpacking historical claims through the prism of Russian identity and its myths in relation to legitimacy. It explains that Russian myths reinforce the identity's credibility based on values. Therein, the drive to secure legitimacy and regain lost grandeur dominate the mindset connecting Moscow's national and global politics. The Baltic states are outside the Russian World and a screen for revanchist projection—a competition zone inside NATO. By contrast, Crimea is a unique symbol for Russianness. The West should recognize that Russia competes in terms of values. Consequently, the West's premise should be to regain the strategic initiative by hindering the Kremlin from dictating the time, place, and topic for the competition.

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RUSSIAN IRREDENTISM: BALTIC STATES NEXT?
MENACE-MYTH-MANTRA

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ABSTRACT

The gulf between the West and Russia has widened again since the annexation of Crimea, leading to worries that Moscow will use Crimea as a blueprint for the Baltics. This thesis argues that Russia does not, in fact, view both regions equally. When scholars report Vladimir Putin uses tools of the past for today, they prove how Russia's democratization failed. But the discourse on Russia's strategy abroad underrates how this path affects Moscow's foreign policy. This thesis explains how Moscow projects its domestic mindset beyond Russia. The analysis compares Crimea and the Baltics by unpacking historical claims through the prism of Russian identity and its myths in relation to legitimacy. It explains that Russian myths reinforce the identity's credibility based on values. Therein, the drive to secure legitimacy and regain lost grandeur dominates the mindset connecting Moscow's national and global politics. The Baltic states are outside the Russian World and a screen for revanchist projection—a competition zone inside NATO. By contrast, Crimea is a unique symbol for Russianness. The West should recognize that Russia competes in terms of values. Consequently, the West's premise should be to regain the strategic initiative by hindering the Kremlin from dictating the time, place, and topic for the competition.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

A2/AD	Anti Access / Aerial Denial
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
DECR	Department of External Church Relations (Moscow Patriarchate)
EU	European Union
EUFOR RD Congo	EU Force in Democratic Republic of Congo
EUTM	EU Training Mission in Mali
EUNAVFOR	EU Naval Force Atalanta
ISIL	Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
ROC	Russian Orthodox Church
U.S.	United States
USSR	Union of Socialist Soviet Republics

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The idea for this study was born out of curiosity for the Baltic Sea region. My grandfather was born in Königsberg, nowadays Kaliningrad, and lived there until the end of World War II. After he had taken refuge in Eastern Germany, he kept the memory for his *Heimat* alive in our family. Today, we live without the Iron Curtain and Eastern Europe is no longer separated from the West. We share our history and should strive for a shared future. I hope this will still be the case when I have, hopefully, become a grandpa myself.

Thanks to my wonderful wife, Rebecca, who shared with me the experience of studying in California, for all of her support. Also, I am incredibly grateful for such an opportunity and would like to thank the German Bundeswehr and the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School for this chance. Furthermore, to all my professors in Monterey, I say thank you kindly. The scholarly enthusiasm and the gentle patience of the academic staff create an inspiring atmosphere, which encourages study.

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I. INTRODUCTION

When Russia redrew Europe's borders by force of arms in 2014, the West quickly characterized this process as Russian irredentism. Indeed, this appeals to a historical tradition of nationalism and conquest, which was a familiar process in Europe during the epoch ranging from 1800 until the end of the Yugoslav Wars two decades ago. The recent debate in Western security in the wake of Crimea's annexation by Russia has centered on Russian strategic and operational combat echelons, as well as the characteristics of employed arms and how the Kremlin has changed warfare (i.e., hybrid warfare). Such analysis has focused especially on how the Russian order of battle in the grey zone could be potentially utilized in other regions, especially the Baltic states. There is little discourse, however, conclusively establishing the motivation behind Russia's assertiveness or how its particular national experience has shaped its strategy. Nor is there much analysis as to how, in fact, Russia would use force—in any of its many forms visible in the 21st century—to coerce the Baltics.

If one wants to seriously engage in a strategic analysis of ends, ways, and means, as well in the sense of Clausewitz, of politics and its psychology, one must consider the equation for a declaration of war is based on two essential factors: political will and military forces. One can more or less count the number of weapons in a nation's arsenal, hence analyzing military technology has a huge following among those who profess to be strategists. Since Russia's seizure of Crimea in 2014, one phenomenon in scholarly literature has indeed been the process of assessing weapons and developing a tactical analysis of such weapons employed by Russia in the Chechen, Georgian, and Ukrainian campaigns of the past two decades. Russian forces and their weaponry are intensively discussed among scholars, think tanks, and senior military leaders, who examine the annexation of Crimea based on the facts and the Baltics as a kind of war in theory.

With another nod to Clausewitz, one knows, however, what is decisive is the formation of political will in the realms of personality and intellect, as well as in the character of institutions for policy and strategy in today's Russia. With a further nod to German philosophy, especially Schopenhauer, one should make use of the word "will" in

such matters. Solely in relation to political will, it is relevant to evaluate the capabilities of friend and foe in the paradoxes of power versus the range of strategic or tactical weapons of all kinds. That is to say, the issue presenting itself here is less a concept of strategy that resides solely in Russian military capabilities than it is an analysis of the chronology, cause and effect, and judgment of how Putin's regime regards the use of armed forces in its attempt to improve the geopolitical position of Russia in a changing world order. Furthermore, it is necessary to assess how the "resort to armed force" method operates in the realm of ideas, state, society, and even in the culture instead of a technocratic emphasis on overamplified tactics and military technology.

This study suggests that a problem exists with the easy assumption held by North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member states that Russia views the Baltics and Crimea to be two chapters of the same playbook of arms and statecraft, and as part of a generalized attempt to recreate something akin to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) through subterfuge and limited forces. The evidence of willingness that Russia translated into policy in the past, as it applies to the Baltic and Black Sea, differs in several key aspects, which this study hopes to elucidate in depth. Similarly, the circumstances that shaped Russia's motivation to use force in the past also likely vary from the current situation. In general, scholars agree that Russia politicizes the story of its role in Europe and its posture to its neighbors, as well as to society, culture, and power in order to justify its actions with a strategic impact not only on its border areas, but on Europe and beyond.

Thus, the question arises: How do Russia's historically legitimized policy views of Crimea and the Baltics differ, and how do these differences consequently affect the strategic outlook for Russia as concerns the Baltic states? Those who guide NATO's response to Moscow's great power ambitions must understand how Russian policy makers establish their historical claims and how such claims affect Russia's decision-making process to identify the narrative's role in the development of Russian motives. This kind of analysis is in short supply among Western defense ministries, which have neglected Russian strategic culture because of an overstressed focus on jihadist terror threats. This myopia has consequently harmed the strategic decision making of NATO as the return of a great power competition so ably demonstrates.

A. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

After Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, the West adapted its well-nigh entente-oriented posture toward Russia back to one of confrontation. NATO's strategic analysis describes a worst-case scenario for its eastern flank by assuming the *fait accompli* in Crimea to be a blueprint for aggression in the Baltic states.[1] Based on the model from about the 1920s through the 1980s, from the time of the Russian Civil War to the Martial Law regime in Poland toward the end of the Cold War, a pattern of invasions and coercion appears whereby the Kremlin sought to secure a Russian forward presence in Europe. Besides the ongoing conflict in Ukraine's Donbass region, NATO has embarked on a return to forward defense through a new posture to meet a Russian assault with military counterforce in the three Baltic states: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

This shift of posture based upon such an assessment equates both the regions due to historical similarities of Russian expansion in the period from the late 17th century through the most recent epoch. Subsequently, the impression of a *New Cold War*[2] has been circulating among policy shapers and decision makers. Consequently, the g*reat power competition*[3] has again become a determining paradigm since the events of 2014.

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[1] For example, see: Peter B. Zwack and Marie-Charlotte Pierre, *Russian Challenges from Now into the Next Generation: A Geostrategic Primer* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2019). For a contrary assessment, see: Robert Person, "6 Reasons Not to Worry about Russia Invading the Baltics," *The Washington Post*, November 12, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/11/12/6-reasons-not-to-worry-about-russia-invading-the-baltics/.

[2] For example, one notable and self-proclaimed controversial voice arguing for the New Cold War, see: Stephen F. Cohen, *War with Russia? From Putin & Ukraine to Trump & Russiagate* (New York: Hot Books, 2019). Cohen is perceived as a left-wing dissident and has a reputation as an apologist.

[3] The paradigm of the great power competition has obviously been re-established in the current U.S. administration, see: "U.S. National Security Strategy," The White House, December 18, 2017, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-announces-national-security-strategy-advance-americas-interests/; see also: Richard V. Spencer (former U.S. Secretary of the Navy), "Time to Update Our Strategic Vision and Goals," *Navy Life*, November 7, 2019, https://navylive.dodlive.mil/2019/11/07/time-to-update-our-strategic-vision-and-goals/. For an overview of the returning great power competition, see: Ronald O'Rourke, *Renewed Great Power Competition: Implications for Defense—Issues for Congress*, CRS Report No. R43838 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2019), https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R43838. For a description of the paradigm's recent evolvement, see: Uri Friedman, "The New Concept Everyone in Washington Is Talking About," *The Atlantic*, August 6, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/08/what-genesis-great-power-competition/595405/.

The perception of Russia as a menace to the Baltic region is essential for the strategic orientation of the 30 allied states in NATO. In reaction to Russian saber rattling, NATO has employed an Enhanced Forward Presence[4] with rotating forces in the Baltics since 2015. Additionally, the United States has established a European Reassurance Initiative almost at the same time to rebuild the U.S. military presence in Europe that had mostly disappeared since 1991.[5] Therefore, the importance of the region's role in Russia's propaganda about its goals and the threats against the Baltics needs to be analyzed for evaluating the suitability and effectiveness of the West's countermeasures.[6]

Varying assessments of Russia's actions have widened the gulf between Western states. While the Baltic states are affected directly and seek immediate action, other members of the alliance more distant from Russia tend to underestimate the Russian threat posed to NATO, dismiss it outright in favor of other threats, or simply ignore the interests of the Balts, the Poles, and the Romanians. This misunderstanding is itself an old problem present from the time the alliance was created in 1949, and such ambivalence in assessing the strategic situation endangers the cohesion of the alliance. This inherent vulnerability of NATO shows the significance of understanding the Russian way of prescribing history in this context.

Academic researchers have scrutinized the mechanics of Russian political legends and myths for its use as a guide to policy and propaganda. In general, their findings have identified that Russia is utilizing, weaponizing, and manipulating the past through legends and myths. The latter consequently define the "Russian World" for Putin's Russia and also suggest the degree to which Russia has repeatedly been the victim of Western aggression as in the case of Napoleon, Hitler, and in the Cold War,

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[4] "NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, July 2019), https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2019_06/20190627_1906-factsheet_efp_en.pdf.

[5] Michelle Shevin-Coetzee, "The European Deterrence Initiative" (briefs, Centre for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, January 25, 2019), https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/EDI_Format_FINAL.pdf.

[6] For a comprehensive assessment of the specific Russian perception of historical context in contemporary policy, see: Stephen Kotkin, "Russia's Perpetual Geopolitics: Putin Returns to Historical Patterns," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2016, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2016-04-18/russias-perpetual-geopolitics.

especially in its last phase. Despite particularly detailed analyses that explain certain effects of Russia's use of the past as justification for the assault on Crimea, a systematic examination is absent to explain the purpose in general terms. Filling this gap in the scholarship could contribute to shaping more effective future strategy for the Baltic region.

Additionally, sidelining Russian historical argument as a mantra underestimates its significance for understanding Putin's Russia, where history is quite alive in the ranks of the government and surely a major force in mass persuasion. Reducing the Kremlin's narrative to a mere fabricated justification miscalculates the impact of the past and the sense of lost glory as well as the injustices of policy on Russia and its elite. Consequently, biased misreading of official Russian statements for a solely self-serving end or to foster recurring paradigms could have an enormous effect on policy making in the West.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

The post-Crimean annexation literature broaching the issue of history as a prism for understanding Russian actions in the realm of international relations is vast and multidimensional. For this research, the relevant and accessible literature[7] is approached in a systematic manner. Foremost, books and articles that generally analyze Russia's foreign policy in the light of Crimea's annexation help to contextualize the current discourse about the role of history from three distinct perspectives: the personality of Putin, the characteristics of the regime, and the definition of Russia. Next, there is literature specifically addressing the implications for the Baltic region of Crimea's annexation by Russia, and literature examining related historical arguments. Additionally, the scholarly works on Russia's myth-loaded narrative is reviewed.

To begin with, Putin and his own history is examined to explain the rationale behind Russian actions. Such an explanation is given by Steven Lee Myers who emphasizes the connection between Putin's personality and Russian policy. He simplifies the Russian

[7] Due to language limitations, only English and German literature is reviewed. Nonetheless, the sources relied on encompass various schools of thought and different regional perspectives (Russian, Ukrainian, Baltic, European, and United States).

switch to military means by concluding: "[F]or Putin, the personal had become policy."[8] In support of his argument, Myers quotes Vladimir Sorokin: "[Russia became] hostage to the psychosomatic quirks of its leader."[9] This personalized perspective echoed throughout Western media and sought to naively explain Russian behavior by profiling Putin and framing the topic: "It would be Vladimir Putin's revenge for a lifetime of grievances."[10]

On the opposite pole of extreme interpretations, Putin is portrayed as cold-handed strategist. Putin has a clearly observable "evil agenda," as proclaimed by Douglas E. Schoen and Evan Roth Smith, who almost ignore history.[11] In response, Andrew Monaghan asserts, this narrow-minded view reflects more on U.S. foreign policy than it explains a Russian agenda.[12]

More insightfully, Mark Galeotti contextualizes the personal history of Putin. His term *Homo Sovieticus* and his analysis of an exhibition in Moscow "Russia—My History" provide a structured view explaining what history means to the Russian president. As a result, he successfully shows that Putin strives for a new narrative incorporating medieval, tsarist, and Soviet myths. This, he assesses cogently, is a defensive policy to deny history rather than to revitalize old claims. He concludes that Putin's selective history seeks to fuel the narrative "of a Russia that has been perennially battered and belittled by foreigners."[13]

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[8] Steven Lee Myers, *The New Tsar—The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 475.

[9] Vladimir Sorokin, "Let the Past Collapse on Time!" *The New York Review of Books*, May 8, 2014, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2014/05/08/let-the-past-collapse-on-time/, quoted in Steven Lee Myers, *The New Tsar* (2015), 475.

[10] See for example: "Putin's Revenge," October 25, 2017, *Frontline* by PBS, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o2L8qINZD3Q&feature=youtu.be. Therein, former U.S. government officials up to the Secretary of State voice their firsthand impressions on personal encounters with Putin. Conclusively, the film generalizes the interview pieces for the claim that Putin is simply avenging Russia. The transcript is online available at: https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/putins-revenge/transcript/.

[11] Douglas E. Schoen and Evan Roth Smith, *Putin's Master Plan—To Destroy Europe, Divide NATO, and Restore Russian Power and Global Influence* (New York: Encounter Books, 2016).

[12] Andrew Monaghan, "Book Review: Putin's Master Plan—To Destroy Europe, Divide NATO, and Restore Russian Power and Global Influence by Schoen, D. (with E. Roth Smith)," *Changing Character of War* (blog), December 14, 2016, http://www.ccw.ox.ac.uk/blog/2016/12/14/book-review-putins-master-plan-to-destroy-europe-divide-nato-and-restore-russian-power-and-global-influence-by-schoen-d-with-e-roth-smith.

[13] Mark Galeotti, *We Need to Talk About Putin—Why the West Gets Him Wrong* (London: Ebury Press, 2019, Chapter III, 41–51), 47.

Very comprehensively, Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy use the personified view to conceptualize vividly and authoritatively Putin's role in the light of his background and in context of his Russian foreign policy.[14]

From a state-centered perspective, literature depicts Russia in a more comprehensive picture through the lens of *Putinism*. The most authoritative reference is *Putin's Russia* edited by Stephen K. Wegren, which compiles contributions of leading scholars.[15] Therein, Andrei P. Tsygankov outlines the linkage between the domestic-focused statist view and its effect on Russian foreign policy. He precisely analyzes that Putin's usage of a distinct Russian idea affects the value-based foundation of society favorably for the Kremlin. Thus, the narrative gains the loyalty of multiple elite strata by emphasizing Russian culture and the cross-ethnic national unity. In sum, Putin's approach serves as a springboard for legitimacy.[16]

Additionally, Jeffrey Mankoff provides an overview of the recent history of Russia's relationship to Europe and its states. He adeptly summarizes that the Kremlin's view mirrors the long-lasting quest to define the Russian identity, "Russia is in Europe, but not of it."[17] Covering the same time span, Vladimir Gel'man focuses on the *post-Soviet political hangover*. Thereby, he argues persuasively that, among other wrong signals, the attempt to resolve Russia's problems with Soviet solutions led to the contemporary political system based on Soviet legacy tools.[18]

In line with those remarkable analyses, Walter Laqueur focuses on Putin's Russia in a historical context. He examines various doctrinal explanations, providing rigorous

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[14] Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy, *Mr. Putin—Operative in the Kremlin* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2nd expanded edition, 2015).

[15] Stephen K. Wegren, *Putin's Russia—Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 6th edition, 2016).

[16] Andrei P. Tsygankov, "Foreign Policy and Relations with the United States," in *Putin's Russia—Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*, ed. Stephen K. Wegren (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 6th edition, 2016), 238.

[17] Jeffrey Mankoff, "Relations with the European Union," in *Putin's Russia—Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*, ed. Stephen K. Wegren (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 6th edition, 2016), 273.

[18] Vladimir Gel'man, *Authoritarian Russia—Analyzing Post-Soviet Regime Change* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), 145–52.

critiques of those explanations and showing their flaws. In summary, his conclusions derive from analyzing the pillars of Putinism: pragmatism above doctrine; disconcerting emphasis on traditional suspicion of foreigners; orthodox spirituality combined with Russian superiority; and denigration of anti-statist views. Conclusively, his assessment states that "Any discussion of Russia's future must undertake to examine the physically resonant concept of an eternal Russia with a great messianic mission to fulfill."[19]

This commonplace notion of Russia's re-imperialization is neither new[20] nor does it explain Russia's motive.[21] Nevertheless, the imperial topos provides a comprehensive conceptualization by reflecting on historical patterns. It seems inconclusive that, according to Agnia Grigas, "[R]eimperialization is the end of Moscow's policies."[22] Re-forging an empire more likely describes the ways or an objective rather than the ends of Russian actions. Marvin Kalb states more plausibly that Putin's strategic gamble is "propelled by a narrow vision of Russian history," and practiced "with an odd mix of rigidity and occasional flexibility."[23]

Convincingly, Michael Kofman offers the explanation that Russian history thoroughly influences Moscow's decision making, strategy, and military doctrinal thinking by drawing analogies to the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union, which leads to a cognitive gap with the West.[24] In more detail, Keir Giles profoundly argues that assessing Russian minds requires an additional step to identify the Russian understanding between the lines of a language outwardly indistinguishable from Western terms. He correctly notes that

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19 Walter Laqueur, *Putinism—Russia and Its Future with the West* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015), 213.

20 Uri Ra'anan and Kate Martin (editors), *Russia: A Return to Imperialism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

21 For a brief overview of the critique, see: Alexander Nicoll (editor), "Russia's Motives in Ukraine," *Strategic Comments* 20, no. 4 (June 13, 2014): viii–ix. See also, Daniel Treisman, "Why Putin Took Crimea: The Gambler in the Kremlin," *Foreign Affairs* 95, issue 3 (May/Jun 2016): 47–54.

22 Agnia Grigas, *Beyond Crimea: The New Russian Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 26.

23 Marvin Kalb, *Imperial Gamble: Putin, Ukraine, and the New Cold War* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2015), 228.

24 Michael Kofman, "Drivers of Russian Grand Strategy," *Frivärld Rapport* no. 6 (April 23, 2019), https://frivarld.se/rapporter/drivers-of-russian-grand-strategy-2/.

historical comparisons have some validity as well as some flaws. Persuasively, his view advocates that historically consistent themes indicate the need for a consistency inducive to Russian leadership.[25]

Finally, Alexander Sergunin provides a broad overview of existing theories that seek to explain Russian behavior in international relations. His book also offers a substantial synopsis of Russian foreign policy schools. His work helps non-Russian speakers to understand the variety of theoretical currents among the Russian elite.[26] In addition, the Russian view can be grasped in fewer English publications.[27]

The second portion of the reviewed literature, regionally focused on the Baltic states, is more limited. Recently, Ann-Sofie Dahl edited a compendium by looking at the subject from varying angles.[28] Therein, Gudrun Person analyzes the preposterous role of history in Russia's National Security Strategy as of 2016. She highlights that the Russians distort history for political ends in this strategy. In a stringent approach, she concludes that Russian engagement with the past attempts to create a national identity.[29]

Through various lenses, John A. Olsen edited a compilation of analyses of Western states' policies in the region, which opens an array of perspectives.[30] Providing a pre-Crimean analysis, James S. Corum examines the perspective of the Baltic states toward Russia prior to the annexation, which delivers a useful reference to identify changes in

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[25] Keir Giles, *Moscow Rules—What Drives Russia to Confront the West* (London: Chatham House, 2019, especially Chapter VIII), 117–24.

[26] Alexander Sergunin, *Explaining Russian Foreign Policy Behavior—Theory and Practice* (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2016).

[27] For the Ukrainian crisis, see for example, Pavel Andreev (project director) and Gayaneh Seiranyan (editor), "The Crisis in Ukraine: Root Causes and Scenarios for the Future," *Valdai Discussion Club Report* (September 2014), 7–9, http://valdaiclub.com/a/reports/the_crisis_in_ukraine_root_causes_and_scenarios_for_the_future/. For a glimpse on Eurasia as primer, see for example, Piotr Dutkiewicz and Richard Sakwa, *Eurasian Integration—The View from Within* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

[28] Ann-Sofie Dahl (editor): *Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Region—Russia, Deterrence, and Reassurance* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018).

[29] Gudrun Person, "Russia and Baltic Sea Security: A Background," in *Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Region*, ed. Ann-Sofie Dahl (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 24.

