Annexation and Hybrid Warfare in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine

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This is an excerpt from *The Sources of Russia's Great Power Politics: Ukraine and the Challenge to the European Order*. Download your free copy here.

In chapter two we pointed out the need to look more deeply into the origins of Russia's information warfare in the USSR and specifically to locate its roots in campaigns against Ukrainian and Baltic independence movements. In chapter three we emphasised how all shades of Russian political opinion have supported territorial claims against Crimea and Sevastopol since the disintegration of the USSR. Russia's problem with an independent Ukraine was not invented by Putin or brought on by NATO and EU enlargement and democracy promotion. In this chapter, we analyse the annexation of Crimea and hybrid war against the Donbas in a longer historical context going back to the 2003–2004 Rose and Orange Revolutions.

We first address the question of whether the conflict in the Donbas is best defined as a civil or interstate war. The chapter then analyses the Crimea and Donbas over five phases with the key drivers listed in each phase. The phases are important for arriving at an understanding of the dynamics of the triangular relationship between Russia, the West and Ukraine. This chapter shows that Russia's actions in 2014 were consistent with long-term trends in its foreign policy aims and actions. Similarly, as chapter two highlighted, Russian intelligence, political technologists, information operations and local proxies were as active in the decade prior to the crisis as were Western democracy promotion efforts.

Civil or Interstate War – or Both?

Scholars have differed on whether to characterise events in Eastern Ukraine as a civil war or interstate conflict. The question is not merely academic. If the conflict there is a civil war, then its roots are within Ukraine. If so, Russia might play an important role in resolving it. If the conflict is seen as an interstate war, the involvement of Russian regular army forces becomes a natural focus. In this case, while Russia must still be part of the solution, it must also be regarded fundamentally as part of the problem. Its role in resolving the conflict will be as a belligerent, not as a mediator.

Equally important, whether the war is a civil war or interstate war changes our view of what is at stake. If the war is an international war, then the question in large part is where the border will be drawn between Russia and Ukraine, though Russia's ability to determine certain aspects of Ukraine's policies is also at stake. If the conflict is a civil war, then it is more fundamentally about who will run the government of Ukraine and under what political system. This was made clear again in 2017, when DNR Prime Minister Aleksandr Zakharchenko proposed a new territorial entity of *Malorossiya* (Little Russia) to replace Ukraine. Zakharchenko was not proposing secession from Ukraine, but the takeover of Ukraine by a new, fundamentally different regime. The proposal reinforced the framing of the conflict as one among Ukrainians over the government of Ukraine. While the proposal was met with bewilderment, it 'is in line with the Kremlin's longstanding strategic goal to take back all of Ukraine under Russian domination as part of the so-called *Russkii Mir*'.[1] Little Russia would be a weak federalised state with Donetsk as its capital city that would join the Eurasian Union and no longer seek NATO and EU membership.

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Not surprisingly, those who tend to blame the conflict on the West see it is a civil war, and those who blame it on Russia as an interstate war. Empirically, debate has centred around two questions. The first is the chronology of events from the Euromaidan through to the invasion of Russian *spetsnaz* led by Alexander Girkin in the second week of April 2014. The second is to what extent the evolution of the protests into an armed movement was a home-grown rebellion or was from the outset a Russian proxy war.

While many conflicts include both civil and interstate components, the ambiguity about this conflict is not accidental, as Russian strategy from the outset has been to obscure who is doing the fighting. This was most visible with the 'little green men' deployed in Crimea, whose unit markings had been removed to obscure their origins, but has been the case in Eastern Ukraine as well, where both fighters and supplies from Russia have been hidden or disguised as coming from Ukraine. These actions were coordinated with Russian information operations portraying both Crimea and the Donbas as internal Ukrainian secessionist movements.

A civil war challenges the sovereignty of an internationally recognised state, and takes place in theory within the boundaries of a recognised state, though in practice most civil wars have international components to them. While definitions of civil war vary, they generally refer to conflict between groups *within* a single state and with a high level of casualties (generally 1,000; some specify within a single year).[2] Most also add the notion that one combatant in a civil war is the state, and another combatant aims to take power at the centre or in a region, or to change government policies.[3]

The key definitional difference between 'civil' or 'intrastate' wars and interstate wars is who the combatants are. In a civil war, only one of the sides is a state. In an interstate war, two or more combatants are states. Thus, the definitional question in the case of Ukraine is whether Ukraine is fighting domestic rebels or Russia. In practice, it is fighting both, and judgments differ on whether Russia's involvement is central or peripheral. Our judgment is that, as was the case in Crimea, the conflict in Donbas is more fundamentally driven by Russia than by internal Ukrainian forces, and has lasted as long as it has, and has produced the level of casualties it has, largely because of the forces and supplies contributed by Russia.

Focusing on chronology, there is disagreement over *when* exactly Russian involvement in Eastern Ukraine became a driving force in the conflict in Donbas. From summer 2014 onward, there is relatively little dispute, as there was extensive evidence of Russian involvement following artillery attacks from Russia, entry of Russian army forces into Eastern Ukraine, and supplying, training and leading of Russian proxy militias in the region. Prior to that, however, there is less agreement, leaving some to argue that Russia intervened in what was already a civil war in Ukraine, rather than actually fomenting the conflict. Scholars downplaying Russian intervention have tended to frame Ukraine's conflict as a civil war between Russian and Ukrainian speakers brought about by Ukrainian nationalism.[4] Such analyses emphasise the volunteer origins of Russian fighters in Ukraine. A 2014 analysis by Laruelle differentiated between nationalist volunteers and mercenaries travelling to the Donbas, leaving out entirely the question of those sent by the Russian government.[5]

Scholars who have instead emphasised the importance of Russia's role in the conflict have pointed to the importance of Russia's security guarantee to the DNR and LNR. Galeotti writes that, 'The DNR and LNR are, of course, Russian proxy actors, armed, shielded and above all funded by Moscow'. But, he adds the caveat, 'However, they are also loose coalitions of self-interested adventurers, from the leaderships down to local militia commanders'.[6] For those emphasising the Russian origins of the conflict, the central point is that without Russian financial subsidies and a security guarantee, the two separatist enclaves would not survive.[7]

The Ukrainian government has defined fighters loyal to the DNR and LNR as 'terrorists' and is fighting the war as an ATO under a 2003 law 'On Terrorism'. This framing of the conflict was intended to avoid defining the conflict as a war, as international organisations do not lend to countries at 'war'. A secondary reason was defining the conflict as a 'war' would require full scale mobilisation of military resources and mass conscription and a state of emergency which would limit democratic freedoms, and there was opposition to this within Ukraine.

