

Putin's Political Philosophy: Implications for Future Russian Military Activity

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

Putin's Political Philosophy: Implications for Future Russian Military Activity, by MAJ Francesca A. Graham, US Army, 44 pages.

President Putin practices the Conservative school of political philosophy. The philosophy acknowledges the existence of a governing body, individual ownership of property, and the rule of law. These are balanced against the central concern of this school, which is the stability of the core governing body. Adherents guard against political or popular dialogue that could upend the existing government order. Seeking an alternative reality to Russia's profoundly conservative political philosophy will elicit an uncooperative and violent spirit. Three vectors of research and analysis balanced against Russia's persistent security dilemmas and employed across multiple historical periods supply the means to assess Putin's political philosophy. Poor geography, a harsh and restrictive climate, and distance plus time—the security dilemmas—each contribute to the maintenance or lack thereof of national accord, national pride, and national prestige, each core concerns of Conservative political philosophical thought.

Putin's security decisions will reflect the same historical determination to mitigate or remove the risks associated with the dilemmas. Japan and China contest Russia's access to the Pacific Ocean; Putin will nurture his relationship with Beijing. Littoral states contest Russia's decision space in the Caspian Sea; Putin will prioritize Tehran. Putin will nurture his relationship with Ankara to undermine NATO and reduce Black Sea southern area threats. Beijing, Tehran, and Ankara are alliances of convenience. Controlling the Strait of Sicily is the next step in the Mediterranean Sea to assure sea access and improve political position. In the Baltic region, he will emphasize deterrence with Western Military District ground forces, strategic strike capability, and A2/AD.

Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	v
Acronyms	vi
Introduction	1
Political Philosophy	2
Methodology	6
Philosophical and Practical Continuities: Russian Imperial and Soviet Eras	10
Russian Imperial Political Philosophy	11
Soviet Political Philosophy	15
Putin's Political Philosophy	24
Conclusion and Implications	34
Bibliography	38

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Acronyms

A2/AD	Anti-Access/Area Denial
AFRICOM	Africa Command
DIME	Diplomatic, Information, Military, Economic
DOD	Department of Defense
EU	European Union
EUCOM	European Command
KGB	Komitet Gosudarstvennor Bezopasnosti
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NMS	National Military Strategy
NORTHCOM	Northern Command
NSS	National Security Strategy
SDF	Self Defense Forces
US	United States

Introduction

For men in general judge more by their eyes than by their hands; everybody is fitted to see, few to understand.

—Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*

The History of every major Galactic Civilization tends to pass through three distinct and recognizable phases, those of Survival, Inquiry and Sophistication, otherwise known as the How, Why, and Where Phases.

—Douglas Adams, *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy*

A US Army captain is sitting in the windowless basement of the pentagon during the height of Russia's 2014 military activities in Ukraine. She is watching a YouTube video of Russia's supreme leader, President Vladimir Putin, entering the Kremlin for a speech. He walks down the long hallway to the room of waiting dignitaries. The Kremlin Regiment, responsible for guarding the president and other state treasures, stand erect along the hallway saluting Putin. The Army captain made two unexpected observations. First, the men were wearing uniforms modeled after those worn by the Russian Imperial Guard rather than after Soviet uniforms. Second, the men of the regiment raised their heads and eyes skyward, turning their heads, still raised, in the direction of Putin's march as he passed.

This was no proletariat passing through the Kremlin. The uniforms, raised heads, and raised eyes showed something different. She realized that Putin is something more than her understanding of him as a brutish Soviet apparatchik still attached to the Soviet Union and the methods of the Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (KGB). A basic understanding of Putin's personal and professional history exists. What does not exist is a careful analysis of who Putin is in relation to the Russian people. In other words, an analysis of Putin's political philosophy, that inner necessity that frames his thoughts and urges his *persona* to act.¹

¹ For a description of the concept of "inner necessity," see Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, rev. ed., trans. Michael T. H. Sadler (Boston: MFA Publications, 2006), 66.

Political Philosophy

This section endeavors to answer two questions: what is political philosophy and how can an assessment of President Putin's political philosophy contribute to a prediction of how or where Putin might use the Russian military next? The discipline of political philosophy, therefore, studies and describes three major schools of thought; Liberalism, Conservatism, and Socialism. Before describing the schools, first, a description of political philosophy itself.