[30] John A. Olsen (editor), *Security in Northern Europe: Deterrence, Defence, and Dialogue* (Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis, 2018).

policy.[31] According to Vladimir Kara-Murza, a specific perspective on the relation between Russia and the Baltic states reveals the evolution of the situation.[32]

Additionally, think tanks offer research reports and policy papers, mostly focusing on capabilities. Assessments by the RAND Corporation take the Russian threat for the Baltic region as matter of fact and, definitely based on considerable shortcomings, distort the different analytical levels of Russian objectives by assigning equal importance to state security, great power status, sphere of influence, prosperity, and stopping Western enlargement based on Russia's imperial ideology.[33] By contrast, Galeotti concludes with more precision that Russia targets the Baltic states to exert leverage against other actors.[34]

Further, there is a wealth of research on Russia's *politics of history* available.[35] The scholarly debate is driven by various research goals for different eras of Russian history.[36] More generally, Peter J. Verovsek offers an overview of memory politics and the academic

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[31] James S. Corum, *The Security Concerns of the Baltic States as NATO Allies* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, August 2013).

[32] Vladimir V. Kara-Murza, "Russia and the Baltics—Once Friend, Now Foe," *World Affairs* 177, no. 5, (January/February 2015): 16–23.

[33] Stephen J. Flanagan, Jan Osburg, Anika Binnendijk, Marta Keep and Andrew Radin, *Deterring Russian Aggression in the Baltic States Through Resilience and Resistance*, RR2779 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2019), 5–7, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2779.html. See also: Raphael S. Cohen and Andrew Radin, *Russia's Hostile Measures in Europe: Understanding the Threat*, RR1793 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2019), 5–13, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1793.html.

[34] Mark Galeotti, "The Baltic States as Targets and Levers: The Role of the Region in Russian Strategy," *Marshall Center Series—Security Insights* 27 (April 2019), https://www.marshallcenter.org/MCPUBLICWEB/en/nav-fix-sec-insights/173-cat-english-en/cat-publications-en/cat-pubs-security-insights-abstracts-en/2659-the-baltic-states-as-targets-and-levers-the-role-of-the-region-in-russian-strategy.html.

[35] For example, Kathleen E. Smith, *Mythmaking in the New Russia: Politics and Memory during the Yeltsin Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); Chiara Bottici, *A Philosophy of Political Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 203–26; Igor Torbakov, "History, Memory and National Identity—Understanding the Politics of History and Memory Wars in Post-Soviet Lands," *Demokratizatsiya* 19, no. 3 (2011): 209–32; Marlène Laruelle, "Negotiating History—Memory Wars in the Near Abroad and Pro–Kremlin Youth Movements," *Demokratizatsiya* 19, no. 3 (2011): 233–52.

[36] Ilya Gerasimov, Jan Kusber, and Alexander Semyonov (editors), *Empire Speaks Out -Languages of Rationalization and Self-Description in the Russian Empire* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2009); Igor Torbakov, "Divisive Historical Memories—Russia and Eastern Europe History," in *Confronting Memories of World War II—European and Asian Legacies*, ed. Daniel Chirot (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014), 234–57.

discourse about it.[37] Focusing on niches or specific myths, there is detailed literature available, especially on the role of religion.[38] Recently, and with another perspective, Lily Gardner Feldmann et al. edited a compendium exploring reconciliation between Russia and Eastern Europe.[39] Therein, the Russian and Baltic grievances can be grasped, and the compendium contributes to the understanding of the different perspectives.

Consequently, the literature offers three levels of analysis for history as the prism to understand Russia: regime/ruler, system/type of government, and state/empire. Overall, scholars agree on Russia's constructed worldview that is juxtaposed to the Western perception in order to frame an *Idea of Russia*.[40] Therefore, Moscow utilizes history, narrative, and memory for politics to shape the Russian national identity. Subsequently, the Kremlin deduces historical claims from this national idea—the Russian World.

C. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

For the fundamental questions about what determines Russian political will, its motives, and its drivers, the discourse presents an intellectual dilemma. On one hand, constructivists argue that the Idea of Russia shapes the desire for great power status to

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[37] Peter J. Verovšek, "Collective Memory, Politics, and the Influence of the Past: The Politics of Memory as a Research Paradigm," *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 4, issue3 (2016): 529–43.

[38] Igor Torbakov, "The Russian Orthodox Church and Contestations over History in Contemporary Russia," *Demokratizatsiya* 22, no. 1 (2014): 145–70; Ricarda Vulpius, *Nationalisierung der Religion. Russifizierungspolitik und ukrainische Nationsbildung 1860—1920* [Nationalizing Religion. Russification policy and Ukrainian nation building 1860–1920] (Wiesbaden: Verlag Harrassowitz, 2005); Bo Petersson, "Putin and the Russian Mythscape: Dilemmas of Charismatic Legitimacy," *Demokratizatsiya* 25, no. 3 (2017): 235–54.

[39] Lily Gardner Feldmann, Raisa Barisha, Samuel Goda and Andre Zempelberg (editors.), *The Former Soviet Union and East Central Europe between Conflict and Reconciliation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019).

[40] The term *Idea of Russia* will be used interchangeably with the term Russian World and its original Russian label Russkiy Mir.

secure Putin's Russia.[41] On the other hand, realists claim the security provided by the great power status that Putin's Russia yearns for exploits the Idea of Russia. .[42]

This puzzle appears to be a Gordian Knot, and this research does not pretend to provide the sword of Alexander. Therefore, the conundrum is circumvented by assuming that Russia's foreign policy trajectory works with the Idea of Russia to achieve the most favorable security derived from the great power status that is accepted in the international arena. Thus, accepted domination in the Weberian sense is the assumable end of the Kremlin's domestic and international policy under Putin's rule.

Assuming such a Russian desired end-state based on the *Dreiklang* (triad), ends-ways-means, the hypothesis deduces that Putin's regime seeks legitimacy. Thus, Russia yearns for acceptance of its domination by shaping the national identity in opposition to the West, protecting itself against Western threats, and denying existentially necessary regions the opportunity to emancipate or become apostate. Therefore, Russia balances its inferiority, inadequacy, and lack of appeal by managing history based on a narrative composed of useful myths, exploiting weaknesses of Western liberal democracies, and conducting destructive interdictions in affairs of alienating neighbors.

Consequently, Moscow perceives itself as engaged in reactive defense in Ukraine. Whereas the West regards Russia as a revanchist force challenging the European security order, the Kremlin, mesmerized by believing its own narrative, thinks it is correcting the unjustified mistakes of history. Moreover, even before Crimea's annexation, Putin had shown he lacked a sense of wrongdoing and willingly accepted the risk of waging war in order to cut Russia's losses and destabilize the renegade Ukraine, to protect the *Russian World*, and to deter the West. Since Crimea's annexation, however, such a Russian perception cannot be so easily projected on the Baltic region.

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41 See, for example, Norbert Eitelhuber, *Russland im 21. Jahrhundert. Reif für eine multipolare Welt?* [21st Century Russia. Ready for a Multipolar World?] (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Edition, 2015); Angela Stent, *Putin's World—Russia against the West and With the Rest* (New York: Twelve, 2019).

42 See, for example, John Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin," *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (2014): 77–89; Roy Allison, "Russian 'Deniable' Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules," *International Affairs* 90, no. 6 (2014): 1255–97.

By comparison, Russia's myths shape the significance of Crimea and the Baltic states differently for the Russian elite's patterns of thinking (paradigm) and create unequal legitimacy in the eyes of Russia's populace. This limits Russia in applying the blueprint of Crimea's annexation in the Baltic region, and this is besides other fundamentally varying conditions of the strategic environment.

D. RESEARCH DESIGN

For these comparative case studies, three key aspects are necessary. First and foremost, the research seeks a clear understanding of Russian history related to Crimea and the Baltics. Thus, the thesis consults standard references concerning Russian, Ukrainian, and Baltic history.

Secondly, the research focuses on the constructed Idea of Russia formulated in the Russian World. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze primary sources available in English from the Russian government, the Russian World Foundation, and the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as from Russian journalism on that topic. Additionally, secondary sources that explain the Idea of Russia must be scrutinized to create a consolidated picture.

Thirdly, the research concentrates on the effect of myths on the Russian narrative. Consequently, the standard literature of anthropologists on myth and its sociological mechanics is relevant for a basic understanding. Furthermore, the examination of scholarly works on specific Russian myths is essential for certain theme-related deep dives.

Hence, this fundamental understanding is used to systematically sort out the relationship between the Russian narrative and legitimacy. Accordingly, the Russian narrative must be presented by its themes based on myths. The myths are then categorized by the three levels of analysis, in contrast to Max Weber's three types of accepted domination,[43] in order to investigate evidence for irredentism.

[43] Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *Essential Readings in Comparative Politics*, ed. Patrick H. O'Neil and Ronald Rogowski (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2018), 28–34 (from *Essays in Sociology*, originally published in 1958).

Finally, the role of Russian history management is contextualized with Russia's strategic environment in the light of Crimea's annexation and as of today. Thus, to draw conclusions for the Baltic states, the thesis explores the significance of historical claims relative to other important determining factors for Russia's involvement in the Ukraine crisis.

E. THESIS OVERVIEW

The thesis is organized as follows. Chapter I introduces the line of inquiry and outlines the research approach. The next chapter provides key terms and definitions and explains the methodology for the thesis. It starts off by discussing irredentism, revanchism, and revisionism in general, and continues by depicting the Idea of Russia. Thereafter, Chapter II explains the mechanics of myths and presents a systematic distinction related to legitimacy in order to set the analytical method for the comparison.

Chapter III presents a case study for Russia and Crimea. After a brief overview, the chapter analyzes the annexation of Crimea. In Chapter IV, the analysis applies the same method to the Baltic states to identify differences between the two case studies. The last chapter summarizes the findings, reflects on Western adjustments in the Baltic region, and concludes the thesis.

II. IMAGINING RUSSIA—*RUSSKIY MIR*

The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 invalidated the existing identity of its people overnight. The Russian Federation emerged with a quest for identity. The new state, as Anne Clunan ascertains, had to redefine from scratch "what is Russian" and to differentiate that from the Soviet identity.[44] Nevertheless, the Russian memory of past glory transcends beyond the disappearance of the USSR. Russia has been born out of two empires—the tsarist and the Soviet. Conclusively, Clunan identifies that both empires presented Russia with the breeding ground for defining a new identity, but with the imperative to choose whether it embarks on a path toward re-establishing imperial grandeur and reverting to an antagonist posture vis-à-vis the West, or embraces the chance to start fresh by adjusting to the new status quo in a post-Soviet era.

At the dawn of the new millennium, and almost one decade later, Putin had ascended to his first Presidency and decided the future heading for Russia. Within his first year in office, he reinstated the old Soviet anthem with lyrics adapted by Sergey Mikhalkov on December 30, 2000.[45] A recently aired documentary of filmmaker Vitali Manski reveals an insight into Putin's reasoning for this nostalgic measure. Putin replies to a question about why he seeks to reimplement the old Soviet anthem, "It is necessary to restore the citizens' confidence in the establishment. That woman in Leninsk who said we should give back her old life. The way it was 20 years ago. People should not feel that they are deprived of something."[46]

Prior to this question, Putin explained the context of his understanding, "It is impossible to get anything back. You can neither recover your youth nor bygone days.

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[44] Anne L. Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence—Aspiration, Identity, and Security Interests* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 1.

[45] The anthem's new text was officially announced in УКАЗ Президента РФ от 30.12.2000 N 2110, https://web.archive.org/web/20110604021354/http://document.kremlin.ru/doc.asp?ID=5280&PSC=1&PT=3&Page=2.

[46] "Putin's Witnesses Part II," December 19, 2019, DW, documentary, 18:20, https://www.dw.com/en/putins-witnesses-part-2/av-51742532.

Moreover, if we try to return to the past, we will definitely destroy everything."[47] This interview points to the direction of a future conceptualization of the past in Russian policy: the symbols of the past are useful for shaping a new Russian identity; utilizing memory fosters confidence in the leadership; and the past will not be revived but something better needs to be created out of the heritage. Additionally, Putin's words reveal that in exploiting history and its symbols he aims for the acceptance of the political system, its elite strata, and his own leadership. Simply put, the past contributes to legitimizing the social order of the present.

Today, some old symbols have revitalized the statist paradigm in Russia, but the cynical atmosphere of the past has come along with it. The Kremlin defines its position by reflecting gloomily on the status quo that Moscow perceives to be debilitating and threatening.[48] Moscow bemoans that the West capitalized on the voluntary dismantling of the USSR to expand rather than to establish mutually acceptable equality.[49] The Russian leadership is condemning the post-Cold War order in Europe by creating a narrative of *Versaillesization*—a new and dictated status quo that harshly belittles the loser and calls for correction—instead of reconciling with the West or even embracing the self-accomplished liberation from the Soviet yoke.[50] Subsequently, the Russian perspective has been based on glorifying the status-quo ante and re-claiming great power status.

The Kremlin's desire for re-shaping Russia's identity and for recapturing past greatness does not, however, inevitably indicate an agenda of *Reconquista*. Thus, Moscow's categories of assertions that seek for revalidation must be differentiated to sort the variety of claims that derive from this retrospective mindset.

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47 "Putin's Witnesses Part II," December 19, 2019, DW, documentary, 17:57, https://www.dw.com/en/putins-witnesses-part-2/av-51742532.

48 Zwack and Pierre, *Russian Challenges from Now into the Next Generation: A Geostrategic Primer*, 2.

49 Nicolás De Pedro, Panagiota Manoli, Sergey Sukhankin, and Theodoros Tsakiris, *Facing Russia's Strategic Challenge Security Developments from the Baltic to the Black Sea* (Luxembourg: EU Parliament Publications Office, 2017), 6.

50 Keir Giles, *Moscow Rules—What Drives Russia to Confront the West* (London: Chatham House, 2019), 60.

A. DEFINING HISTORICAL CLAIMS

Employing historical references to claim lost territory, former reputation, or past prestige is neither a modern phenomenon nor specifically Russian. Historical claims of any flavor have one element in common. They challenge the status quo and aim for restoring a previous situation. In the Russian context, both the tsarist and the Soviet empire had been forged out of preceding political entities. Both had inherited disputes with neighboring states over land and an identity that have been echoing ever since their respective emergence until today. Two brief examples showcase the dilemma of historical claims: referencing to the past does not resolve an issue but simply transfers it to an earlier reference point in history.

The Muscovite tsars proclaimed the heritage of all Rus' unitarily for themselves. As a result, Jaroslaw Pelenski considers, "[T]he contest for the inheritance of Kievan Rus' has represented one of the oldest bones of contention in the history of Russian-Ukrainian cultural and political relations."[51] The remnants of this controversy over who is the heir to Kievan tradition overshadow the ongoing conflict between both countries. Pelenski concludes that the development of the cultural perception, national consciousness, and historical awareness have been affected on either side.

The Soviets, on the other hand, had to cope with the collapse of imperial Russia after World War I. In the aftermath of the revolution, the future borders of the Soviet Union were in question. A century ago, the historian Stanislaw Kutrzeba had been a Polish emissary to the Peace Conference at Versailles.[52] In an expert report, he argued against the Soviet position and deflated Russian claims by highlighting that "[T]he Russians repudiate every suspicion of imperialism, and if they would have us believe them, they must furnish some other foundation for their claims than merely the desire to keep whatever the Tsars

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[51] Jaroslaw Pelenski, "The Contest for the Kievan Inheritance," in *Ukraine and Russia in Their Historical Encounter*, ed. Peter J. Potichnyj, Marc Raeff, Jaroslaw Pelenski, and Gleb N. Zekulin (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press University of Alberta, 1992), 3.

[52] Waclaw Uruszczak, "Stanisław Kutrzeba (1876–1946)," in *Nation and History: Polish Historians from the Enlightenment to the Second World War*, ed. Peter Brock (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 301.

have conquered."[53] The scholarly debate about Russian policy based on historical claims centers on three terms: irredentism, revanchism, and revisionism. Hence, those terms must be unpacked to identify if, and how, they apply to Russian policies on the two regions of interest.

1. Irredentism

The term irredentism stems from Italian foreign policy of the early 20th century. At that time, Italy proclaimed that Italian territories incorporated in the Austro-Hungarian Empire must be redeemed. Irredentism, Alexander C. Diener states, "has since become a reference to political movements seeking to unite ethnic groups and the regions they occupy within historic homelands or emergent states."[54] Thus, irredentism describes a policy to redeem sovereignty over a disputed territory based on the paradigm that the area which is politically separated in a different state belongs beyond any doubt to the nation as a cornerstone.

In consequence, irredentism is understood as the motherland's side of the coin that represents the desire of reunification. On the backside of that same coin, the question for the group to be redeemed is over secession from the alienating state and reunification with the nation. This distinction between secessionism and irredentism, however, is essential. Both terms coin specifications of separatism. The group in question carries either a desire for independence or for union with its kin. For Russia, according to Stephen Saideman and R. William Ayres, five determinants explain the distinction: "the nature of the group itself; characteristics of the group's kin; contagion processes; ethnic security dilemmas; and the end of the cold war."[55]

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[53] Stanisław Kutrzeba, *The Rights of Russia to Lithuania and White-Ruthenia* (translated and edited by M. Flinikowski, 1919), 3, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015030667714&view=image&seq=5.

[54] Alexander C. Diener, "Assessing Potential Russian Irredentism and Separatism in Kazakhstan's Northern Oblasts," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 56, no. 5 (2015): 470.

[55] Stephen M. Saideman and R. William Ayres, "Determining the Causes of Irredentism: Logit Analyses of Minorities at Risk Data from the 1980s and 1990s," *The Journal of Politics* 62, no. 4 (November 2000): 1126.

In Russia, irredentism is a twofold conceptualization. Firstly, it refers to the medieval concept of collecting the territories of the Kievan Rus' by the ruling Grand Prince. The root cause lies in the centrifugal forces of the Rurikids' dynastic custom to divide the land among heirs. In a failed attempt to reform the rule of succession, Prince Monomakh convinced the princes to overcome the cumbersome and conflict-prone system in 1097.[56] As an effect of this system, the principalities became semi-autonomous centers within the Rus' Land, as Serhii Plokhy ponders, and they developed distinct identities.

Consequently, the keys to Kiev became the symbol of over-lordship in all Rus' Lands. By exploiting this tradition, the Muscovite rulers adopted the concept of all Rus' Lands to create an identity that served to enhance their power in the region and to proclaim suzerainty over the territories of the Kievan Rus' in total.[57] In line with the medieval concept, the contemporary struggles over identity in the post-Soviet territories have evolved along cleavages between inclusive and exclusive self-definitions.

Secondly, as Diener concludes, irredentism serves in context of the Soviet Union's collapse as "catalysts of conflict, forums of geopolitical performance, and fulcrums of political leverage for the influence of domestic politics—both internal and external to claimant states."[58] The Soviet Union handled its multiethnicity and the relation between center and periphery by pursuing Russification. According to Agnia Grigas, this policy had three intermingled purposes. First, the center supported the industrialization in the Soviet republics. Second, Russian-dominated internal migration fostered the creation of a "Soviet nationality." Third, the fifteen subjects of the USSR were enmeshed ethnically, culturally, politically, and economically.[59]

When the Soviet empire started to erode, the *Soviet nationality* turned out to be a sheer chimera and the sleeping national identities awoke within the multiethnic Soviet

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[56] Serhii Plokhy, *The Gates of Europe—A History of Ukraine* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 42–44.

[57] Serhii Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations—Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 77–81.

[58] Diener, "Assessing Potential Russian Irredentism and Separatism in Kazakhstan's Northern Oblasts," 470.

[59] Grigas, *Beyond Crimea*, 5.

Union. Subsequently, Astrid Tuminez concludes, "nationalism and ethnic pressures were facilitating and precipitating variables in the breakup of the Soviet Union, rather than the primary cause."[60] In the late 1980s, the ethnic-driven conflict in the Caucasus revealed that the national identities were not replaced, but overshadowed. In consequence, the socio-economic blending within the USSR left various states with mixed populations and Russian minorities.[61]

In conclusion, both perspectives have in common that the underlying concepts for irredentism in contemporary Russia focus on lost territories, separated Russians, and the quest for defining the Russian identity. In this sense, Russian irredentism has a predominantly inwards directed trajectory. The most noticeable expression of this search for identity that includes groups abroad is Moscow's present-day policy on conceptualizing Russian compatriots.[62] Thus, Russian irredentism is a challenge to the status quo in terms of territory and identity.

2. Revanchism

In today's Russia, the second term revanchism refers especially to the end of the Cold War and the process of dismantling the Soviet Union. In general, revanchism focuses on the actor level and not on the object of a dispute. It grows out of self-reflection vis-à-vis the adversary and results in feuds, vendettas, and retaliation. Charged with emotions, the avenger seeks satisfaction for a perceived injustice. Concentrated on strengthening self-esteem, the aggrieved party seeks to heal its dissatisfaction by projecting the grievances on the opponent.

For modern Russia, NATO has become this opponent. In Soviet times, the alliance had embodied the West's resistance against Russia.[63] With the end of the Cold War, the interpretations of the evolving situation in Russia have distinguished between Moscow and

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[60] Astrid S. Tuminez, "Nationalism, Ethnic Pressures, and the Breakup of the Soviet Union," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 5, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 82.

[61] Grigas, *Beyond Crimea*, 61–63.

[62] For a detailed analysis, see: Grigas, *Beyond Crimea*, 57–93.

[63] Stent, *Putin's World*, 113.

the West. Whilst Russians have felt that their nation was humiliated, as Russia's lost status and shrunken size were associated with less security and diminished respect for their nation, the West underestimated this deep-rooted notion of being treated like a loser and defeated power.[64]

Connoisseurs of Russian thinking, however, anticipated the emerging resentments. In 1997, George F. Kennan, the intellectual mind behind the strategy of containment, alarmingly voiced in the debate over NATO's enlargement:

> Such a decision [expanding NATO] may be expected to inflame the nationalistic, anti-Western and militaristic tendencies in Russian opinion; to have an adverse effect on the development of Russian democracy; to restore the atmosphere of the cold war to East-West relations, and to impel Russian foreign policy in directions decidedly not to our liking.[65]

The Russian dissatisfaction was fueled by more than just losing the cause. Deprived of their standard of living, Russians faced a lack of basic commodities. Even the fear of starvation came back to daily life after the Soviet state had collapsed. Russia's political elite became obsessed by the idea to restore the state as provider and regulator. Putin's Millennium Message expressed that objective clearly, "Society desires the restoration of the guiding and regulating role of the state."[66] Moreover, the economic shock of the 1990s, combined with a political hangover, affected the democratization process in Russia to the extent that democracy became a side effect of developing prosperity.[67]

Through the eyes of Russia's elite, there were two dimensions to revanchism: overcoming the destabilization and replacing the nostalgia for the Soviet Union's greatness with a new great state that can protect Russia. According to Gleb Pavlovsky, a former advisor to the Russian president, "Putin in fact achieved the task of revanche."[68] The Russian Federation of the 1990s was short on economic power, social networks were in

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64 Giles, *Moscow Rules*, 59–63; see also: Stent: *Putin's World*, 117.