This is not to say that there was not serious and organised opposition in Eastern Ukraine to the events taking place in

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Kiev in early 2014. A central question is how these grievances were transformed into mass violence. Whereas the violence in Kiev occurred when the state unleashed violence against protestors, in Eastern Ukraine the state had no ability to do so. When Yanukovych fled from Kiev and Euromaidan revolutionaries took power, the Ukrainian state was too weak and fragmented to use its security forces to crush protests. Ukraine launched its ATO on 13 April only *after* proxies from Russia and protestors stormed and took control of state buildings in Donetsk (6 April) and Russian *spetsnaz* invaded Ukraine (11–12 April).

The vast literature on civil conflict focuses both on grievances – why people rebel – and on capacity – factors that sustain or undermine rebellion.[8] Grievances can arise from contestation over economic, identity, religious and/or ethnic factors. Ted Gurr has stressed the salience of ethno-cultural identities and their capacity to mobilise, levels of grievance, and availability of opposition political activities.[9] The World Bank's Collier-Hoeffler model investigates the availability of finances, opportunity costs of rebellion, military advantage and terrain, ethnic and regional grievances of minorities dominated by majorities, the size of the population and the period of time since the last conflict.[10]

Residents of the Donbas have a strong affinity with their region that in many cases was stronger than their affinity with the Ukrainian state. At the same time, the Donbas has been relatively passive and, as seen in the Orange and Euromaidan Revolutions, unable to mobilise on the same level as that of Western and Central Ukraine. Weaker mobilisation might be explained by the fact that elites from the Donbas were always heavily influential in national level policy. In terms of Albert O. Hirschman's traditional choice of exit, voice or loyalty, the Donbas never needed exit because its voice was so powerful. That changed in early 2014 when Yanukovych was ejected and the Party of Regions surrendered control of parliament.

Mobilisation would be assisted by relative levels of hostility, intensification of political cleavages, disintegration of institutions, and loss of government legitimacy. All of these four factors increased in the Donbas in early 2014. The Party of Regions and its allies had mobilised against the nationalist 'other' and 'fascists' during every election since 2004 and had drawn upon this inflammatory rhetoric in parliament and the media. High levels of tension during the Euromaidan and Russia's barrage of propaganda and information war widened political cleavages further. The political crisis and blocking of government buildings during the four-month long Euromaidan led to the partial disintegration of the Ukrainian state which deteriorated further after the ousting of Yanukovych.[11]

Constructivist approaches to conflict find that mobilisation of protestors is the work of elites (ethnic entrepreneurs) who fashion beliefs, preferences and identities and socially construct and reinforce existing cleavages.[12] A constructivist approach has particular resonance in the Donbas where oligarchs and the Party of Regions political machine dominated the region in a way resembling Russia's managed democracy. The influence of elites was shown by the ability of Rinat Akhmetov, Ukraine's most powerful oligarch, to halt an attack on the city of Mariupol in the summer of 2014. Akhmetov had chosen not to intervene when the conflict first emerged in the spring. Donbas oligarchs were either working in collusion with radical protestors (e.g. Luhansk oligarch and head of the Party of Regions parliamentary faction Oleksandr Yefremov) or adopted a wait and see position to apply pressure on Kiev, as they had done during the Orange Revolution, when there was a brief abortive movement toward secession at the November 2004 Severedonetsk Congress. Donbas regional elites have been instrumental in mobilising protests in coalminers' strikes in 1989, the transportation of 'political tourists' to Kiev to protest against the disbanding of parliament in 2007 and anti-Maidan protests during the Orange and Euromaidan Revolutions.

Foreign powers have intervened in the majority of civil wars and the longer the civil war continues the more likelihood there will be outside intervention. Nicholas Sambanis writes that 'expected intervention has a robustly positive and highly significant association with civil war'.[13] Foreign powers should be reasonably confident of success; the projected time horizon of the intervention is short and domestic opposition is minimal. All three factors highlighted by Sambanis exist in the Russia-Ukraine crisis. In August 2014 and January/February 2015, Russia's intervention was decisive, defeating Ukrainian forces at Ilovaysk and Debaltseve respectively. Pro-Putin *and* opposition supporters have supported the annexation of the Crimea although Russians have mixed views of military intervention in the Donbas which has less symbolic value in Russian history and identity. [14] In spring 2014, for Putin and Russian nationalists the two historically symbolic and strategic cities in *Novorossiya* were Kharkiv and Odesa (although the

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former was never part of this Tsarist region) – not Donetsk or Luhansk.

In terms of aiding mobilisation, Russian support was crucial in three distinct respects. First, Russia provided extensive 'information' support, using mass media to paint the new government in Kiev as illegitimate and as determined to oppress Russian-speaking Eastern Ukrainians. Second, Russia provided organisational and material support, using its state capacity to infiltrate organisers and equipment to help coordinate opposition. Third, Russia provided the actual people being mobilised, both informally, via the volunteers and mercenaries Laruelle analyses, and formally, through the introduction of regular army forces. One cannot definitively answer the counterfactual question of what would have happened to the anti-Maidan protestors in Eastern Ukraine without Russia's support, but there is a strong case to be made that they would have lost out either to local elites or to Ukrainian government forces. That is what nearly happened before increased Russian intervention in the summer of 2014. The view that protests were internally self-sustaining raises the question of why Russia intervened at such high political cost if it were not necessary to sustain the conflict. Similarly, it is hard to imagine the rapid takeover of Crimea succeeding without Russian forces taking a direct role, and it is hard to see how the annexation could have taken place so quickly without the Russian government coordinating processes as disconnected as the referendum in Crimea and the legislation of the State Duma.

From Orange Revolution to Annexation and Hybrid War

The conflict over Crimea and Eastern Ukraine did not begin with the Euromaidan revolution and the ousting of Yanukovych. Chapters two and three emphasised that the longer-term sources of the conflict reach back to the Soviet era and earlier. The discussion in this chapter begins with the Orange Revolution and its impact on Russian views of Ukraine. We analyse the process leading to violent conflict in five phases, with the discussion of each phase beginning with a list of key developments.