65 George F. Kennan, "A Fateful Error," *New York Times*, February 5, 1997, A 23.

66 Vladimir Putin, quoted in Hill and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin*, 42.

67 Gel'man, *Authoritarian Russia*, 147–51.

68 Gleb Pavlovsky interviewed by *The Guardian*, January 24, 2012, quoted in Hill and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin*, 58.

disarray, and the Caucasus was in flames. Domestically, Russians understood the economic turmoil as punishment for losing the Cold War. Internationally, NATO's Kosovo campaign seems to have marked a turning point in the Russian perception of its partnership with the West.[69]

This self-perception of being victims paved the way for framing Russia's role in global affairs with NATO: belittled, besieged, and betrayed.[70] Belittled was understood by Moscow when Western decisions on interventions sidelined the Kremlin's interests, and because it lacked power, Russia had to comply. Besieged was felt when NATO accepted new members and, thereby, Moscow's proclaimed sphere of interest shrank. Betrayed was the notion of a double standard that the Kremlin assessed it had fallen victim to by the West. Even when Russia constructively proposed a new approach for the European security architecture, the West rejected Moscow. These experiences widened the gulf between Moscow and Brussels.

In sum, Russia's revanchist challenge to the status quo focuses on its perceived opponent—the West in general and, in particular, the United States with its NATO allies. By reflecting on the West, Russia's identity distinguishes itself and fosters the notion of uniqueness. Additionally, associating the outcomes with actions of an opponent serves the purpose of delivering the scapegoat on which to project Russia's own dissatisfaction. As a result, Moscow justifies its destructive policies with the label of defensive actions against the West.

3. Revisionism

For modern-day Russia, the term revisionism compartmentalizes the striving for a multipolar international order and, thereby, the return to realpolitik with the balance of power between hegemons of distinct regions.[71] In general, revisionism describes the

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69 Stent, *Putin's World*, 121–24.

70 Andrei Kolesnikov, *Russian Ideology after Crimea* (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 2015), 10–11.

71 For details on the dimension of Russia's utilization of international law, see: Roy Allison, "Russia and the post-2014 International Legal Order: Revisionism and Realpolitik," *International Affairs* 93, no. 3 (2017): 519–43.

process of looking over again in order to correct or improve. Historically, revisionism is associated with the evolutionary instead of revolutionary approach to change the order. Thus, revisionism appears to aim for a smooth rather than a radical transition. In the Russian context, revisionism centers on how the status quo is understood.

In the absence of a common understanding of what the status quo is, Moscow identified that the West failed to conclude its end of the bargain.[72] The Kremlin's perspective is to a certain degree plausible in the sense, according to Galeotti, "that bewilderment at what had happened shifted to a desire to find someone to blame."[73] From a Russian point of view, Kobrinskaya argues, "[T]he existing volatile status-quo in Europe cannot be taken as a legitimate 'order' per se. This lack of 'order' stems from the lack of a peace treaty to end the Cold War. This inclusive moment ushered in a 'post-Yalta' period that saw the gradual destruction of the European/Eurasian political-security system."[74]

Consequently, Putin's infamous speech at the Munich Security Conference 2007 revealed Moscow's bottled grievances.[75] Actually, there are voices that identify the speech with the onset of a more aggressive campaign pursuing revisionism.[76] Against this background, Russia attempted to revitalize simultaneously the idea of European security from Vancouver to Vladivostok when President Medvedev spoke in Germany in June 2008.[77] His proposal was either rejected or simply neglected.[78]

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[72] Giles, *Moscow Rules*, 61.

[73] Galeotti, *We Need to Talk About Putin*, 49.

[74] Irina Kobrinskaya, "Deter and Engage: A New NATO Strategy for Taming Russia," *New Perspectives* 23, no. 2 (2015): 134, quoted in Giles, *Moscow Rules*, 61.

[75] Galeotti, *We Need to Talk about Putin*, 41–44; for a Russian view of Putin's speech, see: Sergunin, *Explaining Russian Foreign Policy*, 156–57. The speech by Vladimir Putin at the 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy, February 10, 2007, is available online at: http://www.securityconference.de/konferenzen/rede.php?sprache=en&id=179.

[76] Hannes Adomeit, *Russia and Its Near Neighbourhood: Competition and Conflict with the EU* (Warsaw: College of Europe Natolin Campus, April 2011), 28.

[77] Andrei Zagorski, "The Russian Proposal for a Treaty on European Security: From the Medvedev Initiative to the Corfu Process," in *OSCE Yearbook 2009* (2010): 43–59.

[78] Bobo Lo, "Medvedev and the New European Security Architecture," *Centre for European Reform Policy Brief* (July 2009), https://www.cer.eu/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/pdf/2011/pbrief_medvedev_july09-741.pdf; see also: Stent, *Putin's World*, 128–31.

A few weeks later, Russia intervened in Georgia to *protect* South Ossetians, which resulted in a frozen conflict that has reinforced the undermining of Georgia's territorial integrity. Russia, however, proclaimed the role of the peacekeeper. From this position, Moscow was able to signal its hegemonial aspirations. In Eastern European countries, the Kremlin's message was promptly understood. Notable statesmen like Vaclav Havel and Lech Walesa argued in an open letter to the U.S. president, "Russia is back as a revisionist power pursuing a 19th-century agenda with 21st-century tactics and methods. […] at the global level a status-quo power. But at a regional level and vis-a-vis their nations, it increasingly acts as a revisionist one."[79]

Essentially, the Russian revisionism challenges the understanding of the status quo itself and focuses on the system level. The Kremlin longs to overturn the disadvantageous post-Cold War settlement to drive a wedge between member states of NATO and the European Union for the benefit of shifting the power balance in favor of Russia. For present-day Russia, the analysis of the three policy drivers: irredentism, revanchism, and revisionism, unpacks in two ways. First, all three have a scalable degree of retrospectiveness that connects today's identity of the Russian society with its past. Second, the three drivers are employed on three different levels: object, actor, and system. Additionally, they are intermeshed and interrelated but also specifically tailored to varying areas, groups, and topics.

Further, this study presumes the following definitions for Russia: irredentism strives for specific territories and their Russian-affiliated inhabitants that once belonged to a predecessor state to reclaim former reputation as a great power; revanchism fueled by the perceived injustice that came with the Soviet Union's collapse aims to find satisfaction in blaming the opponent in the West and yearns for the Russian grandeur prior to the caesura; revisionism seeks to alter the power balance and the political security landscape in order to regain the importance of a hegemon.

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[79] Valdas Adamkus et al., "An Open Letter to the Obama Administration from Central and Eastern Europe" (July 15, 2009), https://wyborcza.pl/1,75399,6825987,An_Open_Letter_to_the_Obama_Administration_from_Central.html?disableRedirects=true, quoted in Teona Akubardia, *Revisionist Russia on Offensive: How It Exerts Power in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine* (London: King's College London, 2016), 1.

B. THE IDEA OF RUSSIA

From the onset of post-Soviet Russia's formation process, Moscow's elite has been searching for a definition of the new imaginary bond that determines Russia's national identity. In Soviet times, the union was kept together by a blend of Marxist-Leninist ideology in combination with Russian nationalism based on the notion of superiority.[80] Despite the open and uncertain direction for Russia's future, the various considerations among the political elite about whether Russia should tend toward Europe or recreate another Soviet Union have had one element in common. The vast majority agreed with rallying behind the preference of preserving Russia's great power status.[81]

Besides from the shared aspiration for grandeur, the discourse had not only been fueled by different political currents but also by varying perceptions of Russianness. The questions about who is Russian and what Russianness means have been pursued by the enquiring minds of former Soviet citizens who considered themselves Russians but had awakened in different states when the USSR ceased to exist. In 1996, President Yeltsin established a commission for defining a new Idea of Russia that was doomed to fail during the political transition.[82] The debate was infused by five national self-images: Western, neo-communist, Slavophil, nationalist, and statist. According to Anne Clunan, those categories of national self-image clustered the Russian elite between the two extremes of reformist and restorationist preferences, see Figure 1.

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[80] Stent, *Putin's World*, 24–25.

[81] Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*, 53–56.

[82] Stent, *Putin's World*, 25; see also: Laqueur, *Putinism*, 214.

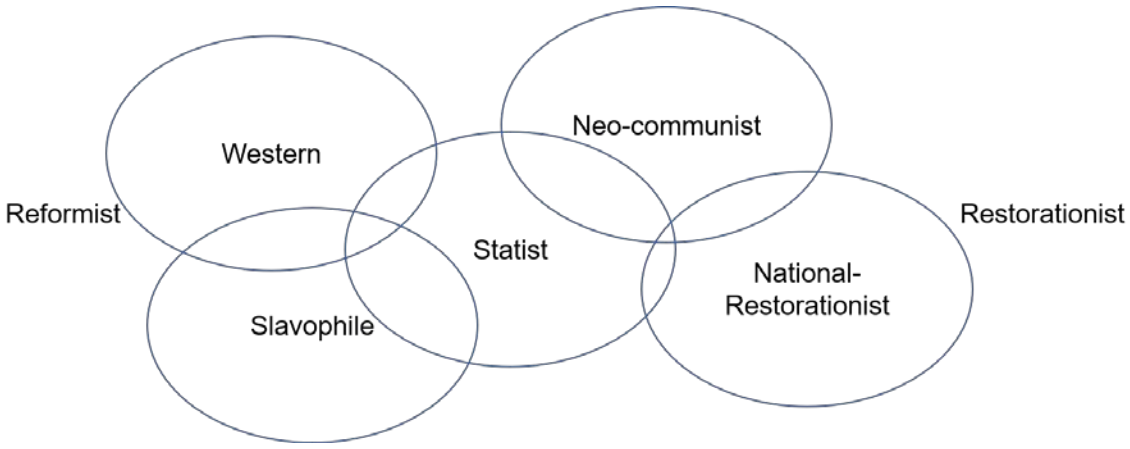

Figure 1. Russian National Self-Images in 1990s[83]

Although several different concepts for achieving a modernized Russia were circulating, there was consensus on the evolving desire for re-establishing Russian uniqueness as distinct from the West. The prolonged discourse about the Russian idea was muted, however, when Putin accomplished his power consolidation by centralizing authority and marginalizing opposition in his first term as president.[84] Moreover, the Russian nation-building process has interdependently affected the state-building efforts in Moscow. The outcome of these intermeshed processes, which Gel'man calls the post-Soviet political hangover, were influenced by four wrong signals: the absent salience of democratization; the preference for Soviet legacy tools to solve post-Soviet problems; the lack of support by the West in promoting democracy; and the passivity of the disengaged population.[85]

When Putin addressed the Russian population with his Millennium Message in 1999, he called on an idea to recreate a strong state based on Russia's fundamental values in conjunction with revitalizing its historical traditions and dismissing the pursuit of Western models for society.[86] Putin's conceptualization of an Idea of Russia matured in

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[83] Adapted from Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*, 73.

[84] Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*, 142.

[85] Gel'man, *Authoritarian Russia*, 150.

[86] Hill and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin*, 55–57.

the early 2000s and was institutionalized when the *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World Foundation) was established in 2007.[87] Nevertheless, the idea Putin had announced, Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy conclude, "was entirely derivative of a particular set of philosophical and legal ideas about the state emanating from conservative circles within the Russian elite."[88]

The concept of the Russian World was introduced to the public by Putin in 2001, when he stated to the congress of compatriots, "[the status of a compatriot] is the matter of a personal choice. I would say, mental self-determination. […] Because since olden times the concept of Russian World has exceeded Russia's geographic boundaries and even the boundary of the Russian ethnos."[89] Besides official statements and policies of the Russian government, two institutions foster the concept with distinct purposes as the carriers of Russian culture. First, the Russian World Foundation has been established to link compatriots via the Russian vernacular. The Kremlin provides funding for the Russkiy Mir and modeled the foundation, at first glance, on the German Goethe Institute. Ostensibly, the mission statement defines:

> Mir means Community. Peace. World. The three meanings of this small but eloquent word inspire and define Russkiy Mir's mission—to promote understanding and peace in the world by supporting, enhancing and encouraging the appreciation of Russian language, heritage and culture.[90]

Despite the attempt to appeal as a language institute, the Kremlin's political message is conveyed by contextualizing the reach of the Russian language with the aspired great power status. In a promotional video for Russkiy Mir, the chair of the board of trustees and president of the Russian Academy of Education Lyudmila Verbitskaya connects policy with culture propagandistically, "because the interest in Russia, as a great power on which

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87 Stent, *Putin's World*, 26.

88 Hill and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin*, 55.

89 Vladimir Putin, quoted in Andis Kudors, "The 'Russian World' as a Vacuum-Cleaner," Center for Eastern European Policy Studies, April 25, 2014, http://appc.lv/eng/andis-kudors-the-russian-world-as-a-vacuum-cleaner/.

90 "Mission Statement," Russian World Foundation, accessed April 28, 2020, https://russkiymir.ru/en/fund/.

much depends in the world and which is strengthening its positions, pursuing a peaceful and very wise policy, cannot help but increase."[91]

Secondly, the Kremlin's efforts put through the foundation are flanked by the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). Naturally, the ROC has a traditional self-perception based on history and spirituality. The ROC as a secular institution, however, has also been occupied with uniting its possession. For both reasons, the ROC has framed the idea of a singular spiritual space that encompasses Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. Recently, the chairman of the Patriarchate's Department of External Church Relations (DECR) Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk clarified the definition, "[T]his space was formed over a thousand years, during which national borders appeared, disappeared and were moved many times, but spiritual commonality remained intact despite numerous external efforts aimed at shattering this unity. A witness to it is the thousand-year history of the Russian Orthodox Church."[92] In a wider sense, the ROC calls this concept the Holy Rus' that incorporates more than just a shared religion.

In 2010, the deputy chairman of the Patriarchate's DECR Hegumen Filipp Ryabykh explained the linkage between the concepts of the Holy Rus' and the Russian World in an interview. He explained, "Holy Rus' is a Christian ideal of national life—the goal that our ancestors tried to achieve—and the actual achievements on this path. It is the historical basis for the Russian World."[93] The concept of Russia's holiness derives from the conceptualization in the 16th century. In his famous letter to Grand Prince Basil III, monk Philotheos wrote, "And now there is the Holy synodal Apostolic church of the reigning third Rome, of your tsardom, which shines like the sun in its orthodox Christian faith

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[91] Lyudmila Verbitskaya, "Presenting the Russkiy Mir Foundation," November 17, 2014, Russian World Foundation, video, 1:36, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yf_y2o1WYxE.

[92] Address by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, DECR chairman, at the conference on "Russia—Ukraine—Belarus: A Common Civilizational Space?" (Fribourg, June 1, 2019), https://mospat.ru/en/2019/06/02/news174818/.

[93] Andrei Zolotov Jr., "Nonaggressive Integration," *Russia Profile*, March 31, 2010, archived at: https://web.archive.org/web/20150311031115/http://russiaprofile.org/culture_living/a1270041656.html. It is important to note *Russia Profile* had been an online platform for Russian journalists; it disappeared, but its content has been preserved by web.archive.org.

throughout the whole universe."[94] As a result, two main principles determined the debate amongst Russian intellectuals about the constituting force of the Holy Rus' in the following centuries: *translatio imperii*—the Third Rome; and s*imfonija*—the byzantine harmony between state and church.[95]

Consequently, the religious and the vernacular dimensions provide the Idea of Russia with a supranational range.[96] This characteristic is the linchpin of the concept, and Thomas Bremer shrewdly concludes that "the Russian world guarantees the cohesion of these nations [of the Rus'] in the future, regardless of contemporary political boundaries. It is therefore seen as something like a predetermined community, from which the constituent nations cannot secede, even if they would like to form other political entities. The culture extends deeper than political units."[97] Thus, the Kremlin's political trajectory is in sync with the ROC when the Russian government employs the historical legacy for surmounting national barriers in the post-Soviet neighborhood by using the soft power of the Idea of Russia.[98]

Nonetheless, the officials of the ROC have been aware of the risks that come along with the intermingled realms of politics and religion. In the aforementioned interview, Hegumen Filipp Ryabykh was careful to note that "[T]he 'Russian World' is not an aggressive world; it doesn't exist to carry out expansion into other Slavic nations. It is an attempt to conceptualize our own identity."[99] Since Russia used its hard power to coerce Ukraine, the soft power based on incentives has been overshadowed. For the ROC, the fear of a widening gulf between Moscow and Kiev translates into financial and symbolic losses

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[94] Quoted in Michael Cherniavsky, "'Holy Russia': A Study in the History of an Idea," *The American Historical Review* 63, no. 3 (April 1958): 619.

[95] Both principles are explained further in Chapter III. For a detailed overview, see: Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime* (London: Penguin Books, 2nd edition, 1995), 224–34.

[96] Kudors, "The 'Russian World' as a Vacuum-Cleaner."

[97] Thomas Bremer, "How the Russian Orthodox Church Views the 'Russian World'," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 35, no. 3 (July 2015): 44, http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol35/iss3/4.

[98] For an overview of Russia's capability to use soft power, see: Adomeit, *Russia and Its Near Neighbourhood*, 6–8.

[99] Zolotov, "Nonaggressive Integration."

that undermine the ROC's position in Russian politics. Until today, the relations between church and state have been mutually beneficial.[100]

Additionally, another essential characteristic of the Russian Idea that consequently emerges from distinguishing Russia as a civilization rather than a culture affects Moscow's pre-positions. Beyond self-determination, the overemphasis on Russian cultural exceptionalism that builds on orthodox and frontier values creates not only a distinction from the West but also points to a systematic denigration of others, especially for the post-Soviet nations and, in a dramatic way, for the Holy Rus' states.[101]

The deep-rooted notion of Russian exceptionalism divides into two categories. In a broad sense, the traditionally xenophobic attitudes toward foreigners, as Richard Pipes analyzed, stemmed from isolating alien traders and artisans in special quarters for *Nemtsy* (Occidentals) and *Busurmane* (Orientals). According to this practice, he observes, "[I]f foreign residents can be trusted many Russian peasants as recently as the 19th century did not know and would not believe that there were in the world other nations and other monarchs than their own."[102] On a smaller scale, modern revanchism in Russia disregards the sovereignty of its neighbors to the degree of considering the national identities of Ukraine and Belarus to be mere shades of Russianness.[103]

In conclusion, the modern Idea of Russia has evolved from historical roots that were meant to define the Russian identities for their respective eras. By quickly walking through the history of Russian ideas and concepts, the characteristic milestones for the present-day conceptualization can be identified. After the Mongol grip on the principalities of the Rus' had loosened, the Muscovite rulers of the Rurikid dynasty won a violent competition for supremacy in Eastern Europe and coined the title tsar of all Russian lands to express their

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[100] Veera Laine, "Holy Rus Challenged—The Conflict between Churches in Ukraine Has Consequences for Russia, Ukraine and the Orthodox World," *Finnish Institute of International Affairs Comments*, no. 18 (September 26, 2018): 2, https://www.fiia.fi/en/publication/holy-rus-challenged.

[101] Laqueur, *Putinism*, 217.

[102] Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime* , 159.

[103] Laqueur, *Putinism*, 217.

claim to this heritage. In a symbiotic relationship with the church, the concept of the Holy Rus' emerged with its imperial aspirations and claim to divine suzerainty.

In the golden age of the Russian Empire, the famous Romanov rulers, Peter I and Catherine II, started attempts to reform the patrimonial society of Russia and they incorporated the emphasis on byzantine harmony between state and church to widen the imperial range of Russia beyond the Rus' and to subordinate the clergy in a mere subservient role. The Bolshevik revolution of 1917 terminated the religious-statist symbiosis at first glance only to replace Orthodoxy with the communist ideology. The European map that Stalin drew for the post-World War II period, however, furnished a renewed messianic aspiration and a sphere of influence with a forward Western presence.

In sum, the attributes of the Idea of Russia under Putin appear to interweave these historic concepts for shaping and legitimizing foreign policy rather than solely for defining an identity for national cohesion. In the absence of new impulses, Russian history along with the narrative that interprets it and the myths that perpetuate the interpretation have become the cornerstone for the retrospective identity of today's Russia. By revitalizing these elements, the Russkiy Mir associates itself not only with Russia's bygone glory but it utilizes the traditional principles for the present-day context with the support of vividly memorized cultural patterns of thinking and behavior. The latter are promoted by myths to legitimize Putinism domestically, as in Laqueur's sense,[104] and contribute vitally to the Kremlin's understanding of the status quo in international affairs.

C. MYTH AND NARRATIVE

The importance of specific myths determines how historical claims foster Russia's political will to use force for achieving its objectives. The utilization of myths in politics

[104] According to Laqueur, the pillars of Putinism are pragmatism above doctrine; disconcerting emphasis on traditional suspicion of foreigners; orthodox spirituality combined with Russian superiority; and denigration of anti-statist views, Laqueur, *Putinism*, 213.

is widely discussed by scholars.[105] Within this discourse, Peter Verovsek summarizes, "Politicians often draw on collective understandings of the past to mobilize remembrance as an instrument of politics."[106] More specifically, Smith explains,

> Politicians in general have a particular interest in shaping versions of past events because shared memories of nationally significant events provide grist for the formation of collective identity. Politicians who can convert past glories into symbolic capital in the present can not only woo supporters but also give an aura of legitimacy to their claim to be worthy wielders of power.[107]

Given these explanations, it must be asked which myths Russian society relates to each of the regions studied in this thesis. In this part, the research first seeks to provide a definition for myth. Then, the Semiotic Triangle will be explained as a tool for analyzing myths. This tool offers a lens through which to examine history when it is utilized for political purposes.

Myths are not historical truth but the believed understanding of historic explanations. Definitions of myth vary depending on the scope of the perspective. The anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss explains, the myth aims for a total understanding by the shortest way, which results in giving only the illusion of universal understanding.[108] Roland Barthes asserts that myths symbolize the commonly accepted cultural knowledge.[109] Within the culture, myths are taken-for-granted and express naturalized

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[105] For an overview of the discourse, see: Igor Torbakov, "History, Memory and National Identity—Understanding the Politics of History and Memory Wars in Post-Soviet Lands," *Demokratizatsiya* 19, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 209–32; Peter J. Verovšek, "Collective Memory, Politics, and the Influence of the Past: The Politics of Memory as a Research Paradigm," *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 4, no. 3 (2016): 529–43; Bo Petersson, "Putin and the Russian Mythscape: Dilemmas of Charismatic Legitimacy," *Demokratizatsiya* 25, no. 3 (Summer 2017): 235–54; Smith, *Mythmaking in the New Russia*.

[106] Verovšek, "Collective Memory, Politics, and the Influence of the Past: The Politics of Memory as a Research Paradigm," 529.

[107] Smith, *Mythmaking in the New Russia*, 4.

[108] Claude Levi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning, Cracking the Code of Culture* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), 17.

[109] Furthermore, Barthes explains, "Myth has an imperative, buttonholing character: stemming from an historical concept, directly springing from contingency." quoted by unknown author at National University of Singapore, accessed on August 7, 2019, https://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/elljwp/myth.htm. For more details on myth in the Barthesian sense, see: Roland Barthes, *Mythology, An Introductory Guide to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993).

understanding.[110] The degree of truth that myths incorporate is irrelevant, what is important is that enough of the populace shares the belief.[111] History and myth are distinguished by the counterpoised reality of the former to the fictitious character of the latter.[112] Considering these definitions, this analysis refers to myth as follows: Myths are cultural knowledge expressed in generally accepted narratives that may not be true but must be believed in.

Myths affect the audience beyond language. The basic understanding of how myths work must be described next. Barthes explains that a chain of semiotic processes creates the myth.[113] He uses the terms signifier, signified, and sign to describe this process. Following his concept, an additional process of a second order determines the myth that derives from the language level. Thus, the cultural group identifies simultaneously and subconsciously with the sign itself, the signified meaning of the myth, by associating the sign with a commonly believed understanding.[114] An operationalization of this process is depicted in the Semiotic Triangle, see Figure 2.

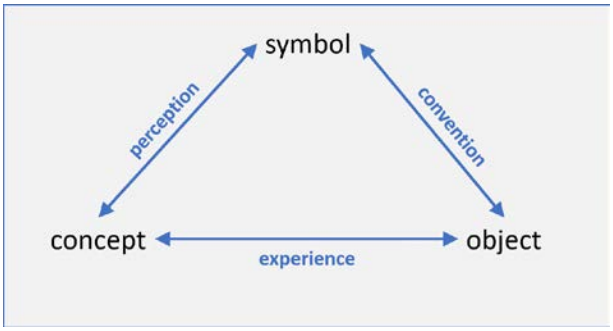

Figure 2. Semiotic Triangle[115]

110 Petersson, "Putin and the Russian Mythscape: Dilemmas of Charismatic Legitimacy," 239.

111 Graeme J. Gill, *Symbols and Legitimacy in Soviet Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 4.

112 Bottici, "Myth, Historical Narratives and the Social Imaginary," 203–26.

113 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (translated by Richard Howard/Annette Lavers, New York, NY: Hill and Wang 2012), 219–38.

114 Barthes, *Mythologies*, 223–24.

115 The Semiotic Triangle has been adapted from mediamanual.at, accessed on August 5, 2019, https://www.mediamanual.at/mediamanual/workshop/kommunikation/bedeutung/mythos01.php.

The connection between object and symbol is transmitted by the concept of the object. The terms are different and refer to the explanation of Barthes as: symbol for sign, concept for signifier, object for signified. An example will simplify the mechanics of the semiotic process. One myth about Germany's defeat in World War I was the *Dolchstoßlegende* (the stab in the back). The metaphor symbolizes betrayal. On the language level, it signifies that the undefeated German Army was betrayed by the politicians of the newborn republic. The object to clear the army of responsibility for the defeat uses the concept of scapegoating. In the created myth, the metaphor signifies that the democratic politicians are responsible for the bad post-war situation. The concept evolves to blame democracy for the outcome and aims for the object of re-establishing the *ancient regime* (old system).

Present-day Russia has constructed its own stab-in-the-back myth. This myth attributes the dismantling of the Soviet Union to the reformers around Gorbachev. On the language level, they have unnecessarily sold out the country as traitors by pursuing democratization. In the myth, the portrayed betrayal signifies that democracy caused the economic turmoil of the 1990s for the object of returning to the old order.

D. LEGITIMACY

The last term essential to the hypothesis and in need of clarification is legitimacy. According to common sense, legitimacy is the outcome of legitimized actions that are attributed to an actor. Further, those legitimized actions are justified by the set of rules in place and therefore generally accepted. For politics, legitimacy attaches the ruler's justified use of power to the acceptance of the ruled polity.

More specifically, Max Weber poses the question, "what do we understand by politics?," which he addresses with a sociological approach.[116] First, he provides a definition that politics is the drive for power or its distribution within a state. Therefore, he argues that "a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly on the

[116] Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 28–34.

legitimate use of physical force within a given territory."[117] Weber's analysis of legitimacy from the perspective of sociology elaborates on the underlying social mechanics. Thus, he derives that a state manifests dominance through the legitimate use of violence. Second, he questions the basis of this relationship between the state and the ruled polity, asking when and why men obey legitimate domination. He defines justified authority as comprising three types:

- traditional domination—patrimonial rule through inherited authority.
- charismatic domination—authority of the exceptional leader.
- legal domination—authority of the state's servants based on rules.[118]

Further, Weber focuses on how leaders conduct organized domination. In addition to legitimacy, he introduces two external incentives for the ruled polity's obedience: material reward and social honor, which he defines as administrative means.[119] Whereas the ruler owned these means in earlier states, the modern bureaucratic state separates the means from its officials, which is the system that created the professional politician. The latter are classified in two types: politicians living for or off politics—which are usually combined and refer basically to the economic dependency of the politician. Finally, Weber concludes, that all political struggles aim for the patronage of office through access to administrative means and for objective goals by considering the cause which gives meaning to politics.[120]

With Weber's definition in mind, it is evident that Russia's current strategic objectives,[121] the three aforementioned policy drivers, and the Idea of Russia unite in a cohesive pattern of thinking that borrows from previous concepts in line with Russian strategic culture.[122] From this point of view, legitimacy for Putin's rule and the Kremlin's

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[117] Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 29.

[118] Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 30.

[119] Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 31.

[120] Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 33–34.

[121] For a detailed analysis of Russia's strategic objectives, see: Dave Johnson, "Russia's Conventional Precision Strike Capabilities, Regional Crises, and Nuclear Thresholds," 13–22.

[122] For an elaborated and detailed analysis of Russian strategic culture, see: Eitelhuber, *Russland im 21. Jahrhundert*.

quest for great power status form the underlying paradigm that encircles any derived objective, see Figure 3.

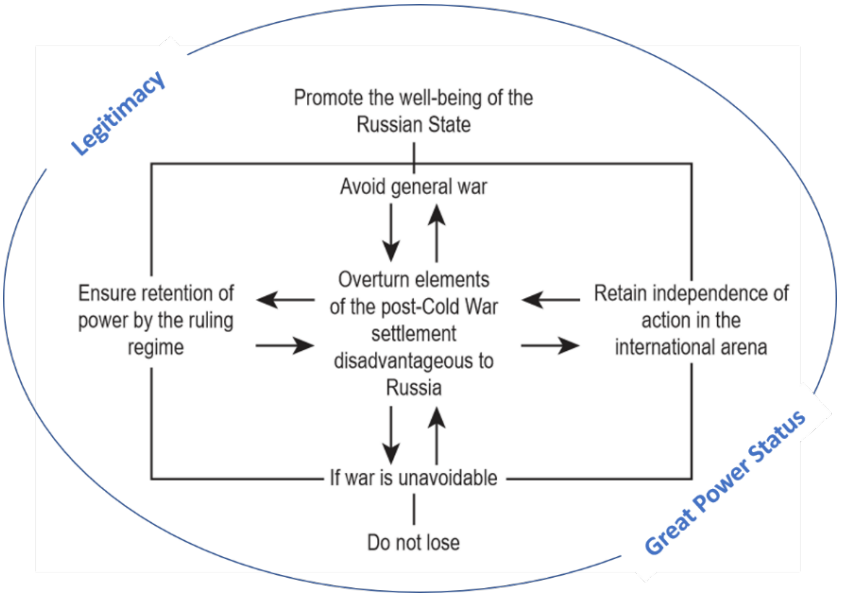

Figure 3. Interdependency of Russian Strategic Objectives[123]

Whilst Russia has announced such objectives in official doctrines,[124] the mindset itself is not stated and can only be discerned by reverse engineering for an analysis of Russian policy. Nevertheless, the interdependency of those elements connects the idea and its drivers with strategic theory and produces objectives that operationalize the desired end-state—domestically and internationally accepted domination. To that end, the Russian myths, according to Thomas Ambrosio, have been employed "not as a pejorative, but rather to refer to a narrative that contains deeply rooted concepts and images that are shared and reproduced in a society, have powerful symbolic significance, and can be utilized by leaders to legitimize policy choices at home and abroad."[125]

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[123] Adapted from: Dave Johnson, "Russia's Conventional Precision Strike Capabilities, Regional Crises, and Nuclear Thresholds," *Livermore Papers on Global Security*, no. 3 (2018), 14.

[124] For an overview of how Russia incorporates history in doctrinal papers, see: Person, "Russia and Baltic Sea Security: A Background," 24.

[125] Thomas Ambrosio, "The Rhetoric of Irredentism: The Russian Federation's Perception Management Campaign and the Annexation of Crimea," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27, no. 3 (April 25, 2016): 475.

In an additional approach to define legitimacy, Walker Connor sorts the gained legitimacy by comparative levels.[126] It is also worth noting that Weber acknowledges his types of authority are not black and white categories but idealized prototypes that appear enmeshed and simultaneously. Connor argues that literature on legitimacy refers only to the ruler or the government. He incorporates the level of state as an assertion of national self-determination.[127] As a result, Connor's definition rests upon "three distinct categories:

- **regime-legitimacy** refers to the propriety or rightfulness of the rule of a particular individual, clique, or administration.
- **government-legitimacy** is associated with a particular form of government and with its corresponding ideology and institutions, regardless of the individuals who momentarily occupy its key positions.
- **state-legitimacy**, the broadest of these categories, is concerned with the justification of the political unit itself, rather than with either individuals or governments."[128]

The distinction between levels, which Connor persuasively outlines, embarks on a critique of the absent awareness for the state's legitimacy in the scholarly literature, but it complements the variation of Weber's three different types. A combination of both perspectives enables the development of a three-by-three rubric that comprises the levels horizontally and the types vertically. By inserting the different Russian concepts and ideas of the past that were employed to gain legitimacy in their respective eras, the illustration can serve to demonstrate the toolbox the Kremlin is using for the Idea of Russia to foster legitimacy today, see Table 1. Thus, the legitimacy rubric shows the most important elements of the different Russian predecessor states as an overview of historical ideas and concepts to which Putin's Russian regime refers. By doing so, the Kremlin tempts the Russian society to associate the present-day ruling system with the past. Therein, the desired effect is to re-create the outcomes of such ideas and concepts—the preference for the strong leader with a messianic calling, and the claim for a greater Russian sphere of influence comparable to the Russian and the Soviet Empires.

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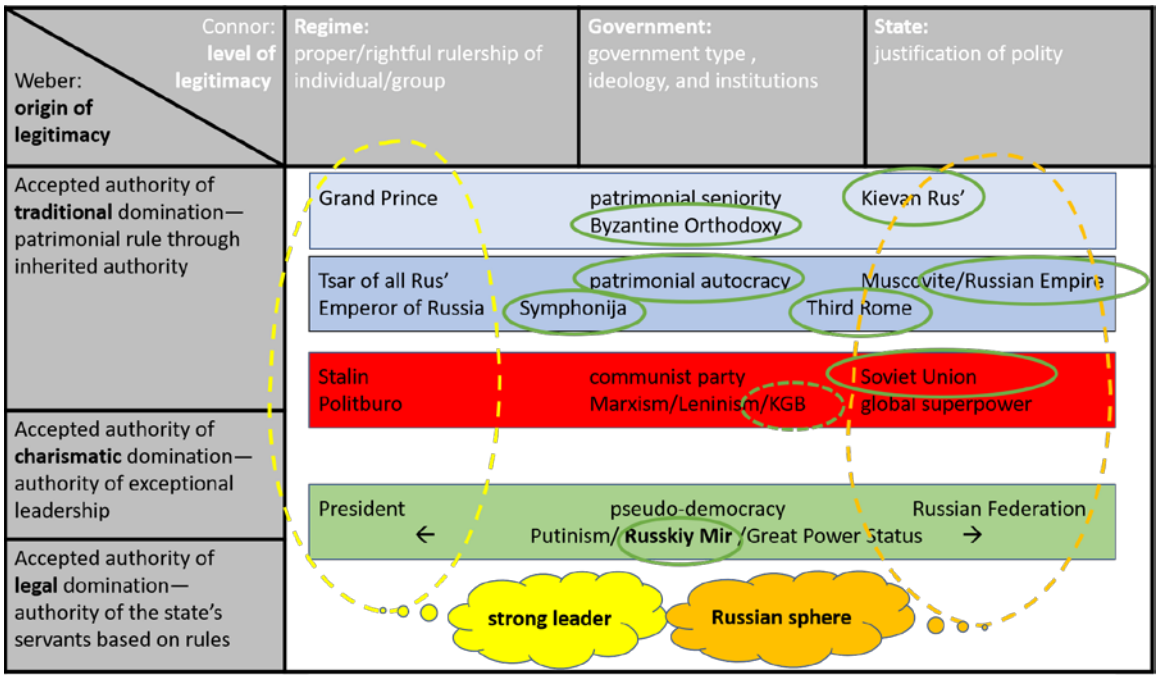
126 Walker Connor, "Nationalism and Political Illegitimacy," *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* 7 (1980): 201–228.

127 Connor, "Nationalism and Political Illegitimacy," 205.

128 Connor, "Nationalism and Political Illegitimacy," 204.

Table 1. Legitimacy Rubric



For the medieval Rus', the pre-dominant type was the traditional authority. The Rurikid princes were a single royal dynasty and their somewhat divided share of authority urged any pretender to the throne to unify the lands in stages: becoming a monocrat to rule alone without cousins; and thereafter becoming an autocrat to rule supreme by suppressing other competitors.[129] At its pinnacle, the Kievan Rus' incorporated Byzantine Christianity to cement the Rurikid's authority with an idea that extended their reach beyond Eastern Europe and connected it with Constantinople.[130] Besides Orthodoxy, the constituting institution of the Grand Prince was based on patrimonial succession and, as Richard Pipes points out, the rise of the Muscovites involved the processes of gaining undisputed sovereignty over all princes and of obtaining full ownership of the patrimony. Further, Pipes assumes that "[B]oth processes had their roots in the idea of votchina (private domain)."[131]

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[129] Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime*, 58.

[130] Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations*, 12–15.

[131] Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime*, 64.

The Muscovite tsars and thereafter the Russian Empire of the Romanov dynasty inherited the system of patrimonial authority and built on it. The former furnished the idea of the Holy Rus' with its principles of Moscow being the third Rome and the idea of Byzantine harmony between ruler and church.[132] Thereby, they claimed not only the heritage of the Kievan Rus' but also started to develop an imperial idea that incorporated Muslim and nomadic people in the East—*Drang nach Osten* (eastwards drive).[133] To that end, the title Tsar of all Rus' was the acclamation of the patrimonial authority[134] and was enriched by the claim that the tsar is almost divine and ruling Russia in God's stead.[135]

The latter went even further in elaborating the idea of the Holy Rus'; by adapting the Western idea of absolutism, they developed the messianic idea of the Russian Empire. At the acme of its power, the Russian Empire under Catherine II expanded into the West and South. Directing that expansion was the idea of her failed Greek project that had Russia engaged with other European powers in Poland and with the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans.[136] In the epoch of awakening nationalism in Europe, Count Sergey Uvarov introduced a Russian version of nationalism with the idea of "Autocracy—Orthodoxy—Nationality" in order to further legitimize the traditional authority of the tsar.[137] Thereby, the government derived its authority from the Emperor by appointment and office, which fostered Russia's development toward a police state in the 1800s.[138]

The Soviet Union, on the other hand, broke with the traditional authority in cruelty by liquidating the imperial family and condemning religion. The communist movement sought to promote charismatic authority and Lenin was depicted as the idealist genius able to lead the revolution. When Stalin took over after Lenin's death, he even strengthened this

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132 Serhii Plokhy, *Lost Kingdom, The Quest for Empire and the Making of the Russian Nation, From 1470 to the Present* (New York, NY: Basic Books, October 2017), 25.

133 Plokhy, *Lost Kingdom*, 14–17.

134 Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime*, 73.

135 Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime*, 232–24.

136 Claudia Pingaro, "Imperial Geopolitics: Catherine II's Policy on the Black Sea," *Mediterranean Review* 12, no. 1 (June 2019): 97.

137 Laqueur, *Putinism*, 214; see also: Plokhy, *Lost Kingdom*, 80–84.

138 Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime*, 291–97.

approach by reinforcing the cult of personality for himself. In this regard, he brutally collectivized agriculture,[139] purged the party and deported minorities,[140] starved the population, and created a police state to consolidate his power.[141] Thus, the gulf between ideological aspiration and reality widened and, as Martin Malia observes, "Concomitantly, the ideocratic legitimacy of the Party had been wholly absorbed into the person of the Leader [Stalin]."[142]

After the leader had died, Stalin's terror accompanied by his achievements molded a first attempt at reform, which was launched by Khrushchev. Sobered by the risk, some of these reformers became the "men of the sixties"—the Brezhnev generation—who desired quiet stability. Consequently, this overaged elite froze the system.[143] Thereafter, the legitimacy shifted back to traditional authority—but in the new disguise of communist inherited power. Thus, the dinosaurs of the *Politbüro* subsequently fostered stagnation and bolstered nepotism within the party's rank and file. Thereby, the next generation of communist leadership faced the outcomes of gerontocracy.[144] The *Politbüro* became the government's source of authority and the place for decision making.

On the other hand, the gulf between the ruling elite and the populace had grown over decades in the multi-ethnic Soviet empire. Connor profoundly summarizes the situation as "a malaise suffusing society—a "paradox" of external expansion counterpoised to ongoing internal decline—contributed to a general sense of domestic drift and erosion."[145] Consequently, the "real socialism" failed to deliver the promised prosperity

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139 Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy—A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 193–95.

140 Marc Jansen and Nikita Petrov, "The Great Terror" in *Stalin's Loyal Executioner: People's Commissar Nikolai Ezhov*, 1895–1940 (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2002), 93.

141 Strobe Talbott (translator & editor), *Khrushchev Remembers* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1970), 351–53.

142 Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 269.

143 Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 406–47.

144 John B. Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3–4.

145 Walter D. Connor, "Soviet Society, Public Attitudes, and the Perils of Gorbachev's Reforms—The Social Context of the End of the USSR," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 5, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 46.

according to the ideology's inherent logic of inevitable victory in the class struggle, which was the source of the state's authority.

In conclusion, it can be assumed that in today's Russia the three policy drivers: irredentism, revanchism, and revisionism, provide a scale of retrospective that links Russian society with its past. The application of these drivers is tailored to specific areas, groups, and topics on three different levels: object, actor, and system. The Idea of Russia under Putin exploits historic concepts to cloak the policy drivers in a sense of historical calling. Therefore, the Russkiy Mir revitalizes Russia's bygone glory by referring to former principles for the present-day context. Through myths that bear memorized cultural patterns of thinking and behavior, the Kremlin seeks to convert past grandeur into symbolic capital in order to legitimize Putin domestically as strong leader and to contribute to Moscow's mesmerized understanding of the status quo that craves a hegemonial sphere. The interrelation of past ideas and concepts with present-day identity shaping in Russia crystallizes in the approach of Putinism that seeks to generate accepted domination. In consequence of this analysis, the idea of Russia becomes assumedly the center of gravity for the Kremlin that must be protected to unfold its power.

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III. ANNEXING CRIMEA—*KRYM NASH!*

Crimea is ours! This euphoric phrase was coined in the triumphant atmosphere of spring 2014. The emotional connection between Russians and the peninsula grows out of individual experience and collective memory. Crimea has a special place in Russian society. Pushkin's poetry and Aivasovsky's paintings describe Crimea's beauty and refresh the memory of carefree vacations. Beyond this affection for a destination that promises a curing climate, a Mediterranean flair, and a revitalization of the soul, Crimea represents remarkable cultural significance for Russia.[146] The Russian feelings for this region were not instigated by its present-day leadership but have been present for centuries. At the dawn of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev summarized the relevance of Crimea for Russia by proclaiming in an interview on December 8, 1991, that "[T]he whole history of the Russian state is connected with the struggle for Crimea."[147]

Gorbachev's opinion has not changed. On May 22, 2016, he reminded the world of his assertion when *The Sunday Times* published an interview by Mark Franchetti; in that interview, Gorbachev stated his support for the re-incorporation of Crimea by arguing that "I [Gorbachev] am always with the free will of the people, and most in Crimea wanted to be reunited with Russia."[148] His view is noteworthy, for he is not known to be a fan of Putin, because it shows that there is a majority agreement across the political landscape in Russia on the unique and special relevance of Crimea. In line with the political strata, the Russian populace welcomed the annexation. Not surprisingly, the *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, which is merely one trumpet in the Kremlin's orchestra of state-controlled media, described accurately the puzzling approval in Russia for Crimea's annexation one day after the

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[146] See: Kerstin Jobst, "Russian Crimea," *The Crimean Archipelago,* March 15, 2019, https://crimea.dekoder.org/russian-crimea. *The Crimean Archipelago* is a multimedia dossier of dekoder.org, the Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOiS), and the Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen. This interdisciplinary project provides facts and figures as well as an overview of public responses to the Crimean crisis.