Countering the Orange Threat: 2004–2009

- The 2004 Orange revolution brings a pro-Western government to power in Ukraine.
- Expressions of nationalism and anti-Western xenophobia increase in Russia.
- In 2005, the Party of Regions signs a cooperation agreement with United Russia and the following year Russia brokers a coalition between the Party of Regions and Crimean Russian nationalists-separatists.
- Ukrainian radicals receive paramilitary training in Russia in preparation for the 2010 elections.
- Putin's speeches at the 2007 Munich security conference and 2008 NATO summit extend claims about Russia's role in the region.
- The *Russkii Mir* project is launched.
- Russia invades Georgia.
- The Russian government, Party of Regions, Communist Party of Ukraine and Crimean Russian nationalists-separatists recognise the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.
- Russia's deteriorating relations with Ukraine in 2008–2009 lead to the expulsion of two Russian diplomats and President's Medvedev's open letter to Yushchenko.
- EU launches the Eastern Partnership in 2009.

The Orange Revolution was the third colour revolution in four years and the most excruciating for Russia's leaders; indeed, political technologist Pavlovsky described it as 'our 9/11'. [15] Russian nationalism was evident throughout the 1990s – especially in the 1993 parliamentary elections – but it increased dramatically in response to NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 and the West's subsequent support for the Bulldozer Revolution, that ejected Slobodan Milosevic from power, and Kosovo's independence. Ukraine's Orange Revolution was another powerful accelerant. Russia's turn away from the West was clearly spelt out in Putin's 2007 speech to the Munich security conference which was unexpected and shocking to Western audiences, but ultimately ignored as not representing a harbinger of the future direction of Russian policies. Russia's turn away from the West has not been linear and has included two (failed) attempts at US-Russia resets after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and after Obama's election.

Following the end of Leonid Kuchma's second term in office in 2004, the moderate centre ground which had

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dominated Eastern Ukrainian centrist political forces evaporated and gave way to the more overtly pro-Russian, neo-Soviet and criminal Donetsk clan in the Party of Regions which increasingly came to monopolise elections and local councils in Eastern-Southern Ukraine. The Party of Regions won a plurality in three subsequent parliamentary elections (2006, 2007, 2012) and elected its leader, Yanukovych president (2010). In 2014, a political vacuum emerged in Donbas and Eastern Ukraine following the disintegration of the Party of Regions and the Communist Party, which was filled by radical Russian nationalists, pan-Slavists and separatists. Many of these radicals, such as the Donetsk Republic founded in 2005 and banned from 2008–2010, successor to Inter-Movement of Donbas established in 1989, had undertaken paramilitary training in Ukraine and in Russian summer camps.[16] These camps were run by the International Eurasian Movement led by Dugin, and Putin's senior adviser Surkov, author of the slogan 'sovereign democracy' and the president's *'kurator'* (overseer on behalf of the Russian president) of the DNR and LNR, was a frequent speaker. The Donetsk Republic is one of two parties of power in the DNR. The founder of the Inter-Movement of Donbas, Sergei Baryshnikov, who was appointed Dean of Donetsk University, believes Ukrainians 'are Russians who refuse to admit their Russianness'.[17] He called for the destruction of Ukrainian identity, which he compared to a 'disease' and 'cancer', by 'war and repression'.[18]

The Party of Regions was different from Eastern Ukrainian centrist parties in three ways. The first was its more pronounced pro-Russian orientation which was seen in 2005 when the Party of Regions signed a cooperation agreement with United Russia and the following year when Russian political technologists brokered an election alliance with Crimean Russian nationalists-separatists. The latter had been marginalised in the second half of the 1990s by President Kuchma, who would have never countenanced cooperation with them. The Party of Regions alliance with Crimean Russian nationalists-separatists paved the way for Russia's annexation of the Crimea, after which most Crimean Party of Regions deputies in Ukraine's parliament were elected to Russia's State Duma as United Russia candidates.

In the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Georgia in August 2008, the Party of Regions, Communist Party of Ukraine and Crimean Russian nationalists-separatists supported Russia's recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, signalling their close relationship with Moscow. A resolution to that effect was adopted in the Crimean Supreme Soviet but a similar resolution failed in the Ukrainian parliament. They were alone in the CIS in following Russia's support for infringing Georgia's territorial integrity. Even Belarus and Kazakhstan, who have backed every integration project in the CIS, refused to recognise the breakaway regions' independence. The action of these three Ukrainian political forces foreshadowed Yanukovych's support for Russia's seizure of Crimea.

Russian propaganda against 'Ukrainian nationalists' did not begin during the Euromaidan; it was already underway during Ukraine's 2004 presidential campaign. In 2005, the transformation of the Walking Alone pro-Putin fan club into the Democratic Anti-Fascist Movement *Nashi* was a reaction to the widespread fear that Russia was next in line for a colour revolution. The 'anti-fascist' label was revived as a means to link the fight against colour revolutions to the myth of the Great Patriotic War and to again denigrate 'Ukrainian nationalists'. The specific goal was to link Ukraine's 'orange' revolutionaries with the anti-Soviet partisans from the World War II-era who had long been demonised as Nazi collaborators. The launch of the *Russkii Mir* was compared to that of the British Council but this was misleading as it always had close ties with Russian intelligence and pursued more overtly political goals towards neighbouring countries. The CIS Customs Union/Eurasian Union was directed at all CIS members while the *Russkii Mir* aimed to maintain the unity of Eastern Slavic Orthodox civilisation of the three 'brotherly peoples' who had descended from the medieval state of Kiev Rus.

Ukrainian-Russian relations became increasingly strained in the latter years of Yushchenko's presidency. President Yushchenko had infuriated Moscow when he had travelled with Polish and Baltic leaders to Georgia to voice their support in the face of Russia's invasion. The EU and US, in contrast, imposed no sanctions against Russia and continued with business as usual. The EU's September 2009 Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia headed by Heidi Tagliavini blamed Georgia for the outbreak of hostilities. The report failed to understand the dynamics of Russia issuing passports to inhabitants of separatist enclaves, its use of proxy forces, armed provocations, and Moscow's desire for regime change. Russian leaders may have believed they had been sent a signal by the West that invading neighbours would not lead to sanctions. In any event, the West's mild reaction to the invasion of Georgia apparently did not sufficiently reassure Russia.

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Increased counter-intelligence work by the SBU led to the expulsion of two Russian diplomats for espionage (i.e. supporting separatist groups in the Crimea and Odesa). This infuriated the supposedly more liberal-minded President Medvedev who penned an open letter to Yushchenko listing a whole raft of changes that Russia sought in Ukraine's domestic and foreign policies.[19] A careful reading of these demands shows that Russia's leaders were adamantly opposed to the Ukrainian nation building project and the revival of a Ukrainian historiography independent of Russia and outside the Eastern Slavic *Russkii Mir* civilisation.[20]

Although NATO had baulked at providing MAPs for Ukraine and Georgia at the 2008 Bucharest summit, Russia's concerns remained acute because of the EU's unveiling of the Eastern Partnership in May 2009. Geared exclusively for post-Soviet countries such as Ukraine, the Eastern Partnership only offered integration *without* membership. Nevertheless, the EU's interest in enlarging for the first time into Eurasia brought about competition from a Russian counter-proposal that the EU never took seriously. After Yanukovych was elected Ukrainian President, Russia entered the second phase full of optimism that Ukraine could be re-integrated.