[147] Quoted in Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire,* 36.

[148] Mark Franchetti, "The Interview: Mikhail Gorbachev—The Americans squandered the trust we'd built," *The Sunday Times*, May 22, 2016, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/magazine/the-sunday-times-magazine/the-interview-mikhail-gorbachev-thbl0p2mc.

official announcement by Putin. In the *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, the referred approval rates are backed by independent polls.[149] However, the outspoken political association of Crimea with the Idea of Russia that the article presents is essential for evaluating the peninsula's significance.

> It seems our history now has another era-defining date—the 16th March, […] 86% think that Crimea is Russia, whilst 91% support making Crimea a subject of the Russian Federation. Such a vastly unequivocal response from Russians […] can mean only one thing—at last a unifying 'national idea' has been born; up to now all attempts to invent it had been in vain. The idea was not the brainchild of government functionaries, academics or PR-people; it was born in the hearts and minds of the most ordinary—and very different—Russians who were united by one thing. It was born in that uniquely spiritual space which goes by the name of the Russian world.[150]

For Russia, the official language labels the incorporation of Crimea as reunification. The unifying effect unfolds in two different ways. On one hand, the lost territory was reunited with Russia. On the other side, the Russian society at large reunited behind Putin's government. The remainder of this chapter seeks to analyze Crimea's uniqueness for the Idea of Russia by providing the strategic and historic contexts before the discussion examines the myth-shrouded Russian narrative and assesses the Kremlin's legitimacy potential on the peninsula. Thereby, the next chapter creates the mirror with which to compare the Baltics and Crimea and to further reflect on both the regions' importance for Russia.

A. RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC OUTSET IN 2014

At first glance, the case of Crimea's annexation matches prototypically with the criteria for irredentism. Yet, one piece is missing. The absence of a long-lasting Russian

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[149] For example, surveys by the Yuri Levada Analytical Center, https://www.levada.ru/en/2014/12/23/russian-politics-towards-crimea/.

[150] Quoted in Alison Borrowman, William Driver, and Zachary King, "The Contemporary Debate—A Look Back," *The Crimean Archipelago,* March 15, 2019, https://crimea.dekoder.org/reactions. The original source in *Russiaskaya Gazetta*: Леонид Поляков, "Референдум, который всегда с тобой Вхождение Крыма в РФ является эпохальным событием," *Российская газета*—Федеральный выпуск № 62–6334, March 19, 2014, https://rg.ru/2014/03/19/sobytie.html.

policy that states the desire to redeem Crimea[151] astonishes and, as a result, explains the sense of surprise in the West. In light of the conceptualized Idea of Russia, the answer to that inconsistency is the bigger scope and the larger scale of Moscow's perspective. Although Crimea is characterized as the crown jewel of the South, it has been embedded in a broader strategic assessment of Russia's soft belly that faces the Islamic world to the South and the Catholic and Protestant world of Europe to the West.

Due to the stormy disintegration of the USSR, a prolonged border demarcation process between Kiev and Moscow emerged. In 1991, Russian officials claimed the right to revise the Russian-Ukrainian border and reserved for Russia the entitlement to the eastern and southern oblasts of Ukraine, including Crimea.[152] The perennial security challenges of resolving the Soviet nuclear heritage, the devastating economic situation, and the destabilizing conflict in the Caucasus fostered Moscow's will to compromise and led to the Budapest Memorandum in 1994, which guarantees Ukrainian sovereignty within its territorial boundaries in exchange for Kiev handing over its inherited nuclear arsenal to Russia.[153] Nevertheless, the issue of Crimea remained a priority in Moscow and Russian Premier Viktor Chernomyrdin, therefore, stated at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) summit in Lisbon in 1996 that "Sevastopol is a Russian city; all the soil there is covered with the bones of Russian sailors."[154]

In 1997, Russia had found a settlement for the most intriguing issue on its southern border with Ukraine—the Black Sea Fleet. This decisive and eventful year brought many

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[151] Compare, for example, the preamble of the Federal Republic of Germany proclaimed from 1949–1990, "The entire German people is called on to achieve in free self-determination "the unity and freedom of Germany" to express the desire for reunification in its constitution. For more details, see: Micheal Silagi, "The Preamble of the German Grundgesetz–Constitutional Status and Importance of Preambles in German Law," *Acta Juridica Hungarica* 52, no 1 (2011): 54–63, https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/78475353.pdf. For the original German version of the preamble, see: http://www.documentarchiv.de/brd/1949/grundgesetz.html.

[152] Serhii Plokhy, "The City of Glory: Sevastopol in Russian Historical Mythology," *Journal of Contemporary History* 35, no. 3 (July 1, 2000): 371.

[153] David Yost, "The Budapest Memorandum and Russia's Intervention in Ukraine," *International Affairs* 91, no. 3 (May 2015): 505–9.

[154] Quoted in Plokhy, "The City of Glory: Sevastopol in Russian Historical Mythology," 372, see footnote 11.

interdependent developments: the NATO-Russia Founding Act was signed,[155] the Black Sea Fleet Treaty between Ukraine and Russia was ratified,[156] and a new Russian national security concept was decreed.[157] Nevertheless, the political debate over defining the Crimean fault line was intensively held, heated by pathos, and encompassed various prominent voices of the Russian society, from author Solzhenitsyn to Moscow's mayor Luzhkov, advocating their dissent with the Kremlin for abandoning Russia's claims on the peninsula.[158] The irredentist discourse was silenced when the Kremlin's understanding prevailed, asserting that the agreement with Kiev represented a Trojan Horse option for Moscow to prevent Ukraine from becoming a NATO member state. If Russian armed forces are stationed on Crimea, the door to the Western alliance will be locked.[159]

By zooming out, it is possible to observe how Moscow's foreign policy toward Ukraine falls into place. Through the prism of the Russian World, the Kremlin's trajectory has persistently aimed to keep Kiev close and to prevent a Western incursion in the Russian sphere. The list of Moscow's measures comprises the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the gas price policy with special discount for the post-Soviet countries and leveraging on Kiev's dependency, the meddling in Ukrainian elections by supporting Russia-friendly candidates, and the design for a Eurasian Union. Thus, the minimal outcome was keeping Ukraine in between—in the twilight tied to Russia and unsteady for a westbound vector.

Against this background, it is important to recall that the Maidan movement started as a protest to Yanukovych's decision to refrain from signing the Association Agreement with the European Union in 2013. From the outset, Putin sided with the Ukrainian president by offering monetary incentives for a membership in his Eurasian Union instead of signing

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155 David Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2014), 219–31.

156 Stent, *Putin's World*, 187–89.

157 Sergunin, *Explaining Russian Foreign Policy Behavior*, 147–53.

158 Jobst, "Russian Crimea."

159 Hannes Adomeit, "Inside or Outside? Russia's Policies Towards NATO" (working Paper, *Stiftung für Wissenschaft und Politik*, January 2007), 27.

the treaty with the EU. The Kremlin's perception of the revolutionary uprising must be contextualized with two significant events—the *Arab Spring,* which started in 2010; and the mass demonstrations in Moscow against Premier Putin's *coup de foudre* to swap offices with President Medvedev, again in 2012.[160] Both events reminded the Kremlin of Russia's own domestic vulnerability and fitted in with the revanchist pattern to accuse the United Sates and the West for pursuing threatening regime changes.

Russia's strategic environment had already changed when the Maidan protest emerged. The European Union appeared weaker than ever before. The economic crises at the end of the first decade in the 21st century absorbed most of the EU's political energy. The austerity policy and the efforts to bail out Greece dominated the European discourse whereby security concerns vis-à-vis Russia faded out of sight. Meanwhile, Moscow could focus on renewing its aged military courtesy of a high oil price and the circumstance that enabled the Kremlin to successfully navigate the economic crisis. Whereas the EU's military focus has started to shift toward Sahel and Central Africa with various training missions (EUFOR RD CONGO, EUTM in Mali) as well as the counter piracy mission at the Horn of Africa (EUNAVFOR ATALANTA).

NATO had been locked in Afghanistan for more than a decade fighting the War on Terror alongside the United States. The hot topic of an U.S. alimented Ballistic Missile Defense System for Europe gradually disappeared but not without leaving its mark on the NATO-Russia relations. Moreover, NATO secretary general Jaap de Hoop Scheffer stated in 2009, "Russia's recent assertiveness […] has exposed a lack of Allied unity vis-à-vis Russia.'[161] Especially the Alliance's reaction to the Russian-Georgian War in 2008 revealed to Moscow the vulnerabilities of NATO's cohesion. Additionally, the not undisputed Air Campaign in Libya and the military measure to counter the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) led to the phenomenon of abandoning NATO's

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[160] Evert van der Zweerde, "Democratic Repertoires of Political Legitimization—Russian Echoes and European Realities" in *Russia and the EU—Spaces of Interaction,* ed. Thomas Hoffmann and Andrey Makarychev (London: Routledge, 2019), 16.

[161] Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, "NATO:Securing Our Future" (speech at The Hague, July 6, 2009), quoted in Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act*, 223.

unitary-based mindset by establishing so-called coalitions of the willing. Those cracks presented the Kremlin with avenues of approach for driving a wedge between member states, especially along the fault lines between South and North.

Additionally, the United States had already changed its global actions to risk-averse and remote measures driven by the experiences in Afghanistan and in the Middle East. The Obama Administration had announced the *Pivot to Asia* as the new strategic direction that puts China at the focal point as the up-and-coming competitor on the global stage. When Secretary of State Hillary Clinton presented her Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov literally with a red reset button in Geneva in 2009 it was meant to be a token symbolizing Washington's desire to ease tensions with Moscow in order to focus unencumbered on the Pacific region.[162]

Given this brief and fragmentary context, the turmoil in Kiev, which erupted in fall 2013 and culminated in the annexation of Crimea in early 2014, threatened Russia on multiple levels. The strategic outset, however, was bolstering the Kremlin to act decisively. According to the renewed Russian foreign policy doctrine of 2013, Moscow's policy makers were convinced that the global stage had been decentralizing due to the decline of Western dominance, and the subsequent transition process toward the desired polycentric world was going to be turbulent in conjunction with steadily growing competition.[163]

The vehemence of the Ukrainian opposition, who had even resisted against military-like riot control measures of Yanukovych's government, alarmed the Kremlin. Put on the back foot, Putin envisaged losing his grip on Kiev. From Moscow's point of view, the uprising on the Maidan was instigated by the United States, its European allies, and Russophobe Ukrainians. Giving evidence to Moscow's paranoia-fueled fear of regime change, the situation in Kiev unfolded dramatically close to Russia and within its self-defined Russian World.

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[162] The handover was covered by the media and can be watched in "Putin's Revenge," October 25, 2017, PBS, video, 39:10, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o2L8qINZD3Q&feature=youtu.be.

[163] Sergunin, *Explaining Russian Foreign Policy Behavior*, 163.

Consequently, the Kremlin's assessment identified multiple threats posed by the possibility of a prevailing Maidan. For the Idea of Russia, the persistent demonstrations that turned into violent street fights with barricades, besieged protest camps in Ukraine's capital, and led to many casualties, presented the Kremlin with a live feed of its worst nightmare. If Ukraine defected, the Russkiy Mir would be discredited by losing its largest area outside the Russian Federation; Kiev choosing Europe over Russia; the Maidan undermining Putin's claim to leadership as strong man in general; *Little Russia* devaluating Russian exceptionalism; and the periphery questioning the center-focused statist paradigm as well as the concept of harmony between the Kremlin and Orthodoxy. Thereby, such an outcome would question the Kremlin's authority and delegitimize Putinism in Russia.

In Russia's security perception, the Maidan movement could destabilize the order beyond the Southwestern flank by encouraging other unstable regions to revolt but the tangible danger dominated with a shrinking buffer zone to Europe. If the Westerners in Kiev succeeded, the obnoxiously perceived status quo would even deteriorate for Moscow; the desired great power status would recede into a dim distance; Russia would be cut off from its access to the Black Sea because any arrangement with Yanukovych might be in question; the Ukrainians would not only establish closer bonds with the EU, which creates economic barriers for Russian exports to Ukraine in return, but also open up to NATO. Thus, Moscow's authority as a hegemonial and balancing power in a multipolar world would vanquish gradually and Putinism would be delegitimized in the Russian sphere of interest and on the global stage.

When the Kremlin realized that its actions to coerce Kiev seemed to fail, it is plausible that Putin's patience snapped given what was at stake. Two characteristics unfolded in this crisis. First, Moscow was stuck in an escalating spiral that accelerated toward violence when the Kremlin's political pressure, leverage, and coercion failed to attain an easing of tension. Second, Russian decision making was held in the thrall of its own policy drivers to the exclusion of rational choice. The potential shift in the security perception had not been urgent—neither imminent nor immediate effects were expected.

Consequently, the Kremlin's concerns for the credibility of the Idea of Russia appear to have outweighed the security sensibility due to its domestic implications. The

seizure of Crimea turns out to have been aimed for Moscow cutting its losses rather than for making gains. In response to the Maidan threat, it seems reasonable to assume that the Kremlin decided to act resolutely by seizing control over Crimea in order to protect a powerful symbol for the Russian World; secure the strategic stronghold by turning the rule-based presence into a predetermined one founded on irredentist claims; disparage Ukraine's sovereignty by compromising its territorial integrity to prove the validity of Moscow's pretension to power within the Holy Rus'; showcase Putin as strong leader who firmly defends Russians; and cement the denial of a Western prospect for Kiev by activating the Trojan Horse option.

Presuming a more opportunistic attitude, it is tempting to assume the Kremlin engaged cogently by exploiting a window of opportunity in capturing Crimea. This sort of interpretation reduces the Kremlin to a merely reactive actor by denying Putin a strategic view.[164] Although, according to Hill and Gaddy, "contrary to the prevailing assessment, Putin is a strategic planner."[165] Nevertheless, this sort of assumption is at best shortsighted and at worst utterly dangerous. Moreover, such presumption would not alter the explanation for Russia's purpose of war in Ukraine; it only changes the emphasis by inducing aggressiveness. The opportunity would merely offer a way to pursue more proactively the aforementioned objectives.

As a result, the enfolding situation reinforced Russia's understanding of its own position. The persuasiveness of the Kremlin's policy drivers intensified fitfully. Sequentially and tailored to the audience, Moscow's political strata had Russians recollect memorized images of Crimea via propagandistic media coverage even before the *fait accompli*. When the West confronted Moscow with its involvement in Ukraine, the revanchist rhetoric explained to the domestic audience that foreigners launched the turmoil in Kiev to divide the Russian World, thereby blaming the United States and Europe. After Crimea's annexation, Moscow's revisionist assertion set the tone in order to ease tensions,

164 Kalb, *Imperial Gamble*, 156.

165 Hill and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin*, 388.

to downplay the violent act, and to proclaim that Crimea gave evidence to the need for revising the status quo.

Whether irredentism with regard to Crimea re-surfaced in Russia or it was activated by Putin, it mobilized popular support for Putin and legitimized the Kremlin's course of action. By reviving myths related to the peninsula in Russian collective memory, the Kremlin vividly transmitted the designated narrative to the Russian populace. Thus, understanding those myths is of essence and the next analytical step of this research begins with a brief history overview.

B. RUSSIAN AND CRIMEAN HISTORY

Russian history as concerns Crimea is complex and refers to the past of more than a millennium. Ever since, the peninsula and the adjacent Pontic Steppe have been a *zone de perturbation* (fault zone) due to multiple cultural incursions from various directions.[166] From Moscow's vantage point, the strategic direction to the south remained the same but the adversaries who were challenging Russian control over Crimea had been changing—the competition's origin followed the course of the sun.

In the 10th century, Crimea represented the gate that connected the Kievan Rus' with Constantinople. When the Golden Horde had conquered the area in the 13th century, they cut off this connection. Then, the succeeding Crimean Khanate maintained the severed connection until they became part of the Ottoman Empire, which only prolonged the divide thereafter. Five centuries after the Mongols had interrupted the north-to-south link, the Russian Empire gained access to the Black Sea and re-established the connection to the South. Whilst the Turkish Sultanate was in gradual decline, Russia clashed with the Western Empires over the spoils of the Ottoman fragmentation and fought the first modern War on Crimea in 1853–1856.

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166 This term was coined by the most notable Ukrainian historian and politician Mykhailo Hrushevsky, *History of Ukraine-Rus'. Volume 1 From Prehistory to the Eleventh Century* (first published in 1898, translated by Marta Skorupsky, edited by Andrzej Poppe and Frank E. Sysyn, Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1997).

For present-day Russia, the history of Crimea comprises many important events that contribute to defining the Russian identity, but two historical turning points surpass them all. First, Crimea is associated with the birthplace of Russian Orthodox Christianity.[167] Second, when Russia finally won control over Crimea after various Russian-Turkish Wars, the last remnant of the submission to the Mongol Empire vanished and another piece was added to the re-collection of Rus' land.[168] Since then, the Russian rule in Crimea was contested multiple times but never really broke until the Soviet Union collapsed. Thereafter, former mere administrative boundaries within the Soviet Union became cemented territorial borders and created a chip on the shoulder of the Kremlin's leadership.[169]

Crimea's first important notion in Russian history refers to the Kievan Rus' when the peninsula was the bridgehead of Byzantium's North in the 9th century. It became the springboard for Kiev princes' recurring southbound raids in Byzantine territory. In 988, Vladimir I (the Great and the Saint) besieged Khersones and enforced the earlier promised but unmet marriage to a sister of Emperor Basil II. The extortion worked out and he married into the imperial family, securing a rise in status for himself. In return, Vladimir I had to accept his baptism in the Orthodox Rite, which launched the Christianization of the Kievan Rus'.[170]

In 1783, Catherine II (the Great) annexed Crimea from the Khanate to complete the Russian hegemony over the northern coastline of the Black Sea for access to trade routes. This was accomplished by reaching the Mediterranean through the Bosporus and the Dardanelles.[171] Mastering the Black Sea was intertwined with the failed Greek Project of Catherine II—her idea of renewing the Byzantine Empire. The plan incorporated the idea

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[167] Sanshiro Hosaka, "The Kremlin's 'Active Measures' Failed in 2013: That's When Russia Remembered Its Last Resort—Crimea," *Demokratizatsiya* 26, no. 3 (Summer 2018): 342–44.

[168] Serhii Plokhy, *The Gates of Europe—A History of Ukraine* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2015), 140.

[169] Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire*, 36.

[170] Plokhy, *The Gates of Europe*, 32–33.

[171] Pingaro, "Imperial Geopolitics: Catherine II's Policy on the Black Sea," 104–5.

of the Third Rome, which was constructed as claim to an inherited imperial succession of Rome and Constantinople.[172]

Half a century later, the southern expansion of the Russian Empire culminated in the Crimean War over the Eastern Question: How to deal with the declining Ottoman Empire?[173] In line with the idea of the Third Rome, Nicholas I "declared holy war against the half-moon in defence of the cross in 1853".[174] The famous phrase of "the sick man of Europe" referring to the Sublime Porte in Istanbul outlined the Russian desire to share the spoils with Britain.[175] The Crimean War ended in defeat and humiliation for Russia. After Sevastopol had fallen to the invading Western allies, Russia was losing face as a great power.[176]

In the 20th century, Crimea was part of the Soviet Union and faced a second invasion from the West by Nazi Germany in the Great Patriotic War. Sevastopol fell again after heroic fights in 1942.[177] In 1954, Crimea was incorporated in the Ukrainian Soviet Republic. At that time, it seemed to be a symbolic act by simply adjusting internal administrative borders. In the light of the tercentenary of the Agreement of Pereiaslav between the Cossack Hetmanate and the Muscovite tsar in 1654, Khrushchev attempted to help the economically depressed peninsula by subordinating it to Kiev.

Khrushchev's gift became part of the Russian narrative. It was intended to be understood as gesture for the reunification of Ukraine with Russia.[178] But it was also meant to incorporate more Russian population in the Ukrainian SSR in order to enmesh the ethnicities in favor of Moscow. After the Soviet Union had collapsed, the Russian

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172 Natalia Polonska-Vasylenko, *Two Conceptions of the History of Ukraine and Russia* (London: Ukrainian Publishers Limited, 1968), 21.

173 Trudi Tate, *A Short History of the Crimean War* (London: I. B. Tauris & Company, 2019), 13.

174 Polonska-Vasylenko, *Two Conceptions of the History of Ukraine and Russia*, 21.

175 Tate, *A Short History of the Crimean War*, 13.

176 Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations*, 121–22.

177 For more details on the battles fought on Crimea, see: Mungo Melvin, *Sevastopol's Wars: Crimea from Potemkin to Putin* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2017).

178 Plokhy, *The Gates of Europe*, 298–99.

Federation and Ukraine signed the Budapest memorandum in 1994.[179] Both countries negotiated a cooperation agreement in 1997, which stated Russia's recognition of Ukraine's borders, including Crimea, and its 20-year lease of the navy base for the Russian Black Sea Fleet.[180] The lease was renewed for another 25 years prior to the annexation and would have lasted until 2043.

C. CRIMEAN MYTHS IN RUSSIA'S NARRATIVE

After this quick overview of the history, the analysis of the Crimean case narrows its focus to review how Putin has been drawing on myths as collective knowledge of the past to exploit remembrance as a political tool. Due consideration is given to the established definition of myth. Bear in mind, therefore, myths are expressions of the generally accepted cultural understanding comprised in a narrative that may not be true but must be believed in.

Putin's pattern of using history for politics has been a determining characteristic and dates to his ascent to power. According to Hill and Gaddy, "He [Putin] sees himself as a historical figure among the pantheon of those who have sought to save the Russian state."[181] From the beginning of his annexation speech, Putin emphasized that history is the prism through which to understand Russia's motif. Given the depiction of Russia's historical relationship to Crimea, an analysis of Putin's address will identify the myths employed in the case of Crimea.[182] Putin started off by giving reason to the enormously positive vote in favor of re-uniting Crimea with Russia in the referendum, "To understand

179 Plokhy, *Lost Kingdom*, 335.

180 Plokhy, *Lost Kingdom*, 319.

181 Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy, "Putin and the Uses of History" *The National Interest*, no. 117 (Jan/Feb 2012): 30.

182 For a detailed account on the speech with interdisciplinary commentary, see: Thomas Bremer et al., "Speech of Vladimir Putin," *The Crimean Archipelago*, March 18, 2019, translated by Allison Borrowman, https://crimea.dekoder.org/speech.

the reason behind such a choice it is enough to know the history of Crimea and what Russia and Crimea have always meant for each other."[183]

He introduced his history lesson by outlining that Crimea is the place of origin for Russian values. Therefore, Putin claimed, "Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. This is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptized. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilisation and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus."[184]

By adding references to modern Russian history, Putin underlined the legacy of Crimea. Thus, he stated, "The graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian empire are also in Crimea. This is also Sevastopol—a legendary city with an outstanding history, a fortress that serves as the birthplace of Russia's Black Sea Fleet."[185] Thereby, Putin also made Crimea a symbol of unity.

At the end, he summarized, "Crimea is our common historical legacy and a very important factor in regional stability."[186] In this way, Putin defined the official narrative for the *Reunification*[187] of Crimea with Russia. Against this background, the Semiotic Triangle helps to unpack the presented narrative and its myths, see Figure 4. On the language level, Crimea symbolizes the concept of Russian unity for the object of historical claims. On the level of myth, Crimea as birthplace becomes a symbol for unity through the concept of *simfonija* (Byzantine symphony) with the object of legitimacy for the strong leader.

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[183] Vladimir Putin, "Speech on March 18, 2014," *The Washington Post*, March 18, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/transcript-putin-says-russiawill-protect-the-rights-of-russians-abroad/2014/03/18/432a1e60-ae99-11e3-a49e76adc9210f19_story.html.

[184] Putin, "Speech on March 18, 2014."

[185] Putin, "Speech on March 18, 2014."

[186] Putin, "Speech on March 18, 2014."

[187] By contrast to the Western definition of the events in 2014 as annexation, official Russian statements refer positively to the incorporation of Crimea as reunification.

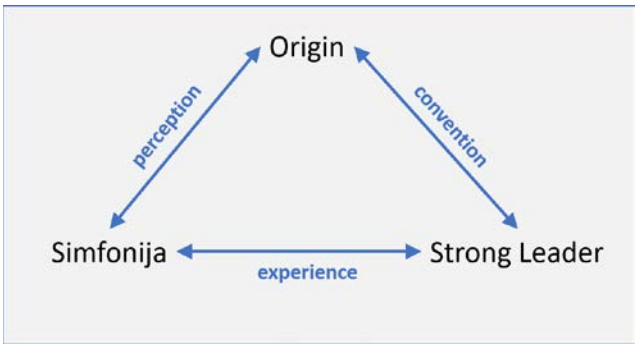

Figure 4. Semiotic Triangle—Origin

Putin's first reference, the baptism of Vladimir I in Crimea, symbolizes the starting point for Russia's claim to be an exceptional country with a sacred destiny and the need for a strong leader. Crimea is consequently considered the birthplace of Russian Orthodox Christianity. This represents the origins embedded in the broader myth of defining Orthodox Christian values derived from the *translatio imperii*. Norbert Eitelhuber explains that in tsarist Russia the transfer from Rome via Constantinople to Moscow as the Third Rome was constructed only for the religious heritage without political aims of irredentism.[188]

At first glance contradictory, Putin stated that Crimea is the birthplace of Russian values evolved from Orthodoxy. Thereby, Putin's historical understanding referred to the imperial nationalists' perception of the conservative movement in tsarist Russia that was influenced by Count Sergey Uvarov's concept of "Autocracy—Orthodoxy—Nationality."[189] Through this lens, Eitelhuber emphasizes that tsarist Russia was adapting the concept of *simfonija*—the close relation of church and state.[190] The Russian Orthodox Church apparently believes that tsarist Russia had realized an even better version of Byzantine symphony.[191]

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[188] Eitelhuber, *Russland im 21. Jahrhundert*, 78.

[189] Kalb, *Imperial Gamble*, 19–27.

[190] Eitelhuber, *Russland im 21. Jahrhundert*, 79.

[191] Torbakov, "The Russian Orthodox Church and Contestations over History in Contemporary Russia," 156.

Ultimately, *simfonija* culminates in the myth of the need for a strong leader. Accordingly, Bo Petersson argues that *simfonija* symbolizes the answer to *smuta*—the paradigmatic "Times of Trouble."[192] In contrast to Byzantine symphony, *smuta* represents the recurring weakness of Russia being exploited by external powers. Both the Kremlin and the Metropolitan of Moscow have conceptualized Russian history in this dichotomy.[193] The internal dimension of this concept fosters the strong ruler. The externally directed view of the concept divides in "good Russians" and "evil foreigners".[194]

Moreover, Polonska-Vasylenko has persuasively outlined that the idea of the Third Rome was a determining factor in the conception of Russian history.[195] In overrating the idea of a holy Russia, state and church strive to achieve recognition for Russia's exceptional status.[196] After the annexation of Crimea, Putin repeatedly invoked the historical significance of the peninsula for Russia.[197] Putin sacralized Crimea in another speech later in 2014, "Crimea, […], and Sevastopol have invaluable civilisational and even sacral importance for Russia, like the Temple Mount in Jerusalem for the followers of Islam and Judaism. And this is how we will always consider it."[198]

Putin's pattern of referring to Orthodox-Slavic values was not a reaction solely to the Crimean events in 2014. Previous speeches of the Russian president had already incorporated this concept. In July 2013, Putin's addressed a conference in Kiev:

> Here at this site, at the baptismal site on the Dnieper River, a choice was made for the whole of Holy Rus, for all of us. Our ancestors who lived in

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192 Petersson, "Putin and the Russian Mythscape: Dilemmas of Charismatic Legitimacy," 243.

193 Torbakov, "The Russian Orthodox Church and Contestations over History in Contemporary Russia," 148.

194 For details on the exclusive function, see: Hill and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin*.

195 Polonska-Vasylenko, *Two Conceptions of the History of Ukraine and Russia*, 17–40.

196 Eitelhuber, *Russland im 21. Jahrhundert*, 99.

197 Mauro Mantovani and Daniel Rickenbacher, "Crimea Going East—A Clash of Great Power Strategies," *Military Law and Law of War Review* 53, no. 1 (2014): 56.

198 Vladimir Putin, "Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly," December 4, 2014, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47173, quoted in Andrei Kolesnikov, *Russian Ideology after Crimea*, 5.

> these lands made this choice for our entire people. When I say "for our entire people," we know today's reality of course, know that there are the Ukrainian people and the Belarusian people, and other peoples too, and we respect all the parts of this heritage, but at the same time, at the foundations of this heritage are the common spiritual values that make us a single people."[199]

By contrast, Eitelhuber cogently claims that the idea of Moscow being the Third Rome no longer explains Russia's justification for expansion.[200] But the upswing for Putin's popular support after annexing Crimea showcased the tractive power of the narrative and its included myths.[201] As a result, the reference to Crimea as the birthplace of the Russkiy Mir serves to justify Russian irredentism and foster the support for reuniting Russian territories as well as strengthening the memory of times of harmony caused and determined by a strong leader.

Additionally, Putin referred to a second myth about the heroic battles in Crimea that ended up in sacrifice, especially in the Great Patriotic War, see Figure 5. This argument seems universal for the western part of the post-Soviet countries rather than being unique to Crimea. It applies, for instance, to other regions and cities like Minsk and Saint Petersburg. On the language level, the fallen Russians symbolize the concept of sacrifice for the object of defending the fatherland. On the level of myth, soldiers' graves become a symbol of sacrifice through the concept of assigning priority to the community with the object of society's cohesion and unity.

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[199] Vladimir Putin, "Orthodox-Slavic Values: The Foundation of Ukraine's Civilisational Choice Conference," address on July 27, 2013, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/18961, quoted in Sanshiro Hosaka, "The Kremlin's 'Active Measures' Failed in 2013: That's When Russia Remembered Its Last Resort—Crimea," 342.

[200] Eitelhuber, *Russland im 21. Jahrhundert*, 79.

[201] Putin's approval rate skyrocketed from about 60% at the end of 2013 to more than 80% in the first quarter of 2014, depicted online at http://www.levada.ru/en/.

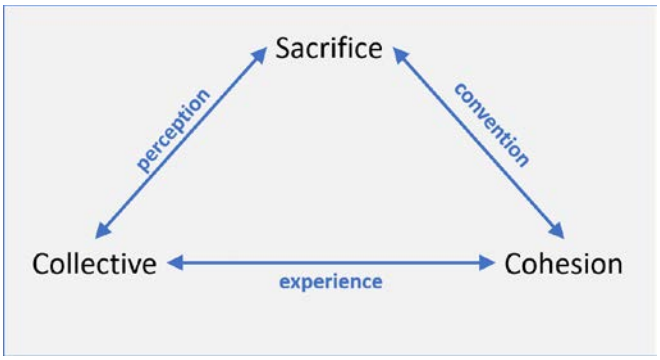

Figure 5. Semiotic Triangle—Sacrifice

The sacrifice myth supports Moscow's narrative by addressing the Russian yearning for security, which in turn causes the desire for reaching geographical borders.[202] Thus, the Kremlin's paradigm is disseminated—the mindset that is dominated by the vision of Russia as a great power based on its sphere of influence.[203] Consequently, Crimea embodies Moscow's revisionism that seeks to alter the status quo. Additionally, Russia's threat perception is emphasized—the fear which is driven by the obsession of being encircled or even landlocked.[204] In consequence, the latter combined with the wish to restore historical justice[205] expresses Russian revanchism and represents the cornerstones of Russia's worldview.

Foreshadowing the annexation, Putin implied the upcoming burden the Russian society would have to shoulder. His speech highlighted the sacrifice to appeal to Russian's passionate will to suffer for defending the fatherland. In conjunction, the already established celebration of the Defender of the Fatherland Day institutionalizes the collective memory and manifests Russian pride to foster society's cohesion.[206] The support for the Kremlin increased because a cohesive Russian society tends to unite behind

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[202] Eitelhuber, *Russland im 21. Jahrhundert*, 100–101.

[203] Plokhy, *Lost Kingdom*, 321.

[204] Eitelhuber, *Russland im 21. Jahrhundert*, 179–82.

[205] Ostap Kushnir, "Russian Geopolitical Advancements in the Black Sea Region: The Annexation of Crimea," *Athenaeum Polish Political Science Studies* 56 (2017): 112.

[206] Plokhy, *Lost Kingdom*, 333.

its leadership, especially when directed to face external threats.[207] Thereby, the narrative and its myth of the need for sacrifice bolstered the upswing of Putin's approval rate.

With his special emphasis on the sacred city of Sevastopol, Putin reminded Russian society of two brutal wars. Thereby, he has given a clearly recognizable orientation for the strategic direction to the Russian audience and he has refreshed the memory that the West has been Russia's opponent for centuries. The collective memory of heroic resistance against Great Britain and France in the Crimean War and to Nazi Germany in the Great Patriotic War fosters the association with an existential peril.

Additionally, the territorialization of Russian collective memory shapes the notion of imposed state borders that deviate from cultural boundaries.[208] In this way, the Kremlin's revanchist mindset delivers the scapegoat on which to project Russian grievances by connecting past animosity with contemporary disputes. In his speech, Putin proclaimed, "It was only when Crimea ended up as part of a different country that Russia realized that it was not simply robbed, it was plundered."[209] Thus, the Russian dissatisfaction with the status quo is attributed to external actors who caused the perceived injustice.

Despite the fact the Crimean War was lost due to Russia's backwardness and inability or unwillingness to adapt, the Sevastopol myth presents a wider reach. It glorifies the protection of imperial acquisitions made by Russian tsars.[210] Thus, highlighting Sevastopol adds to the values of the origin myth and the memory of grandeur by giving evidence to the claim that Russia's calling reaches beyond the Holy Rus'. In consequence, the city of glory flanks the uniqueness of Crimea as birthplace for the Idea of Russia. The Russian novelist Nikolaev expressed the meaning of the Sevastopol myth with sharp tongue and precision in 1993:

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[207] Giles, *Moscow Rules*, 122.

[208] Plokhy, "The City of Glory: Sevastopol in Russian Historical Mythology," 381.

[209] Putin, "Speech on March 18, 2014."

[210] Plokhy, "The City of Glory: Sevastopol in Russian Historical Mythology," 377.

On the ruins of our superpower
There is a major paradox of history:
Sevastopol—the city of Russian glory
Is ... outside Russian territory.[211]

In sum, the combination of both myths, origin and sacrifice, explains the successful accumulation of support. The gained approval might be politically calculated or just an inherent consequence of the paradigm that determines the view of Russia's leadership. Either way, the synergy of both affected the political will and readiness of Russia's government to risk war because Crimea is a unique symbol for Russian identity that has powerful implications for the legitimacy of Putinism.

D. CRIMEA'S LEGITIMACY POTENTIAL

Capturing Crimea symbolizes that Putin can turn the tides and halt Russia's decline. The peninsula seems to meet all the criteria of the Kremlin's school of thought considering Russia's policy drivers: irredentism, revanchism, and revisionism. By connecting past and present, Russians associate Crimea with a region that represents glory and grandeur. Consequently, accomplishing the seizure and reintegration of the irredenta gives evidence to the postulated benign character of Russia's statist order. On both sides of the Strait of Kerch, Russian identity triumphed after Putin announced the *Reunification*. Nevertheless, the effect on legitimacy has a domestic and an international dimension and the redemption of Crimea affects legitimacy on all three levels and drags the emphasis further away from the rule-based type of accepted domination.

Seizing the peninsula signals Russian nationalistic and preordained perception of state. Therefore, Moscow's dominating statist view reveals its abstruse Russian version of interpreting the three-element theory of Georg Jellinek, who proclaims the commonly accepted definition for state from the perspective of constitutional law. He defines the state as a social construct composed of territory, people, and rule. Jellinek operationalizes that rule determines social life; territory sets boundaries for the range of rule; and people

[211] Quoted in: Plokhy, "The City of Glory: Sevastopol in Russian Historical Mythology,"382.

incorporates all citizens who contribute to forming a collective will that directs the rule and are subject to the rule.[212]

Consequently, the annexation of Crimea is an expression of Russian nationalism that has pushed the borders of the Kremlin's rule and fosters the hyper-elevation of the Russian state. Creating a nation, Benedict Anderson explains, requires "an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."[213] He further specifies imagined by emphasizing the non-personal relation of this community[214] For the aspect of construction, Ghia Nodia prompts, "there simply are no God-given or naturally preordained borders."[215] The Kremlin, on the contrary, preys on such an assumption of preordination.

For Russian irredentism, the Russian state has incorporated a symbolic territory that aligns cultural and political borders. Thereby, the extended degree of national unity fuels the justification for the Russian polity, reassures Russians to accept the narrative that has proven to tell the truth about Russia's destiny, and infuses confidence in Russian society by representing continuity and confirmation of rightful claims. At the government level, the Kremlin achieved a goal that was subtly set by cultural consciousness and collective memory. Thus, the statist system delivered and demonstrated its capability to generate good deeds for the nation. As a result, the accomplishment justifies the statist vision of statehood and fosters acceptance of the Idea of Russia in the populace by reaffirming the existence of the Russian identity. Putin added to his legacy the title of unifier. Subsequently, the increased popular support showcased the populace's attachment to the ruler-level and its wish to obey because his decision rests on a collectively understood justification that inspires acceptance of his domination.

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[212] Georg Jellinek, *Das Recht des modernen Staates. Erster Band—Allgemeine Staatslehre* [Constitution of the Modern State. Basic State Theory] (Berlin: O. Häring, vol. 1, 2nd ed., 1905, Chapter XIII), 381–420, in German only, https://archive.org/details/allgemeinestaat00jellgoog/page/n414.

[213] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 6.

[214] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6

[215] Ghia Nodia, "Nationalism and Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 3, no. 4 (October 1992): 7.

With regard to revanchism, the re-incorporation of Crimea brought satisfaction. Domestically, most of Russian society perceives the annexation of Crimea in a way as correcting a historic injustice that happened to them because the West exploited Moscow's weakness and established an unreasonable imposition. Conversely, Putin's ability to reverse the unfair resulting separation adds the attribute of just ruler rather than avenger to his characterization in the eyes of Russians. In this case, the legitimacy type shifts from legal to charismatic for the ruler level. Additionally, the Kremlin reasserted the traditional type of accepted domination in Russia when the statist order prevailed over the opposing liberal democracy. Therein, the distinction from the West and the Russian exceptionalism promoted by the Russkiy Mir appeared to be victorious and increased the acceptability of the action. Moreover, the Russian state has refurnished past grandeur by adding to its reputation vis-à-vis the West through successful resistance against further deterioration of Russia's position in international affairs.

Concerning Russian revisionism, the annexation presented Moscow's decisiveness to the international audience. The Kremlin showed the capability to shift the balance of power on its own terms. The overarching message is that legitimacy outweighs unjust legality and Moscow's power is great enough to enforce the revision, dupe its opponents, and establish hegemonial order in the Russian sphere, which the West helplessly had to watch. As a result, Russia challenged the status quo with partial success by questioning the European security architecture without facing severe consequences.

Consequently, the characteristic of such legitimacy is founded on the charismatic type at the ruler level. By linking present-day events with historic concepts, Moscow adds the traditional type of accepted domination to the inextricably intertwined justification in order to portray persistence and exemplify continuity for advocating the statist state-building, distinguishing Russia from the West, and promoting the Idea of Russia. The incorporation of Crimea enlarged Russia with additional territory, signifying a repetition of the past sequence that *simfonija* follows *smuta.* Further, the Russian state abandoned international law by breaking treaties, guarantees, and promises, which shifts the primary source for state legitimacy to the traditional type. Yet, the observable pattern reminds the

analyst of the collection of Rus' land rather than the imperial expansion fueled by a messianic calling that goes beyond cultural boundaries.

By contrast, Russia's security worsened immediately after the annexation of Crimea. The Kremlin added another frozen conflict to Russia's periphery, which has destabilized the desired buffer zone. The goal of dismantling NATO seems to have retreated into the far distance. The alliance has adapted its strategic view toward Russia. Collective defense has returned as a priority for NATO's posture and its member states' military capability planning. For the short-term assessment, the annexation has turned out as damp squib and rather exacerbated Russia's security environment.

But in the long run, Russia's decisive action has affected the geopolitical landscape dramatically. Although NATO adjusted, the reaction to Russia boosted the Kremlin's self-esteem—being back at the negotiation table of great powers. Europe and the United States will need to take precautions since an emboldened Russia signaled that further incursion in the Russian sphere will come with a risk for Western security. These considerations reveal more about the balance of power than they are an assessment of the equilibrium of military clout. Consequently, the Russian objectives for the Crimean coup centered on political will and not on capabilities. Otherwise, the Kremlin would have failed foolishly.

In sum, Russia's capture of Crimea offered a bouquet of legitimacy potential based on the peninsula's unique symbolic meaning that matches with the three policy drivers, fits optimally in the Idea of Russia, and reaffirms that the Russian decision makers' paradigm of being belittled, besieged, and betrayed by the West is, in fact, pre-determined. The existing myths related to Crimea revitalize the Russian collective memory vividly. The annexation rejuvenated the national self-esteem driven by the notion of glory, greatness, and unity. Nevertheless, Russia's security, at first glance, has not been enhanced by calculating NATO's consequent threat adjustment and the periphery's shrinking stability. Putin, however, is willing to pay these costs for sustaining, improving, and expanding the legitimacy of Putinism as well as accumulating reputation for Russia's grandeur.

Considering the thoughts of Clausewitz for another time, it is interesting to note one of his conclusions in *On War* that resonates in the current case: power is used to enforce

one's will upon the enemy—the means-to-end relation called the purpose of war.[216] In conclusion, this chapter argues that Russia annexed Crimea in order to force its will upon Kiev and Western capitals for the objective of redeeming legally lost territory and ultimately preventing the loss of its grip on that territory, avenging a historical injustice by correcting it, and revising the status quo by shifting the balance of power the post-Cold War order had disadvantageously established.

Moreover, Moscow has been driven by the urgency to protect its values that are promoted in the Russkiy Mir and widely shared in the Russian populace. For the Kremlin, the statist concept and the ideal of *simfonija,* which both foster strong man leadership, are at stake in Ukraine. To that end, values-based actions accumulate legitimacy best, because, according to Weber, "Not ideas but material and ideal interests, directly govern men's conduct. Yet very frequently the 'world images' that have been created by 'ideas' have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamics of interests."[217]

The Idea of Russia is just such a track for the Kremlin. When Moscow reflects on the Western values-based arguments that criticize Russian actions, the Kremlin concludes, trapped in a loop, that the narrative's primer of double standards is at work, because Crimea is to Russia what the Cote d'Azur is to France—culturally owned space with strategic significance. As a result, legitimacy and the quest for great power status solidify into one underlying paradigm for the Kremlin. In Putin's words,

> "[…] we retain the right to use all available means to protect those people. We believe this would be absolutely legitimate. This is our last resort."[218]

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[216] Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege* (published by Oliver von Corff, Berlin, 2010), 3–4, https://www.clausewitz-gesellschaft.de/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/VomKriege-a4.pdf.

[217] Quoted in Robert Jarvis, *Perceptions and Misperceptions in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 9.

[218] Vladimir Putin, "Vladimir Putin Answered Journalists' Questions on the Situation in Ukraine," March 4, 2014, press release by the Kremlin, online no longer available, quoted in: Mantovani and Rickenbacher, "Crimea Going East—A Clash of Great Power Strategies," 54.

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IV. TARGETING THE BALTICS—*BALTIJA NASH?*

In January 2007, the Estonian government announced its intention to relocate a Soviet-era war memorial in Tallinn. Thereafter, Estonia faced a cyberattack that flooded the country's IT infrastructure and caused, subsequently, an outage of unknown extent. The event has been deemed the first major account of cyber warfare. When the excavations at the memorial site began on April 26, Estonia's IT services were targeted, and the peak of the attack was synchronized with the celebrations of Victory Day in Russia on May 9, 2007.[219] On that same day, Putin mentioned in his speech at the military parade in Moscow,

> We will preserve this sacred memory and historical legacy. Those who attempt today to belittle this invaluable experience and defile the monuments to the heroes of this war are insulting their own people and spreading enmity and new distrust between countries and peoples.[220]

Ever since, the terms cyber warfare and later hybrid warfare emerged to dominate the discourse about military strategy for the decade to follow. Military analyses have focused on the changing nature of warfare, whilst NATO has adapted its threat perception regarding the virtual domain. Thereby, NATO has adjusted accordingly to Baltic security concerns. Those were immediately expressed by Estonian Defense Minister Jaak Aaviksoo. He admonished the West that "[T]aking into account what has been going on in Estonian cyber-space, both the EU and NATO clearly need to take a much stronger approach and cooperate closely to develop practical ways of combatting cyber-attacks."[221]

The fault line of present-day relations between Russia and the Baltic states, however, runs alongside a cultural border that demarcated Russia's reach toward the West.