Putin Turns Further to the Right, 2010–2013

- Yanukovych's election brings domestic and foreign policy changes in Ukraine.
- Russia's lease of Sevastopol as a Black Sea Fleet base is extended to 2042–2047.
- Ukraine adopts a non-bloc foreign policy and drops the goal of NATO membership.
- Russian intelligence gradually takes control of and recruits spies within the SBU and Ukrainian military intelligence.
- Russia launches the CIS Customs Union in 2010 as a stepping-stone to a Eurasian Union.
- Widespread anti-Putin Russian protests take place in 2011–2012, fuelling fears that Russia is the next Western target for a colour revolution and regime change.
- Putin wins re-election and turns even further to the nationalist right.
- In 2013, Putin begins to promote the idea of Ukrainian-Russian unity.
- In summer 2013, Russian trade boycotts and *kompromat* are used to pressure Yanukovych to drop European integration.

In Moscow's eyes, the election of Yanukovych had the potential to return Ukrainian-Russian relations to 'normality' and that of 'brotherly peoples'. But the reassurance offered by the election of Ukraine's most pro-Russian president led not to an easing of Russian activity, but to an increase. Although Yanukovych fulfilled all of the domestic and foreign policy demands laid out by Medvedev, Russia remained unsatisfied. In Yanukovych's first year in office he became the first Ukrainian president to eschew characterising the *Holodomor* as a famine directed by Stalin at Ukraine and avoided using the term 'genocide', which was particularly infuriating to Russia. The Party of Regions-controlled Parliament adopted a 'non-bloc' foreign policy (sometimes mischaracterised as 'neutrality'), and dropping the objective of seeking NATO membership. In sum, Yanukovych gave Russia much of what it had long wanted.

Although Ukrainian politics have been routinely presented as one of East-West rivalry, presidential elections have generally been competitions between Eastern Ukrainian elites; only one of Ukraine's five presidents (Leonid Kravchuk) has been from Western Ukraine. Moreover, not all Eastern Ukrainians hold similar political views; it was Kuchma who organised a worldwide campaign in support of defining the *Holodomor* as a genocide on its 70th anniversary and who first enunciated EU and NATO membership as Ukraine's goals.

In 2012, the Party of Regions adopted a law on languages that *de facto* upgraded Russian to a second state language, circumventing the process of amending the constitution, for which it had insufficient votes. The Council of Europe's Venice Commission had criticised the law as not meeting the requirements of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages which was drawn up to protect endangered languages.[21]

In addition to the language law, Yanukovych also forced through parliament (against the advice of three parliamentary committees) the Kharkiv Accords extending Russia's lease of Sevastopol. The 1997 Black Sea Fleet agreement had provided for a 'temporary' lease of the Sevastopol naval base until 2017. The Kharkiv Accords extended the lease to 2042 (with the option of a five-year extension), in effect making this a permanent Russian naval

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base. This was a major strategic achievement for Russia, where re-establishing Russian ownership of Sevastopol and Crimea had long been popular across the political spectrum. In addition to pressuring Yanukovych to drop EU integration, Russia made further demands. These included the creation of joint ventures in practically every area of Ukraine's economy, especially the military industrial complex and energy. Russia sought the same control over Ukraine's gas pipelines that it had acquired in Belarus, Armenia and elsewhere. Russia's proposal for a consortium over Ukraine's pipelines would have given Moscow a majority shareholding.

By the 2012 elections, Russia and Russian leaders had become even more nationalistic and anti-Western xenophobia had become a staple in the Russian media. The US-Russian reset had again failed and Hillary Clinton's support for protestors in Moscow made Putin suspicious that the West was fomenting another colour revolution with regime change in mind. Putin's re-election pushed him even further to the nationalist right and he increasingly added social conservatism to nationalism, espousing 'conservative values' and anti-Western xenophobia, aligning with anti-EU populist nationalists, neo-Nazi (such as Greece's Golden Dawn party) and fascist (such as France's Front National) political forces in Europe. Additionally, US White nationalists and Alt-Right, who have become more assertive and prominent in the US in the wake of the Charlottesville riots, have become fans of Putin.[22] US Alt-Right leader Richard Spencer describes Putin's Russia as the 'sole white power in the world'.[23]

Russia's integration strategy relied on the participation of the three Eastern Slavic peoples of the *Russkii Mir* as the core of the Eurasian Union. In many ways, this strategy reflected traditional Soviet nationalities policy under which the Eastern Slavs had formed the Russian-speaking core of the USSR. It also reflected the more deeply rooted Russian historiography that saw Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians as *odyn narod* (one people). Putin began referring to Ukrainians and Russians as 'one people' with their joint origins in Kievan Rus that could not be allowed to be broken apart. Russia's chauvinistic rhetoric towards Ukrainians became more visceral and public after Putin's re-election but they were by no means new. Russian views of Ukrainians as not constituting a 'real people' and of Ukraine as a failed and artificial state have deep roots in Russian national identity.

Putin's counter-attack against Western encroachment into what Russia sees as its 'zone of privileged interests' came in the creation of the CIS Customs Union in 2010, which would evolve into the Eurasian Union in 2015. Ukraine would hold its next presidential elections in the same year the CIS Customs Union would transform into the Eurasian Union and Yanukovych's re-election for a second term would be necessary for Ukraine to join Putin's pet project. The Party of Regions launched its 2015 election campaign after the 2012 parliamentary elections, taking its 'anti-fascist' slogans directly from Soviet commissars and Russian political technologists. The Party of Regions adopted the slogan 'To Europe without fascists' (implying that the opposition was fascist) when Yanukovych's ally, Russia was cooperating with and financing European neo-Nazi political forces.[24]

Putin did not initiate a new departure for Russian security policy towards Eurasia but merely drew on a tradition of Russia seeing itself as the dominant centre of Eurasia. Attempts to create CIS structures and unions had taken place throughout Yeltsin's presidency. In 1992, the Tashkent Treaty established CIS collective military forces that became the Collective Security Treaty Organisation a decade later. In 1996, Russia and Belarus outlined plans for a union and they together with Kazakhstan launched the Eurasian Economic Community (which was joined by Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in 2000 and Uzbekistan in 2006).