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[219] For a detailed description of the event, see: "2007 Cyber Attacks on Estonia" NATO Strategic Communication Center of Excellence, https://stratcomcoe.org/download/file/fid/80772.

[220] Vladimir Putin, "Speech at the Military Parade Celebrating the 62nd Anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War," May 9, 2007, Red Square Moscow, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24238.

[221] Quoted in "Estonia urges firm EU, NATO response to new form of warfare: cyber-attacks," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 16, 2007, https://www.smh.com.au/national/estonia-urges-firm-eu-nato-response-to-new-form-of-warfare-cyber-attacks-20070516-gdq5iu.html.

In the Estonian city of Narva this centuries-old cultural boundary is displayed by monuments. In Estonia, the Hermann Castle guards the left bank of the border river facing the Ivangorod Fortress on the opposite side in Russia. The former was established as a fortified outpost of the Livonian Order whereas the latter was constructed by Muscovites as a bulwark against the Teutonic Knights. Their appearance reveals to the observer how the relationship developed. When Russia gained control over the region, the Hermann Castle lost its relevance whilst the Ivangorod Fortress had constantly been improved to represent tsarist power.

For present-day Russia, the significance of this demarcation was revitalized when the Baltic states entered the Western alliance and also became member states of the EU in 2004. At the beginning, the membership process was accompanied by doubts in the West, suspicions in Russia, and great hopes in the Baltics. Recently, an Estonian official summarized the situation at the outset, "[W]hen the Baltic states termed that NATO membership was their goal, many countries in the West said: Don't rock the boat."[222] In consequence, the Baltic states articulated their desire for membership with lucid explanations and rather courageous diplomacy. With a bold move, the Lithuanian president Algirdas Brazauskas applied directly for NATO membership in a letter to secretary general Manfred Wörner on September 4, 1994, in which Brazauskas explains:

> Lithuania's position on NATO membership is not directed against neighbouring states or any European countries. There should be a place for each of them in the new security structures of our continent. We regard favorably the "Partnership for Peace" initiative. As in the past, we support close cooperation among the Baltic States in all areas, including defense, as well as the advancement of security and stability throughout the Baltic Sea region.[223]

In the aftermath of Crimea's annexation, the Baltic states' membership in NATO has become the bone of contention between Russia and the Alliance. Recently emerged

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[222] Merle Maigre (Security Policy Adviser to the President of Estonia) in "Panel VI—A Look Back on Membership: How the Baltic States Joined NATO and the EU," Tbilisi International Conference, September 6–7, 2016, video, 4:00, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sgKTMOnTOGc.

[223] Algirdas Brazauskas, "Letter to NATO secretary general Manfred Wörner," September 4, 1994, https://twitter.com/ProfPaulPoast/status/1114506248408444928/photo/1.

tensions in the region have been perceived as a geographical orientation for a hypothetical battlefield and a primer for anticipating the expected sort of warfare rather than as an evolvement of cleavages. The remainder of the chapter seeks to analyze Moscow's strategic view of the Baltic region, along the outline of the previous chapter, to identify contrasts and similarities to the Crimean case.

A. RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC OUTSET IN 2019

With regard to Russian irredentism, the Baltic states do not meet the criteria and never have. The Kremlin has never successfully achieved its policy objective of Russification in the region. The national awakening in the 19th century,[224] the presence of resistance embodied in the Forest Brothers that lasted from after World War II until the 1950s,[225] or the Baltic Way of 1989,[226] showcase the cultural distinction that prevailed in the Baltics beyond the fault lines of religions, commerce patterns, languages, and nationalities, as well as Soviet ideology.[227]

Some reasons can be identified for the Kremlin's underachievement in the various epochs: the lack of resources for Russification efforts in the Baltics whilst expanding Russia in all directions simultaneously; and Russian institutional backwardness that needed not only to compete but overcome the advanced Western-designed institutions of the societies in the Baltics. Historically, tsarist Moscow's policy relied on co-opting elites to execute control rather than on exchanging the elite strata.[228] Then, especially during the early Soviet era, varying Russian-ethnic influxes resulted in urban areas with concentrated

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224 For a specific analysis of the national awakening in Latvia and Estonia, see: Kevin O'Connor, *The History of the Baltic States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003), 44–53.

225 For an overview of the Lithuanian Forest Brothers from 1944 till 1952, see: V. Stanley Vardys, "The Partisan Movement in Postwar Lithuania," *Lituanus Lithuanian Quarterly Journal of Art and Science* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1969), http://www.lituanus.org/1969/69_1_02.htm.

226 For a detailed depiction of The Baltic Way, see: "The Baltic Way," *Latvian National Commission for UNESCO* (the project was set up to collect memories for commemorating the 25th anniversary in 2014), http://www.thebalticway.eu/en/history/.

227 Corum, *The Security Concerns of the Baltic States as NATO Allies*, 8–9.

228 O'Connor, *The History of the Baltic States*, 53–56.

Russian pockets like Riga, Tallinn, or Narva,[229] due to Russia's modernization and industrialization needs.

Against this background, the NATO and EU memberships of the Baltic states succeeded because the three countries "were clear-eyed regarding their geopolitical predicament."[230] Baltic officials framed their positions on Russia through this very lens of historic experience and, consequently, "the annexation of Crimea served as the vindication of long-held positions."[231] Therefore, the NATO membership process and its circumstances are crucial for understanding the present-day Russian posture toward the Baltics.

In the early 2000s, the Kremlin appeared to have considered the Baltic question pragmatically. Contemporary analysts were tempted to draw euphoric conclusions, as Marko Mihkelson demonstrated in 2003, "[B]y removal of that geopolitical dimension, the economic attraction of the region will undoubtedly increase."[232] In retrospect, two factors aided the Baltic states in their desire for membership. The post-9/11 atmosphere between the United States and Russia seems to have fostered Moscow's acceptance of the Baltic states NATO membership; and prior to that turning point the Kremlin had already signaled that Russia would ask for something in return for accepting NATO's enlargement in the Baltic region.[233] As a result, NATO made concessions to Russian security concerns and, according to Mark Kramer, the alliance "deliberately excluded the three of them [Baltic states] from allied contingency defense plans."[234] Moreover, these particular historical

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229 For a visualization with a map, see: Grigas, *Beyond Crimea*, 139.

230 Andris Banka, "The Breakaways: A Retrospective on the Baltic Road to NATO," War on The Rocks, October 4, 2019, https://warontherocks.com/2019/10/the-breakaways-a-retrospective-on-the-baltic-road-to-nato/.

231 Kadri Liik, "The Baltic States and Russia—On Diplomatic Dimensions of Security," in *Security in The Baltic Sea Region: Realities and Prospects*, ed. Andris Spruds and Maris Andzans (The Riga Conference Papers 2017, Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2017), 149.

232 Marko Mihkelson, "Baltic-Russian Relations in Light of Expanding NATO and EU," *Demokratizatsiya* 11, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 278.

233 Banka, "The Breakaways: A Retrospective on the Baltic Road to NATO."

234 Mark Kramer, "Russia, the Baltic Region, and the Challenge for NATO," *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo* no. 267 (July 2013), 2.

accounts give the impression that "Russia sees the Baltics as having been lost to the U.S. "sphere of influence."[235]

Yet, such analyses fail to address Moscow's strategic perspective whilst focusing on that of the three Baltic states. At that time, Putinism was in an exceedingly early development stage and the Idea of Russia was starting to evolve. The former directed Russia's political energy to the domestic affairs with a focus on consolidating the statist concept and the re-establishment of vertical power. The latter excluded the Baltic states from the core of the narrative for Russianness due to cultural, religious, and language boundaries. Additionally, it is of utmost importance to realize that Russia already had a forward presence in the Baltic region—Oblast Kaliningrad.

Consequently, the Kremlin's strategic forward position in the region has never been at stake when Moscow compromised in the Baltic question. By comparing Russia's three infamous violent acts against its neighbors—Estonia 2007, Georgia 2008, and Ukraine 2014—one factor appears to deviate from the Russian pattern: Moscow went on to start a punitive campaign that resulted in cementing its forward posture, except in the Baltics. In Georgia, the quasi-legal establishment of South Ossetia has created a stronghold for Russia beyond the Caucasus that facilitates power projection in the bordering countries. In Ukraine, the quasi-legal reunification with Crimea has changed the setting for Russia's presence that enables Moscow to strengthen its footprint undisturbed and bolsters power projection in the Black Sea region. But in the Estonian case, the result was diametrically inverted as NATO's reaction has been limited to adapting its strategic view to the cyber domain and Russia gained not a millimeter of territory. Thus, two questions arise that need to be answered for understanding Russia's different views on the Baltics and Crimea. What distinguishes the Baltic Sea region from the Black Sea region in Moscow's perspective? What has changed Russia's behavior between 2004 and 2007 that activated the Kremlin's will to engage in Estonia and, subsequently, to what end did Moscow start its hostility?

The answer to the first question needs to emphasize the strategic significance of the Oblast Kaliningrad. Western military analyses mostly center on the presumption that war

[235] Liik, "The Baltic States and Russia—On Diplomatic Dimensions of Security," 148.

with Russia is a worst-case scenario. Therefore, such studies predominantly address the operational situation with a focus on the assumed Russian military objective: cutting off the Baltic states by closing the so-called Suwalki gap—the distance between the borders of Russia's Kaliningrad and Belarus. Recently, the discourse about the military consequences of Russia's strategic position in Kaliningrad has opened up for broader assessments. According to Sascha Rackwitz, "Kaliningrad is dependent on supplies from the sea, and a possible Baltic area of operations is entirely within the range of regional allied naval forces" and he further concludes that "A2/AD [anti access/aerial denial] is a concept for obtaining sea control in coastal and confined waters, which is primarily characterized by the use of land-based capabilities."[236] But Rackwitz clearly reminds his readers that such operational considerations are based on the presumption that deterrence has obviously failed when NATO must organize convoys for crossing the Atlantic.

Nevertheless, the strategic value of Russia's Kaliningrad exclave derives from its geographic position. Thereby, the Kremlin obtains a legally accepted forward presence in the region. That presence is part of the post-Cold War status quo and has never been contested by the West. Moscow has used that favorable position for a strong posture to project power by "gauging the opposing state´s power and will to maintain security and influence over a region."[237] Consequently, the Kaliningrad presence seems to have served as a template in Crimea and South Ossetia from Moscow's strategic perspective, instead of concluding that the Russian operation in 2014 might serve as blueprint for the Baltics.

An explanation for the second question is also closely tied to Kaliningrad. It is striking that Russia somehow accepted NATO's enlargement in the Baltic region in 2003. Moreover, the Kremlin was not rattled when the alliance immediately deployed air force assets. "NATO has been protecting the Baltic skies since 2004, when Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania joined the Alliance. The Baltic Air Policing mission started in April 2004 and

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[236] Sascha H. Rackwitz, "Clausewitz, Corbett, and Corvettes," Center for International Maritime Security, April 17, 2020, http://cimsec.org/clausewitz-corbett-and-corvettes/43475.

[237] David Takacs, "Ukraine's Deterrence Failure: Lessons for the Baltic States," *Journal on Baltic Security* 3, no. 1 (2017): 2.

has been executed continuously ever since."[238] But Russia reacted severely when Estonia relocated a Soviet war memorial in 2007. By adapting Peter Paret's observation about the meaning of paintings and war, it seems applicable to conclude that the memorial "is less about war than about the concept of authority and policy."[239] Through the prism of the Russkiy Mir, the relocation of such a memorial challenged the Kremlin's narrative. From Moscow's point of view, the legitimacy of Russia's presence was contested. It is plausible to assume the Kremlin, in a paranoid way, anticipated that probing the narrative could lead to questioning the legitimacy of Russia's claim on Kaliningrad in the long run.

Additionally, the Russian struggle with Kiev started long before the annexation of Crimea. Ukraine had already been targeted by Moscow's gas price policy in 2005.[240] It is also noteworthy that Moscow's efforts to consolidate the Russian presence in Georgia are still ongoing.[241] The process, in fact, started much earlier than 2008—the South Ossetian population had already held two internationally unrecognized referendums for independence in 1992 and 2006.[242] Prior to Russian actions, both countries had seen so-called color revolutions—Georgia had its Rose Revolution in 2003 and Ukraine had its Orange Revolution in 2004. These developments in Russia's neighborhood contextualize the Kremlin's cyberattack on Estonia in 2007.

For Russia's current strategic outlook, the global security environment has developed remarkably since the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Ever since, the Kremlin has

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238 "Air Policing: Securing NATO Airspace," NATO topic, last updated on May 16, 2018, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_132685.htm?selectedLocale=en.

239 Peter Paret, *Imagined Battles—Reflections of War in European Art* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 12.

240 For an overview of the gas conflict, see: Jim Nichol, Steven Woehrel, and Bernard A. Gelb, *Russia's Cutoff of Natural Gas to Ukraine: Context and Implications*, CRS Report No. RS22378 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2006), http://congressionalresearch.com/RS22378/document.php.

241 This process has not ended yet. Recently, the Georgian Embassy in Washington, DC, made a press release concerning the ongoing Russian efforts to push the borders of their presence to consolidate the Russian position. The statement encompasses a map depicting Russian gains, see: "Russia's Occupation of Georgia's Territories Intensifies," Georgian Embassy in Washington, DC, April 20, 2020, https://georgiaembassyusa.org/2020/04/20/russias-occupation-of-georgias-territories-intensifies/?fbclid=IwAR2qMwemN3EKunpBiegFnDfL0tlvQad8z3rhPhCRjQjCcy-jDDFUxq77vng.

242 Maria Danilova, "Georgia: Separatist Vote Illegitimate," *The Associated Press*, November 11, 2006, https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/11/AR2006111101247.html.

engaged more visibly in global affairs and has dramatically affected the security perception in the West. In Europe's capitals, Russia's actions shocked the community of policy makers. Thereafter, France and Germany initiated the so-called Normandy format for peace negotiations in the Ukraine crisis that led to the Minsk agreements. Thus, the format provided Moscow with the sought-after taste of great power bargaining, but the result failed to deliver a stabilizing settlement for the Donbas region.

Moreover, Russia vested its military in the cause of protecting the regime in Damascus that has been fighting the Syrian civil war against its own populace and Islamic terrorists. The additional military capabilities from Russia not only prolonged the fight but also intensified the migration of refugees, which contributed to the European migration crisis in 2015. A similar pattern can be observed in Libya. Russia supports General Haftar in his attempt to gain control over the North African state.

As a result, Russia's engagement in the Mediterranean region serves various purposes vis-à-vis the West. Moscow's involvement has fostered the destabilization of Europe's periphery, which forced the West to reallocate resources. Thereby, rather distracting or camouflaging, the Kremlin redirected the political attention of Western organizations southwards to widen the gulf between north and south among those organizations. In addition, Moscow took the chance to present the image of being the protector against Western intrusion, which suits its efforts to be perceived as a great power.

Furthermore, the Kremlin has utilized the intensified confrontation in the Middle East to bolster the divide between Turkey and its allies. The tripartite negotiations of Russia, Turkey, and Iran over the situation in Syria, and Turkey's procurement of Russian missile defense systems, showcase the alienating effect in Ankara. But Moscow's efforts to drive a wedge between Western allies have not been undetected or ignored. Within Western alliances, the discourse about Russian policies has been re-ignited and the warning voices from Eastern member states have started to echo throughout Europe and North America.

On the contrary, the Crimean annexation infused Eastern European states to mobilize and unite political efforts against the Russian menace. In 2015, the Three Seas

Initiative was launched "to promote connectivity among nations in Central and Eastern Europe by supporting infrastructure, energy, and digital interconnectivity projects."[243] The underlying geostrategic mindset of this project stems from century-old considerations for the region between the Baltic and the Black Seas, especially in Poland with its *Intermarium* strategy. Today, the rejuvenating effect for Polish strategic thinking is palpable.[244] Moscow's foreign policy alone made possible that such an initiative concerning the strategic outset was unveiled and is driven by Eastern European countries and the United States in order to counterbalance the East-West axis by establishing a stronger North-South belt disadvantageous for Russia. Against this background, Washington's anger and, subsequently, its sanctions against the Russian-German Nord Stream II gas pipeline in the Baltic Sea can be explained.[245]

With regard to the United States, the presidential elections in 2016 left a mark on Washington. Moscow's meddling in the democratic process demonstrated its own strategic reach, the vulnerability of democracy as portrayed in the vicious face of campaigning for office, and the domestic gulf between the political camps. The aftermath absorbed Capitol Hill and the White House to an extent that has been unprecedented. Additionally, the Trump Administration set a new strategic course from the outset. The institutionalized global architecture has been questioned at almost every occasion. Washington has given the impression that the United States seeks to withdraw from the Western leadership. Yet, the measures taken behind the grand stage of diplomacy speak otherwise. The United States has re-committed military resources to the European theatre despite the headline: "Trump said NATO is obsolete."

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[243] David A. Wemer, "The Three Seas Initiative Explained," *New Atlanticist*, February 11, 2019, https://atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/the-three-seas-initiative-explained-2/.

[244] For an overview on the Intermarium's historic development, see: Ostap Kushnir (editor), *The Intermarium as the Polish-Ukrainian Linchpin of Baltic-Black Sea Cooperation* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019).

[245] For an overview of the project, see its online presence, https://www.nord-stream2.com/company/rationale/. For a glimpse of the U.S. position, see: Anna Mikulska, "U.S. Sanctions Against Nord Stream 2 Pipeline: Strategic Hit Or Miss?" *Forbes*, August 15, 2019, https://www.forbes.com/sites/thebakersinstitute/2019/08/15/us-sanctions-against-nord-stream-2-pipeline-strategic-hit-or-miss/#3924e36fe5a7.

Particularly within NATO, the awareness of Russia's revanchist ambitions has increased. As a result, the Kremlin has re-occupied its role as threatening actor and the alliance has agreed to conclude that "[U]nder Putin, Moscow's primary ambition has been to reverse the changes of the post-Cold War era. Its strategic behavior has been calibrated to this end: containing, undermining and reversing NATO influence throughout Europe's east."[246] In consequence, NATO adjusted its posture toward Russia and deployed rotational forces to re-assure its own deterrence credibility, which has not benefitted Russia's security perception on the operational level, at first glance.

Nonetheless, the revival of dichotomy on the strategic level aids Putinism. The invigorated antagonism fuels the Kremlin's narrative of a Western threat that must be rebuffed by Russia. Every measure of the West can be framed as anti-Russian aggression and reveals, therefore, like a self-fulfilling prophecy the urgency to protect Russia in order to gain the domestic population's acceptance of Putinism. If NATO can even be dismantled Russia would be victorious as a great power once again. Thus, the next step in this analysis explains how the Kremlin tweaks history and draws on myth for its narrative regarding the Baltic states. The next section provides the historical background.

B. RUSSIAN AND BALTIC HISTORY

By contrast to Crimea, the turbulent 20th century determined Russian history in the Baltic region. In fact, the historical links can be summarized simply. In World War I Russia was amongst the biggest losers and lost the Baltics; in World War II the Soviet Union was the main victor and re-gained control over the Baltics; and in the Cold War Russia again lost the Baltic States and considered itself the main loser.[247]

The first significant Russian incursion of the Baltic region began with the downfall of the Teutonic and Livonian Orders in the mid-16th century.[248] Tsar Ivan IV (the Terrible)

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[246] Janusz Bugajski and Peter B. Doran, "Black Sea Imperatives," *CEPA Strategic Report* no. 3, November 2016, 25, https://www.cepa.org/black-sea-imperatives.

[247] Torbakov, "History, Memory and National Identity Understanding the Politics of History and Memory Wars in Post-Soviet Lands," 216–20.

[248] O'Connor, *The History of the Baltic States*, 23.

started the Livonian War in 1558 that resulted in losing any previously gained or inherited foothold on the Baltic littoral.[249] Thereafter, the Swedish Empire evolved in Northern Europe and controlled most of the Baltics, especially Estonia, until the Great Northern War ended with the Treaty of Nystad in 1721.[250] On this occasion Tsar Peter I earned the honorifics "the Great," "All-Russian Emperor," and "Father of the Fatherland." Russia became an Empire by name.[251] As a result, Peter I recovered the land lost to the Swedish by Ivan IV, which justified the annexation of Ingria,[252] and gained Estonia.

In the 18th century, Catherine II occupied what was left of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth together with Prussia and Austria. In 1795, the third Polish partition gave Russia new western borders. By then, Russia encompassed all of Lithuania and its Baltic coastline.[253] The Baltic-German nobility sought to secure their privileged position[254] and formed an influential group at the Court in Moscow until 1917.[255] Additionally, Russian colonization fostered a clampdown on Baltic national identities and a ban on printing books in the Latin alphabet enforced the Russian imperialization.[256] Nonetheless, the Baltic states retained their particular identity and stayed oriented toward the West due to religion, culture, and traditional trade relationships.[257]

After the October Revolution of 1917, the emerging Soviet Union fought with the Baltic states over their respective independence, which was finally acknowledged for

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249 Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations*, 125.

250 Kyllike Sillaste, "Conquest and Survival: An Outline of Estonian history," *World Affairs* 157, no. 3 (Winter 1995): 120. See also: Mara Kalnins, *Latvia—A Short History* (London: Hurst and Company, 2015), 87–91.

251 Plokhy, *Lost Kingdome*, 44–45.

252 Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations*, 285.

253 Plokhy, *Lost Kingdom*, 62–63.

254 Sadhana Naithani, *Folklore in Baltic History—Resistance and Resurgence* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2019), 16–20.