In spring and summer 2013, Russian trade boycotts of Ukraine and other forms of pressure compelled Yanukovych to sign a memorandum in May making Ukraine an 'observer' in the CIS Customs Union. The EU, meanwhile, dropped its earlier insistence that Yanukovych release Yulia Tymoshenko from prison before an Association Agreement was finalised. By removing an obvious reason why the Association Agreement could not go forward, this concession actually increased pressure on Yanukovych.

Plans Undone: Euromaidan Ukraine, 2013–2014

- Yanukovych's reversal on the EU Association Agreements prompts the Euromaidan Revolution.
- Russian information warfare promotes portrayal of Euromaidan 'fascists'.
- Russian intelligence supports Ukrainian security forces in suppressing protests and training and financing

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  anti-Maidan vigilantes.
- Russian 'political tourists' are transported into Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk and Odesa to swell the crowd numbers.

The Euromaidan and Yanukovych's ouster destroyed Putin's well-cultivated plans for Ukraine to join the Eurasian Union. When Yanukovych 'suspended' discussion of joining the Association Agreement in November-December 2013, Putin believed he had successfully induced Yanukovych to join Russia's regional bloc. Russia followed up by offering to buy $15 billion worth of Ukrainian Eurobonds and by lowering the price of gas from over $400 to $268 per 1, 000 cubic metres. The latter price was still higher than that charged to Belarus but similar to what the *Ostchem* gas intermediary owned by gas tycoon Dmytro Firtash had been paying. The preferential price given to Firtash was in return to a portion of his profits being used to purchase strategic sectors of the Ukrainian economy on behalf of the Russian state.[25]

During the Euromaidan, Russia provided advice and equipment to Ukrainian riot police (*Berkut*) and other security forces involved in repressing protestors.[26] Russian intelligence, whether as long-time sleepers or inserted during the Euromaidan crisis, also supported anti-Maidan vigilantes long before Yanukovych's ouster. Russia's support for paramilitary hybrid warfare on the ground was backed by a barrage of anti-Ukrainian, 'anti-fascist' and anti-Maidan propaganda that inflamed passions and reduced the chances for compromise.

Russian intelligence was not only training and financing anti-Maidan, pro-Russian vigilantes but also organising the transportation of protestors (dubbed 'political tourists') to Donetsk, Luhansk and Kharkiv from Russia and to Odesa from Russian-controlled Trans-Dniestr. Russian nationalists were quickly on the scene and radicalised the crowds who captured state buildings in Donetsk and Luhansk. In Donetsk and Luhansk, the disintegration of the security forces, who had been loyal to the Party of Regions, provided vigilantes with a stockpile of weapons. These developments were supplemented in the second week of April by the arrival of 'muscle' (Russian *spetsnaz*), who expanded the area that protestors controlled and provided training, discipline and military equipment.[27]

Russian intelligence services had penetrated Ukrainian security forces and in particular the SBU during Yanukovych's presidency.[28] The Ukrainian military, Ministry of Interior and SBU in the Crimea were recruited locally, which in hindsight was a mistake. The First Deputy Commander of Ukraine's navy, Sergei Yeliseyev, was born near Moscow, graduated from a Soviet naval school in the Russian city of Kaliningrad and had served with the Russian Pacific fleet. After defecting during the crisis, he was appointed deputy commander of Russia's Baltic fleet. Ukraine's naval commander Denis Berezovsky also defected, along with several of his commanders, and was appointed deputy commander of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. In Crimea, thousands of SBU and military officers, *Militsiya* and prosecutors defected to Russian occupation forces.

The only other Ukrainian region where the security forces defected *en masse* was in the Donbas. Since the end of the gang war between criminal groups in 1996–1997 and Yanukovych's appointment as Donetsk Governor, oligarchs and the Party of Regions political machine had controlled the security forces. *Berkut* riot police and Internal Troops from the local *Militsiya* had been sent to Kiev to quell the Euromaidan protests and returned home angry and bitter at the death and injury of their colleagues and the lack of political will to quell the protests. One hundred thirty protestors and 18 *Militsiya* officers were killed on the Euromaidan. The disintegration of the Party of Regions and flight of Yanukovych from Kiev after the bloodbath on 18–20 February, led to the loss of command and control over the security forces in the Donbas.

In the majority of regions in Eastern and Southern Ukraine a large proportion of the security forces continued to operate and, assisted by local businessmen, Euromaidan activists and self-defence forces, they defeated pro-Russian forces. In Moscow's eyes, the key battleground cities and strategic prizes were Kharkiv and Odesa – not Donetsk and Luhansk. In Kharkiv, Russian political tourists initially stormed the opera and ballet theatre mistakenly believing it was the city hall. Interior Minister Arsen Avakov, who is from Kharkiv, oversaw the defeat of pro-Russian forces in his city by the end of the first week of April. In Odesa, street fighting between pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian forces ended after a day of violence on 2 May which killed 48 protestors by gunshots and fire. In Donetsk and Luhansk, 6 factors worked towards the Ukrainian state losing control:

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the political vacuum after the collapse of the Party of Regions; the passivity and collusion of oligarchs; widespread use of violence by anti-Maidan vigilantes against pro-Ukrainian protestors;

covert Russian intelligence operations; the inflow of nationalists and neo-Nazis from Russia who took control of pro-Russian protests; professional assistance from Russian *spetsnaz* who invaded mainland Ukraine in the second week of April.

Protests, Hybrid War and Annexation, 2014

- EU peace deal falls flat after protestors are killed.
- Yanukovych flees Kiev, eventually to Russia.
- Euromaidan opposition parties take power and remove Yanukovych as president.
- In late-February, Russian 'little green men' invade the Crimea and backed by local nationalists, Cossacks, organised crime and 'self-defence' forces take control of state institutions without Ukrainian government opposition.
- From late-February to late-April, attempts are made to organise pro-Russian uprisings in Eastern and Southern Ukraine but most quickly subside.
- In early-April, Russian 'little green men' invade Ukraine and move to the Donbas to support protestors.
- In mid-April, Ukraine launches an ATO against Russian proxies in the Donbas.
- In May, a nascent pro-Russian uprising in Odesa ends in bloodshed.

Having been prominent in roundtable negotiations during the Orange Revolution, the EU engaged in negotiations over the Euromaidan in February 2014. On 21 February, the EU, Yanukovych and opposition party leaders negotiated a deal with Yanukovych which would return Ukraine to the constitutional arrangement (featuring less extensive presidential powers) that had been in place during Yushchenko's presidency and would hold presidential elections by the end of 2014 (they were scheduled for January 2015). The negotiated deal was rejected by protest leaders on the Maidan who, in contrast to the Orange Revolution, were driven much more by civil society groups and were much less trustful of opposition party leaders Vitaliy Klitschko (UDAR – Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reforms), Arseniy Yatsenyuk (*Batkivshchyna* [Fatherland]) and Oleh Tyahnybok (*Svoboda* [Freedom]). Moreover, anger at the bloodshed that had taken place in the previous three days radicalised the crowds of protestors, who now insisted that Yanukovych had to step down rather than submit to early elections.

The rejection of the negotiated deal, defections from the Party of Regions by deputies in parliament and a breakdown of command and control over the security forces led to a rapid disintegration of Yanukovych's support, as people deserted what increasingly looked like the losing side. Overnight on 21–22 February 2014, Yanukovych and ten of his closest allies packed what loot they could and fled Kiev; at least four others committed suicide.[29] Yanukovych planned to address the 'Ukrainian Front' in Kharkiv, in an attempt to rally Eastern and Southern Ukrainian deputies along the lines of the 2004 Severdonetsk Congress, but many never showed up and pro-Ukrainian protestors, angry at the bloodshed in Kiev, threatened to break-up the meeting. Yanukovych then fled to Donetsk and later to Crimea as it was being seized by Russian forces.

Scholars have debated whether Putin's decision to invade the Crimea was pre-planned or a spur of the moment decision brought on by the victory of the Euromaidan, but the two explanations are not contradictory. With all Russian political forces laying claim to Sevastopol and the Crimea, adoption of numerous resolutions by both houses of the Russian parliament, open interference by Moscow Mayor Luzhkov and extensive Russian intelligence activity in the Crimea by the Black Sea Fleet's naval intelligence and FSB and GRU, it would be highly unusual for Russia not to have prepared a range of plans for militarily intervening in the Crimea. Russia reacted sharply in 2008 after Yushchenko threatened to not allow Black Sea Fleet vessels that had participated in the invasion of Georgia to return to Sevastopol. Before Russia's invasion, Lukashenka claimed to have seen Russian plans for military intervention in the Crimea.[30] The invasion itself showed signs of having been well-prepared, so it seems likely that contingency plans were prepared well in advance, with the decision to implement them made due to the combination of the perceived 'putsch' in Kiev and the opportunity to intervene while chaos reigned.

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As mentioned earlier, Russia's intervention in the Crimea was welcomed by many local residents because of their long-standing pro-Russian and pro-Soviet sympathies, as well as by the fear generated by Russia's information war regarding Ukrainian fascists preparing to invade and massacre Russian speakers. Russia's forces consisted of GRU *spetsnaz* without country insignia, Black Sea Fleet marines and intelligence, defectors from the SBU, Ukraine's military and *Militsiya*, Crimean Russian nationalists and organised crime enforcers. The latter two had long been linked and the role of organised crime was reflected in the installation of former organised crime boss and Russian nationalist Aksyonov as Crimean Prime Minister.

Widespread pro-Putin and pro-Russian/Soviet sympathies in the Crimea did not necessarily translate into the ludicrously reported referendum result of 96.7% in favour of joining Russia. That figure would require that the majority of Ukrainians and especially Tatars, who numbered approximately 15% of the population in Crimea, backed union with Russia. According to leaked data, the real turnout was only 30% (not 83%), and of these only half (i.e. 15%) voted in support of union with Russia.[31] Throughout the post-Soviet period, support for separatism (understood as an independent Crimea or union with Russia) had never had majority support in the Crimea.

Elsewhere in Ukraine, between March and May, Russia made numerous attempts to mobilise protestors for uprisings with the purpose of capturing state buildings and declaring the formation of 'people's republics' in what Russian nationalists called the 'Russian Spring'. Russia's hybrid warfare in *Novorossiya*, the name for the Tsarist-era *gubernia* (region) that encompasses Eastern-Southern Ukraine (but not Kharkiv, which had been the centre of the province of *Slobozhanshchyna*), failed. Pro-Putin sentiment and support for separatism proved to be weak in Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk (since re-named Dnipro), Zaporizhzhya, Odesa, Mykolayiv and Kherson. Pro-Ukrainian protestors outnumbered pro-Russian protestors in every one of these regions. In the strategically important city of Dnipropetrovsk, oligarch Ihor Kolomoyskyy led the fight against pro-Russian separatists and offered large financial rewards for the capture of Russian soldiers.

Kolomoyskyy funded a number of volunteer battalions. His actions and those of other Ukrainians with Jewish backgrounds belie the notion that Nazism was a major force in Ukraine. Although a Russian speaker, Kolomoyskyy supported the Euromaidan and Ukraine's fight against Russian military intervention. Despite the rhetoric from Russia, anti-Semitism in the Soviet form of 'anti-Zionism' was more prevalent in the DNR and LNR, whose media routinely condemned the alliance of 'Jewish oligarchs', Ukrainian 'fascists' and Western governments. Ukrainian leaders such as Poroshenko, Yatsenyuk and Tymoshenko were mocked for allegedly Ukrainianising their Jewish roots. Russian information operations could not explain why Jews had fled from the DNR and LNR to 'fascist Ukraine'.[32]

Girkin's invasion of mainland Ukraine in the second week of April came too late to assist most of the pro-Russian protests and attempted uprisings in Eastern-Southern Ukraine. Perhaps as a result, Girkin's *spetsnaz* made the strategic decision to concentrate their support in Donetsk, where pro-Russian protestors had made headway. Girkin's forces captured the towns of Slavyansk and Kramatorsk in Western Donetsk *oblast* and were able to hold on to them for four months before being forced by Ukrainian forces to flee eastward to Donetsk. Ukrainian forces also re-captured Mariupol in Southern Donetsk *oblast* with relative ease. In Luhansk *oblast's* Northern regions, which historically had been part of *Slobozhanshchyna*, pro-Russian forces had little local support. Overall, the 'Russian Spring' engendered some local support in the Crimea, had limited appeal in the Donbas and barely any in Kharkiv and the remainder of so-called *NovoRossiya*. But with Ukrainian security forces largely absent, even a small group, if well-organised and armed, could seize control of key buildings and declare 'independence'.