255 Sillaste, "Conquest and Survival: An Outline of Estonian History," 120.

256 Grigas, *Beyond Crimea*, 146.

257 Corum, *The Security Concerns of the Baltic States as NATO Allies*, 8–9.

Estonia and Latvia in 1920.[258] The twenty-year period of independence lasted until the Hitler-Stalin-Pact of August 1939 divided Eastern Europe.[259] During World War II, the Baltic States were annexed by the Soviet Union in 1939, then occupied by Nazi Germany in 1941, and recaptured by the Soviet Union in 1944.[260] Subsequently, the Baltic states became part of communist Russia's sphere of influence under Joseph Stalin and were incorporated in the Soviet Union.[261] In the following Soviet era, the three Baltic states were again affected by efforts at Russification that resulted in a tremendous loss of the Baltic population.[262] Until one decade after the end of the Great Patriotic War, national resistance was strong in the Baltics and Soviet rule faced the Forest Brothers, an anti-communist guerrilla force.[263]

As part of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Baltic States played an important role with their protest *The Baltic Way* and their declaration of independence in 1990. Boris Yeltsin sided with the Baltics in his struggle over Russia's sovereignty to separate Russia from the Soviet Union.[264] He recognized the independence of the three Baltic countries on behalf of the Russian Federation in 1991.[265] After the Soviet Union had collapsed, different historical interpretations damaged relations between Russia and the Baltics.[266] In spite of Russia's vain efforts to deny the Baltics an integration with the West, the prolonged

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258 Katja Wezel, "Memory Conflicts as Barrier to Reconciliation," in *The Former Soviet Union and East Central Europe between Conflict and Reconciliation*, ed. Lily Gardner Feldmann, Raisa Barash, Samuel Goda and Andre Zempelberg (Göttingen, DE: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), 136–39.

259 Plokhy, *Lost Kingdom*, 267.

260 Cohen and Radin, "Russia's Hostile Measures in Europe: Understanding the Threat," 24.

261 Corum, *The Security Concerns of the Baltic States as NATO Allies*, 9.

262 Grigas, *Beyond Crimea*, 146.

263 Corum, *The Security Concerns of the Baltic States as NATO Allies*, 10.

264 Wezel, "Memory Conflicts as Barrier to Reconciliation," 132.

265 Vladimir V. Kara-Murza, "Russia and the Baltics—Once Friend, Now Foe," *World Affairs* 177, no. 5 (January/February 2015): 17.

266 Mihkelson, "Baltic-Russian Relations in Light of Expanding NATO and EU," 272.

negotiations about border treaties did not prevent those states gaining membership in the EU and NATO in 2004.[267]

C. THE BALTICS IN RUSSIA'S NARRATIVE

In present-day Russia's narrative, the Baltic states provide the Kremlin with a projection screen. The use of twisted interpretations of history, half-truths, and misinformation serve to display the Kremlin's understanding of Russia being belittled, besieged, and betrayed by the West. The narrative portrays the Baltic states as Russophobic, nationalistic, and declining states.[268] Therein, the three counties are depicted in contrast to Russia; they serve as proxies for Western aggression against Russia and undermine Russia's greatness by denying its past deeds. Russian media outlets broach the issue of contrast especially on occasions related to the victory in World War II.

> Soviet occupation is the favourite topic of Baltic politicians, inspired by the Americans. They have big problems in the Baltics. They have borrowed a lot of money from Europe, but now it is time to return it. Adults and young people left to work in other EU countries, only old people and children stayed. The only trump card for those countries is to keep this anti-Russian and anti-Soviet trend. Now, the Baltic states refuse to participate as millions of people of the planet celebrate the victory over fascism. On July 10, 1944, Soviet units liberated the northern part of Vilnius and entered the Old Town, and on July 13, Vilnius was completely liberated.[269]

By contrast to Crimea, the Kremlin's focal point with the Baltic states centers on the history of the last century. The narrative emphasizes that the Soviet Union liberated the Baltics and refuses to acknowledge the ensuing occupation. Therefore, it downplays the

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267 Wezel, "Memory Conflicts as Barrier to Reconciliation," 138–39. For a brief assessment of Russia's foreign policy towards the Baltic states in the post-Cold War period, see: Mihkelson, "Baltic-Russian Relations in Light of Expanding NATO and EU," 273.

268 Mārtiņš Kaprāns, "Isolating Russia's Three Master Narratives in Latvia," StopFake.org, December 31, 2017, https://www.stopfake.org/en/isolating-russia-s-three-master-narratives-in-latvia/.

269 "Салют спасения. Как в России отметили освобождение Вильнюса от фашистов," [Salute of salvation. How Russia celebrated the liberation of Vilnius from the Nazis] *Baltnews.lt*, July 15, 2019, https://baltnews.lt/vilnius_news/20190715/1019302419/Russia-salut-Vilnius-osvobozhdenie.html), quoted in "Disinfo: The Baltic States refuse to celebrate the victory over Fascism," EUvsDisinfo (EUvsDisinfo is a project of the European External Action Service), https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/the-baltic-states-refuse-to-celebrate-the-victory-over-fascism/.

significance of the Hitler-Stalin Pact and glorifies the liberation in 1944, which had not actually freed the Baltic states but captured the region for the Soviet Union.

> Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia cannot stand the situation, when Moscow gets in their face with historical truth, discounting the myths of "Soviet occupation." Russia and its fireworks remind the nationalists in the Baltic States that they lost the WW2 together with their Führer. Political successors of Hitler's accomplices are in power in the Baltic States. They cannot bear the fireworks to honour the liberation of the Baltic cities from Nazis, because these fireworks remind them of their defeat.[270]

Those recent examples help to identify two differences compared to the Crimean case. The narrative focuses on the actor level rather than on the territorial dimension, and the time span of the narrative is shorter on which to draw brighter memories. Yet, the Kremlin embeds the Baltic states in the wider myth of the Western threat, see Figure 6. On the language level, the Baltic states symbolize the recurring pattern of Moscow rebuffing Western incursions in the Russian World for the object of mobilizing public support. On the level of myth, the Western peril becomes a symbol for Russia's successful resistance and survival, with the object of legitimacy for the strong leader who necessarily commands the rebuff.

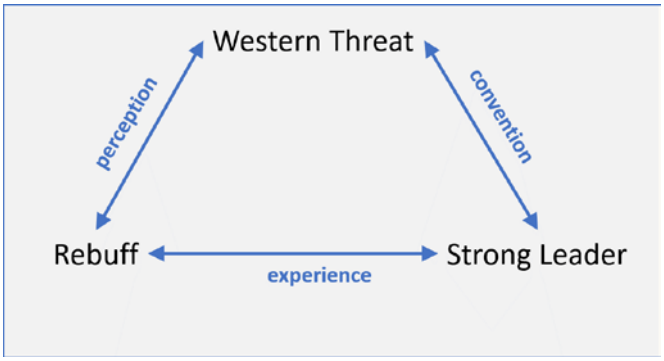

Figure 6. Semiotic Triangle—Western Threat.

The Kremlin's view stems from the myth that Moscow, according to Maria Snegovaya, presumes to act in "Russia's historical struggle to preserve its sovereignty

[270] Aleksandr Nosovic, "Московские салюты напоминают Прибалтике о поражении во Второй мировой," [Moscow's salutes remind the Baltics of defeat in World War II] Rubaltic.ru, July 15, 2019, https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/15072019-moskovskie-salyuty-napominayut-pribaltike-o-porazhenii-vo-vtoroy-mirovoy/.

against the predatory West."[271] This glorification of the past compensates for the absence "of any considerable contemporary achievements that could be a source of national pride."[272] Conclusively, the myth addresses the domestic Russian audience rather than the Baltic populaces. The myth recollects the memory of Russian victorious superiority in the glorified past to distract from present-day shortcomings of the Kremlin, to prove the continuity of Russian greatness, and to protect the claim that the statist government design of Putinism is irreplaceable for ensuring Russia's security.

Additionally, the Kremlin's view transformed "the memory of the Victory into a power demonstration and a source of Russia's moral right to dictate its will to others."[273] Moscow signals this reminder to the West to support its revisionist argument against the status quo. The notion differs as compared to the case of Crimea because the Kremlin's narrative aims not for direct control by grabbing the Baltic land, but it seeks to gain the West's acceptance for Russia's authority in the region based on traditional domination instead of the despised rule-based status quo of the disadvantageous post-Cold War era—the most recent *smuta*.

D. THE BALTIC'S LEGITIMACY POTENTIAL

It appears striking that present-day Russia reiterates the polarizing debate about its own identity and the reasoning for its destiny. The long-lasting internal tussle over Russia's fate seems to be concluded under Putin, but only to be externalized because the international community also needs to accept Moscow's providence. When Pipes describes the poles of the Russian discourse in the 19th century, the similarities astonish. The Slavophiles stressed the grotesquely idealized depiction of bygone times to promote the idea that Russia is destined to solve the world's issues due to its harmonized system of trust

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[271] Maria Snegovaya, "Reviving the Propaganda State—How the Kremlin Hijacked History to Survive," *CEPA brief*, January 2018, 6, https://1f3d3593-8810-425c-bc7f-8988c808b72b.filesusr.com/ugd/644196_d47fa4fc96f64f0aadf99392a1df01ae.pdf.

[272] Ieva Bērziņa and Māris Cepurītis, "Russia's Grand Strategy and Its Implications on the Information Environment of the Nordic-Baltic Region," in *Russia's Footprint in the Nordic-Baltic Information Environment*, ed. Elīna Lange-Ionatamišvili (NATO Stratcom Center of Excellence, January 2018), 27.

[273] Lev Gudkov quoted in Snegovaya, "Reviving the Propaganda State," 7.

between authority and nation. Whereas the opposing pole, the so-called Westerners, identified that the difference between Russia and the West stems from backwardness rather than uniqueness.[274] In contrast to past arguments, it transpires that the previously internal bipolarity transcended to the external imagined opponent—the West.

Targeting the Baltic states represents the externalized competition to prove Russia's nationalistic narrative to the domestic audience. The attacks in the so-called grey zone aim to show Russia's moral preeminence without risking a subsequent passage at arms in the Baltics region. This objective explains the lack of irredentist rhetoric, which the Kremlin could hardly construct due to the missing territorial determination that stems from previously failed Russification attempts in the region. The cultural boundary between Orthodox, statist, and East-Slavic Russians and non-Orthodox, liberal democratic, and Western-oriented Balts is all too evident. Therefore, the West is tempted to conclude that Moscow's coercive measures in the region re-draw on the pattern of imperial past.

The explanatory topos of re-imperialization gains plausibility only from the Western perspective. The legitimacy potential of targeting the Baltics, however, affects not only the international dimension but predominantly the domestic one. The latter is underestimated despite its effects on all three levels of accepted domination for the Russian populace. The Idea of Russia excludes the Baltic region. In fact, the narrative presents the Baltic states as part of the West. The Kremlin depicts the region as one of the many areas the West uses to undermine Russia's worldview in order to derail Putinism in Russia.

In terms of revanchism, Moscow's persistent confrontation, especially regarding the history of the Great Patriotic War, serves to provide the domestic audience with the projection of the stylized opponent. The Kremlin's narrative seems to instigate the need for satisfaction, whereas in the Crimean case the Russian call for correcting historical injustice was a silent desire and generally accepted in Russia. This fabricated antagonism does not seek to reconcile the Baltic states with Russia, but it fosters Russian nationalism by boosting self-esteem and viewing "history as a competition of narratives rather than a

[274] Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime*, 268.

search for accuracy."[275] For the level of state legitimacy, the Russian assertiveness vis-à-vis the Baltic states seeks to justify Russia's domination based on supreme civilizational deeds instead of territorial claims.

Moreover, Moscow seems to target Tallinn, Riga, and Vilnius in lieu of directly competing with the West. The Baltic states are not only the frontier of Russia's reach, they also represent Moscow's bygone power that demonstrated the efficacy of the Russian way in the past. This is significant, because the former Russian presence provides the Kremlin with opportunities to mobilize domestic approval for the regime level by associating previous successes in the Baltics with the context of present-day Russia. For the ruler level, Putin appears to be Russia's protector in this competition when the narrative reminds the Russian audience of the continuing need for the strong leader—in the tradition of Peter I, Catherine II, and Stalin. Thus, Moscow's engagement in the region strives for acceptance of the traditional instead of rule-based domination, and the Baltic states are one battlefield for this struggle that offers Moscow leverage for convincing the domestic audience and fuels Russia's self-elevation in international affairs.

With regard to Russian revisionism, Moscow invokes persistently low-level contested instability in the Baltic region to fabricate proof for the status quo's insufficiency. Thus, the Kremlin defines the zone of confrontation between Russia and the West beyond the Russian borders. Thereby, Moscow suggests a conflicting image that implies stability in Russia and indicates the inferiority of Western ideals. Consequently, the Russian provocations aim to keep the West occupied, to project the competition on the opponent's territory, and maintain the initiative or the escalate dominance. In this sense, Russia's hostility serves the purpose of weakening the West, which materializes in the Baltics.

Furthermore, Russia's security perception vis-à-vis the West has deteriorated, at first glance, due to events that Moscow ignited. NATO has deployed a symbolic tripwire force, which poses no security challenge on either the tactical or the operational level for Russia's military. On the contrary, Moscow has reminded the Alliance that the operational advantages are in favor of Russia. Moreover, the strategic perspective has not changed at

[275] Giles, *Moscow Rules*, 123.

all. The Kremlin indicates that the security of the three Baltic states is a bargaining chip in the revision of the status quo. In contrast to the case of Crimea, Moscow has no need to secure its presence as long as Kaliningrad undisputedly belongs to Russia, which gives the Kremlin the launching pad for power projection below the threshold of war and without a costly fight.

In sum, Russia probes the West on western soil, but not for territorial gains, in the Baltics. By questioning the status quo, the Kremlin pushes for the West to accept and recognize as its equal the political system of Putinism[276] as a legitimizing source for domination—domestically to protect Russia from Western intrusion, and internationally to support Moscow's hegemonial claims of exceptionalism and as a great power. Therefore, this chapter argues that Russia targets the Baltic states in order to coerce the West to review the status quo by suggesting that traditional legitimacy, based on the concert of great powers, stabilizes the world better than rule-based domination. In contrast to its objectives for Crimea, Moscow does not aim to change the geostrategic landscape, but the Kremlin, indeed, exploits the strategic advantages presented in the Baltic region. On the contrary, Russian analysts focus on potential changes that shift the strategic balance. If Finland and Sweden reassess the prospect of NATO membership, the Russian strategic outlook would change and provoke confrontation in the Baltic Sea region.[277]

In comparison, Russia has used strategic interdictions in Crimea and Georgia to prevent the further advancement of the West. By denying the rule-based development of integration through a Russian forward presence, Moscow has circumvented the application of this process in order to protect the Russian World. In the Baltics, on the other hand, Russia has used harassment to project the conflict zone into the West's territory by exploiting the advantages of its already existing strategic position and provoking doubts about the Western value set and its credibility in order to keep the competition away from the Russian World.

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[276] Person, "Russia and Baltic Sea Security: A Background," 27.

[277] See for example: Galina I. Gribanova and Yuri V. Kosov, "NATO Policies in the Baltics: Objectives and Priorities," *Baltic Region* 10, no. 1 (2018): 61.

V. CONCLUSION

This study argues that analysts of Russian foreign policy cannot underestimate the relevance of legitimacy for the Kremlin. Since Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, Europe's security architecture has been in question. Subsequently, the West has interpreted Russia's use of military means in Ukraine as irredentism that has significant implications for other regions tied to Russian history. By missing the distinction between Russian views of the Baltics and Crimea, Western studies tend to overrate the similarity of Russian capabilities in comparable settings. Moreover, Western scholars tend to overlook the historical distinctions between Russia's relationship with Crimea and the Baltic states that particularly affect the legitimacy potential for the Kremlin.

Seizing Crimea has not been so much a conquest as it has been the disguising of Moscow's already existing control in the region. The Kremlin's influence on the peninsula changed from loosely tied to clearly visible. By redrawing the map, the Kremlin made abundantly obvious what was previously subtle. The Baltic region, by contrast, has had a constant, formal Russian presence in the Kaliningrad Oblast since winning the Great Patriotic War. When analysts compare Russia's access to the Black Sea with its access to the Baltic Sea, some interpretations conclude that the Crimean case may be the potential blueprint for the Baltics. From Russia's strategic point of view, the case is actually the other way around. After the annexation, Russia's indirect control and legally based presence in Crimea was transformed to one of direct control on a formal basis like its presence in Kaliningrad, which it justified by reasoning of its own traditional authority to defend Russia's southern pincer.

Indeed, Russia's foreign policy poses a menace to the Baltic states, but not because of irredentism. Moscow's hostile rhetoric and measures indicate that the Baltic region is targeted because the area is chosen as a battlefield outside of the Russkiy Mir on which to defend the Kremlin's world view rather than doing so inside Russian borders. It seems plausible that the Russian rationale is to bring the struggle over which paradigm dominates to its opponents in order to protect its own center of gravity—Russkiy Mir—and exploit the vulnerability of the West's center of gravity—the cohesion of the Alliance.

The relevance of understanding Russian myths that disseminate Moscow's narrative to the domestic audience cannot be underestimated. Myth reduces complexity and reinforces the credibility of the value set by replacing truth with simplicity, consistency, and continuity. The Kremlin is aware of this streamlining effect. It politicizes issues in the Baltic region to create a screen on which to project grievances about its constructed and imagined opponent—the West. This contributes to the stability of the statist design in Russia. To that end, Moscow's revanchism has identified the Baltic states as an area of competition because the region provides plenty of opportunities to direct the Russian desire for satisfaction toward the West.

Moreover, Russian aggressions have the pattern of creating instability as a way to give evidence of Moscow's aim to revise the status quo. These considerations refer to the engaging on the abstract level in regard to the balance of power rather than to the tangible act of land grabbing. By harassing and encroaching on the Baltic states, the Kremlin seeks to constantly generate instability in the strategic environment like repeating a mantra, only to advocate, subsequently, for the Russian solution—great power politics.

> In the very heart of Moscow, across the square from the Borovitsky Gate of the Kremlin, stands one of the tallest monuments in the Russian capital. The statue of a man in medieval garb, with a cross in one hand and a saber in the other, is eighteen meters high. The man is Prince Vladimir […] Many in Moscow believe that the impulse to erect the monument […] was based on a desire to glorify none other than St. Volodymyr's namesake, the president of Russia, Vladimir Putin.[278]

This anecdote exemplifies the essence of myth in Russian society. The story presents all the ingredients needed for a commonly believed and implied truth, whether manipulated or genuine. Nevertheless, Vladimir's statue demonstrates the significance of myth for the collective memory, especially in Russia. It also demonstrates the remanence of historical events for the contemporary decision-making process. Comparing Russia's historical ties to Crimea and the Baltics, this analysis has shown the unique importance of the peninsula, which is constructed by relating Russian values to Vladimir's baptism in Crimea. The unique role of Crimea in Russia's narrative highlights the significance of this

[278] Plokhy, *Lost Kingdome (*2017), introduction, vii.

region and its potential for perpetuating a Russian identity. As a result, the myth of origin has dramatically affected the populace's support for Putin and gained, consequently, extraordinary legitimacy for the Kremlin. This analysis suggests that Moscow's tendency to shift the regime's domestic legitimacy from a rule-based authority to one of traditional accepted authority for Putinism has been translated into Russia's foreign policy making. Therefore, Russia has transgressed internationally accepted borders to showcase its authority.

The study concludes that two factors inherent in the Russian approach to secure its legitimacy and recapture its great power status represent two sides of the same coin. First is the Russkiy Mir, about which Andrei Tsygankov observed, "[T]hese ideas assisted Putin in forging a greater loyalty among elites by serving as an additional source of legitimation and loyalty to the state."[279] As for the great power competition in the Baltics, Galeotti assesses, "this pressure is part of Moscow's wider 'political war' with the West."[280] The perceived inconsistency in Russia's policy, then, disappears when analysts incorporate Moscow's drive for legitimacy. This approach contributes to closing the gap between the different mindsets in Moscow and the West that both derive from varying values-based paradigms and could help to prevent dangerous misinterpretations of Russian measures.

The West's response to Russia's assertiveness has been reactive and deliberately measured, so far. If the Western capitals acknowledge that Russia competes on the level of value sets, it would enable those states to regain the initiative and deprive the Kremlin of the momentum to dictate time, place, and issue in this competition. Today, Russia perceives the diversity of opinions within NATO and the EU as weakness vis-à-vis Russia's decisiveness—despite the common wisdom that diversity creates resilience. One recommendation is to redirect the competition to areas where the West has the advantage—prosperity, higher standard of living, and individual liberty.

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279 Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy—Change and Continuity in National Identity* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 5th edition, 2019), 233.

280 Mark Galeotti, "The Baltic States as Targets and Levers: The Role of the Region in Russian Strategy," *Security Insights* 27 (April 2019), 1.

If NATO and the EU in conjunction with their member states re-calibrate their respective strategic view toward Russia, it would be reasonable for them to promote the cultural dialog by welcoming the Russian population to inspect reality in the West instead of supporting the Kremlin's efforts to fence in the Russian society.[281] The influx of ethnic Russians in the Baltic states has been seen as a vulnerability that Moscow could exploit, but it also offers the chance to prove the Kremlin wrong, when the heterogeneity of Estonia's, Latvia's, and Lithuania's societies become the source of an adjusted image of the West in Russia. A presentation of the West that depicts prosperity and democratic participation in line with the Western value set suggests opportunities.

Nevertheless, the study also concludes that the efforts to increase Western cohesion and to strengthen the credibility of its will to defend its own value set must continue, not only concerning the military posture at the Eastern flank of NATO and the EU but in all dimensions of politics. A Russian foreign policy based on the mindset of traditional authority creates an erosion effect for the rule-based authority of the status quo. It unsettles the people's trust in rules and incentivizes other actors to join Moscow. Through this lens, Putin's words, which were published in 2000, appear to reveal his decisiveness quite bluntly and uncannily,

> We will fight to keep our geostrategic and spiritual position. And if they push us away, then we will be forced to find allies and reinforce ourselves. What else can we do?[282]

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281 For a glimpse of a German perspective that advocates for such measures, see: Stefan Meister, "Thesen für eine neue deutsche Russlandpolitik," [Arguments for a new German policy towards Russia] *DGAP-kompakt* no. 3 (March 2015). DGAP is the German Council on Foreign Relations.

282 Vladimir Putin, *First Person—An Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait by Russia's President* (New York: Public Affairs, 2000, translated by Catherine A. Fitzpatrick), 169.

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