Ukraine's ATO was launched a few days after Girkin's invasion but only gathered steam the following month. Two decades of neglect, corruption, and asset stripping, combined with Russian penetration of the SBU and military high command, left Ukraine a limited number of reliable military forces. These did include elite parachute (air-mobile) units who took the brunt of the fighting. This was the case especially in Donetsk airport, which had been re-built for the 2012 European football championship, where they became immortalised as 'Cyborgs' after holding off Russian marines and *spetsnaz* and Russian proxies until early 2015.[33] With the Ukrainian armed forces in shambles, volunteers played a key role as fighters in the over 40 battalions that were created. Additionally, large numbers of largely women civilian volunteers[34] collected and transported supplies (uniforms, blankets, boots, telescopic lenses, night vision goggles, medical supplies, food and fresh water) to the front line.[35] Ukraine's military and

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volunteer battalions were supplemented by a revived National Guard based on Interior Ministry Internal Troops which had existed in the 1990s.

Over time, Ukraine has strengthened its military capacity and volunteer battalions have been integrated into the army and National Guard.[36] In 2017, Ukraine was ranked 30th in the world's armies.[37] A study by Poland's Centre for Eastern Studies found that:

Despite all these problems, the Ukrainian armed forces of the year 2017 now number 200,000, most of whom have come under fire, and are seasoned in battle. They have a trained reserve ready for mobilisation in the event of a larger conflict; their weapons are not the latest or the most modern, but the vast majority of them now work properly; and they are ready for the defence of the vital interests of the state (even if some of the personnel still care primarily about their own vested interests). They have no chance of winning a potential military clash with Russia, but they have a reason to fight. The Ukrainian armed forces of the year 2014, in a situation where their home territory was occupied by foreign troops, were incapable of mounting an adequate response. The changes since the Donbas war started mean that Ukraine now has the best army it has ever had in its history.[38]

Military Invasion, Phoney Peace and Real War, 2014–?

- In July 2014, the war escalates as Russian artillery pounds Ukraine from the Russian side of the border.
- Russia sends sophisticated surface-to-air Buk missiles to counter the Ukrainian Air Force and one of these shoots down Malaysia Airlines Flight 17.
- In August, Russian proxy forces in Luhansk and Donetsk are on the verge of being defeated but are saved by Russian forces invading Ukraine and inflicting a major defeat on Ukrainian forces at Ilovaysk.
- Ukraine signs the Minsk I accord, negotiated by Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany. Despite the agreement, intense fighting continues and leads to the signing of Minsk II in February 2015. Neither accord is implemented.
- Russia transforms proxy militias into a 40, 000-strong DNR-LNR army.
- Conflict continues into 2017. Although it is widely assumed Minsk II is dead, there is no Plan B or likelihood of new negotiations leading to Minsk III.

By July 2014, Ukraine's ATO was successful in re-taking control of Western and Southern Donetsk *oblast* and in neutralising Russian proxy activity in Northern Luhansk. At that stage, Putin had to choose whether to abandon his proxies to their fate or to assist them by invading Ukraine. He chose the latter, further damaging Ukrainian-Russian relations and Russia's relations with the West.

Artillery pounded Ukraine from Russian territory making it difficult for Ukrainian forces to maintain control over its border regions. The British Bellingcat investigative network described this as Putin's 'undeclared war'.[39] Ukraine's Air Force had inflicted high numbers of casualties on Russian forces and Russian proxies in May–June and Putin could not respond by sending his own Russian Air Force as this would further undermine the fiction that there were no Russian forces in Eastern Ukraine. Instead, Russia sent surface-to-air missiles, such as the Buk, to shoot down Ukrainian Air Force planes. This sophisticated military equipment could only be manned by trained Russian soldiers – not Russian proxies or Cossacks. In July 2014, a Buk shot down what it thought was a Ukrainian military transport plane but turned out to be a civilian airliner (Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 – MH17), killing all 298 passengers and crew. Despite numerous Russian attempts at deception, Russia's involvement was established beyond doubt.[40]

The following month, Russian forces humiliated Ukraine by invading and defeating Ukrainian forces on Ukraine's Independence Day, 24 August. Russia's increased military aggression and the shooting down of MH17 stiffened US and EU responses to the crisis, leading to new sanctions against Russia. Western government policymakers did not believe Putin's claim that Russia was not militarily intervening in Eastern Ukraine. Ukraine's continued use of the term ATO, until a change in legislation in late 2017, was also confusing as it did not designate Russia and Ukraine as being in a state of war.

The US and UK, both signatories to the 1994 Budapest Memorandum that gave Ukraine security assurances in

return for denuclearisation, did not participate in the Minsk process. The EU (represented by Germany and France), Ukraine, Russia and the OSCE were parties to the negotiations.

In accepting Russia as a partner in the negotiations, the West was playing its own game of *maskirovka*. While rejecting Putin's claims that Russia was uninvolved in the war in Eastern Ukraine they were at the same time willing to include Russia as a mediator rather than as a participant in the conflict. This led to a situation whereby Ukraine's President Poroshenko sat down to negotiate peace with the Russian president whom he accused of conducting hybrid war against and invading Eastern Ukraine while Putin insisted that Russia was not a party to the conflict. The Minsk negotiations did not cover the Crimea.

The Minsk process did not include discussion of Crimea, which for Russia is a closed question. The West has imposed separate sanctions against Russia over Crimea. Some European leaders, echoing populist nationalists, have called for the EU to recognise Russia's sovereignty over the Crimea. During the 2016 US presidential campaign, then-candidate Donald Trump, echoing former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, said 'But, you know, the people of Crimea, from what I've heard, would rather be with Russia than where they were', hinting if he were elected he would recognise Russian sovereignty.[41]

After the poor performance of Donbas militias in summer 2014, Russia set about fashioning them into a 40,000-strong army with Russian command and control and equipped with large supplies of Russian military technology. NATO and Ukraine estimate there are between 5,000–10,000 Russian soldiers in the Donbas with larger numbers stationed just across the border who provide a security guarantee. In transforming proxy militias into standing armies, Putin's policies towards the Donbas were little different to those pursued by Yeltsin in the Trans-Dniestr, South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

The West and Ukraine on one side and Russia on the other have held diametrically different approaches to the implementation of the Minsk accords. Ukraine and the West have insisted on implementing the security provisions first, including the withdrawal of Russian forces, demilitarisation of proxy forces and reestablishment of Ukraine's control over its border with Russia. Putin disagrees, insisting Ukraine should first change its constitution to provide 'special status' for the DNR and LNR and hold local elections. The holding of elections in today's conditions could never be free and fair (Prime Minister Zakharcheko has said Ukrainian parties could not participate) and elections would therefore freeze and legitimise existing control of the DNR and LNR by Russia and its proxies.

That the Minsk accords have failed is not surprising for two reasons. The first is that there is an understandable absence of trust on the Ukrainian side towards any promises made by Putin that security steps in Minsk II would be implemented after Ukraine introduced constitutional changes and held elections. Russia's ability to bargain is undermined by its record of deception; it will be difficult to take Russian assurances seriously when Putin continues to claim there is no Russian military intervention in Eastern Ukraine. A second factor is the potential for further political instability and possibly a third Maidan in Ukraine if President Poroshenko were seen as capitulating to Russian demands. In contrast to Moldova, Georgia and Azerbaijan, Ukraine has not been defeated in the Donbas, so there is less basis upon which to give in to Russian demands. The Ukrainian parliament's attempt to debate the changing of the constitution in August 2015 to provide 'special status' to the DNR and LNR led to nationalist riots and the deaths of three National Guardsmen from a grenade thrown by a veteran of the war. A new factor in Ukrainian electoral politics is the 15% of voters who are veterans and their families.

Charap and Colton point out that Russia's overall goals for Ukraine have not changed since the 21 February 2014 agreement. These include neutrality of Ukraine, adoption of a federal structure in which the DNR and LNR have veto powers over Kiev's domestic and foreign policies, election of governors rather than their appointment by the Ukrainian president, granting Russia the status of a second state language, recognition of the right of the Crimea to 'self-determination' (meaning recognition of Russia's sovereignty over it) and the holding of elections only after adoption of constitutional reforms recognising a 'special status' for the DNR and LNR. Not surprisingly, these demands are a non-starter for all political forces in Kiev other than the former Party of Regions who have re-grouped in the Opposition Bloc.[42]

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'Finlandisation' of Ukraine, which some in the West have advocated, is unacceptable to many in Ukraine and might not satisfy Russia. As this book has shown, Ukraine is viewed as one of three key countries in the *Russkii Mir* and central to the success of the Eurasian Union. To the extent that Russia seeks Ukraine's membership of the Eurasian Union – not a neutral successful democracy on its doorstep – 'Finlandisation' will not do.[43] Since 2009, Russia has focused more on Ukraine integrating with Russia, and not just on its staying neutral.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov implied that neutrality might satisfy Russia, saying that 'only a non-aligned Ukraine may escape further territorial disintegration', but it is not clear that this is a firm offer.[44] Moldova and Azerbaijan have never sought NATO membership and yet Russian proxies have occupied the Trans-Dniestr and Nagorno-Karabakh since the early 1990s. Similarly, in 2002, Putin proposed to Lukashenka that Belarus, a country which has never sought NATO or EU membership, unite with Russia in what would amount to a Russian *Anschluss* of Belarus. Lukashenka refused and vowed to defend his country's sovereignty. In Georgia, Russian proxies took control of South Ossetia and Abkhazia more than a decade before Georgia raised the goal of NATO membership. Georgia's interest in NATO was an *ex post facto* justification for invasion, not a cause of it. In the case of Ukraine, Lavrov was being doubly disingenuous as Russia's understanding of returning Ukrainian territorial integrity did not include the Crimea. Even outside Russia's self-declared 'sphere of interest' in Eurasia, a country with no interest in NATO membership can become a target of Russian hybrid and information warfare, as the case of Sweden shows.[45] The German Marshall Fund reported that Russia has intervened in the internal affairs of 27 European and North American countries since 2004, ranging from cyberattacks to disinformation campaigns.[46]

It is hard to find anyone who believes that the Minsk accords will be implemented. There is no way to bridge Ukraine's insistence on independence and Russia's refusal to accept Ukraine as a fully sovereign country. Russia's plan is for Ukraine to be a fully-fledged member of the Eurasian Union. Russia demands that the West recognises its *droit de regard* over Ukraine and Eurasia and seeks to negotiate a grand bargain with the US over the heads of Ukrainians. Charap and Colton write that 'Russia wanted the deal clinched by the great powers and imposed on Ukraine'.[47]

It is important to recognise a long-term consistency in Russian security policy towards the CIS. [48] Yeltsin, Medvedev and Putin have not differed over Russia's right to dominate Eurasia and its desire to have the US recognise this in a grand bargain. Brezhnev claimed Soviet satellites in Central-Eastern Europe possessed 'limited sovereignty' and Warsaw Pact countries invaded Hungary and Czechoslovakia in 1956 and 1968 to thwart colour-style revolutions. In 1993, only a few years after the disintegration of the USSR, Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev outlined Russia's right to protect Russians and Russian speakers in the former USSR. In September 1995, Yeltsin issued a decree claiming the former USSR as Russia's sphere of influence where Russian peacekeepers would 'guarantee peace and stability'.[49] While Russia's capabilities have recovered dramatically since the 1990s, in terms of goals, Putin did not bring anything to the table that had not already been proposed by his Soviet and Russian predecessors.

Conclusion

The conflict in Ukraine is going to be difficult to solve, for several reasons highlighted in this chapter. First, the conflict is not primarily a civil war but an international war. Russia is a party to the conflict, and therefore cannot effectively mediate it. Nor can it permit the West a real role in mediating it. There is no reason to believe that international wars are easier or harder to resolve in general than civil wars, but in this case, Russia's goals are so contradictory to Ukraine's, and to the West's norms, that it will be very difficult to find common ground.

Second, Russia's aggression in Ukraine was many years in the making, even if it took the events of 2014 to provide the opportunity. Because the invasions of Crimea and the Donbas were not responses either to the West's actions or to the specific events in Kiev, resolving those issues will not be sufficient to secure Russian withdrawal. This is particularly true in the case of Crimea, which, through its annexation, Russia has announced its intention to keep it permanently. Russia's unwillingness to change its behaviour in the Donbas, never mind in Crimea, have been factored into the July 2017 US sanctions. These call on the Treasury and State Departments, along with intelligence officials, to analyse the 'potential effects of expanding sanctions…to include sovereign debt and the full range of

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derivative products'[50] which would represent a significant escalation of economic pressure on Russia.

Third, it appears that there is no path toward a negotiated solution; or rather that the existing path is a dead end. Neither side accepts its basic commitments under the Minsk process, but neither Russia nor Ukraine (nor the EU or US) benefits from walking away from the process. As emphasised throughout this book, regaining control over Ukraine is a long-term Russian foreign policy goal. But the invasion of Ukraine has solidified Ukrainian opinion against Russia and in favour of stronger ties with the West. That means that force and subversion will be more necessary than before, not less, to achieve Russia's objectives.

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[33] On Ukraine's defence of Donetsk Airport for 242 days see Iryna Shtohrin, ed., *AD. 242. Istoriya Muzhnosti, Braterstva i Samopozhertvy* (Kharkiv and Kyiv: Klub Simeynoho Dozvillya and Radio Svoboda, 2016).

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