Political philosophy studies the *who* of the political object. The 2014 invasion of Ukraine surprised the US military and political community writ large, as did Russia's 2015 deployment to Syria. With these two acts, Russia invalidated long-standing assumptions about Moscow's political rationale, its military projection and sustainment ability, and Russian diplomatic and economic risk prioritization. With much analysis over the last decades focused on the symptoms of *what* Russia does (restricts freedom of speech and the press, masterfully manipulates the diplomatic environment, jealously protects its land), it is no wonder that we lost sight of *who* Russia is. Without an understanding of this *who*, it is impossible to understand the *why*, and equally fruitless to predict the *where*, *when*, *what*, and the *how*.²

The *who* of any object is more than just its history in the textbook sense of the word. The *who* of any object is the object's total history; the whole in its organic form. In other words, a history that is impossible to know. G.W.F. Hegel, a renowned German philosopher, famously argued that "the True is the whole," while Werner Heisenberg, a renowned German theoretical physicist, equally famously argued that it is impossible to wholly know anything. Neither are wrong, as far as this author can know, though they seem to contradict each other. Given the lack of empirical certainty, it is any wonder that the study of the whole fell out of vogue in the 20th century. Deconstruction and the search for an independent variable that yielded a sense of discreet

² For a pithy and useful discussion of the focus of recent scholarly work on President Putin's political decisions, see Robert Nalbandov, *Not by Bread Alone: Russian Foreign Policy Under Putin* (Omaha: University of Nebraska, 2016), 1-18.

understanding and the ability for discreet manipulation became attractive. Philosophy is the opposite. It examines the whole, not with the purpose of deconstruction, but rather with the purpose of construction, always with the absolute knowledge that no human means exist to know absolutely. Therefore, political philosophy is a field of study that examines and makes observations on the whole of a political body – the nation, its nature, and its character.³

Through this study, an observer can assess “both the nature of political things and the right, or the good, political order” for the nation under inspection. The etymology of the phrase, political philosophy, is useful to understand. The word *political* derives its meaning from the Greek *polis*, or city. In modern usage, *polis* expanded to mean state. A *polite*, or citizen, is a member of the city upon whom the protection and the law of the government extends. *Politikos*, or statesman, is a noun referencing the administration of the *polis* on behalf of the *polites*. A dialogue in this case exists between three elements: individuals – *polites* – the group or society – *polis* – that is “constituted of and by a sum of voluntary associations,” and statesmen – *politikos* – those entrusted by *polites* and *polis* with stewardship of their sovereignty and communications. These three elements form a nation. The nature and character of a nation as expressed through its diplomatic, information, military, and economic tendencies (DIME), is communicated by one or more of these elements of the nation depending on the established form of government; by the state only in a totalitarian form of governing, by the society only in an anarchical form of governing, as examples.⁴

³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 11; Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2007), 161-80; for an enlightening history of the decline of scholarly work on political philosophy as well as the confusion between the disciplines of political philosophy and political science, see Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies* (Chicago: University of Press, 1959), 9-55.

⁴ First quote from Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?*, 12; “Politic,” Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed October 30, 2018, https://www.etymonline.com/word/politic#etymonline_v_17575; for an in-depth discussion of the three elements of a nation, their relation to each other and their obligations to each other, see Ernest Barker, *Principles of Social & Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951); for information on how the Department of Defense views the diplomatic, information, military, economic (DIME) construct, see US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, *Joint Doctrine Note (JDN) 1-18, Strategy* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2018); Barker, *Principles of Social*, 5.

Philosophy, also, is a Greek word, and a compound. *Philos* is a word for love and *sophia* is a word for wisdom. Thus, philosophy, in its contemplative form is a love of wisdom, and in an active sense is a quest for the truth, a quest for “knowledge of the whole.” This is not enough of an explanation, however, to understand the meaning of philosophy. Greek philosophers used four words to describe love: *libido*, *eros*, *agape*, and *philos*. *Libido* denotes love for an inferior in the sense of bringing someone or something into one’s possession or consumption. *Eros* means love of an ideal, admiration of a hero, something greater than oneself, a superior personality or thing. *Agape* describes a love given without desire for compensation, for example, the love of God in the Christian tradition. *Philos* denotes the love for a friend, a partner, an equal. The word *philos* precisely describes a love of wisdom and a quest for truth, the dialogue, among equals. It is important to understand, however, that equality refers to persons who are equally *polites*, and thus equally voluntary citizens of the *polis*. Equal does not assume social equality.⁵

The etymology drawn out above suggests a proposition: Political philosophy describes the intelligent use of power, coherent with the nature and the character of a nation, by a government to steward the affairs of the *polis* on behalf of the *polites*. As a government is not an agency unto itself, another proposition is possible: a nation allows a leader that properly expresses its national self, in other words its national political philosophy. A leader that does not properly express the national self is disposed of or stripped of tangible power. A third proposition, one that gets to the heart of this monograph, thus follows: the expressions of an accepted – meaning one that holds tangible power – national leader, including their use of warfare, is an expression of the national self. Evoking Carl von Clausewitz, Colin S. Gray, in his book *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare*, describes the relationship in the following manner: “Warfare is social and cultural, as well as political and strategic behavior. As such, it must reflect the characteristics of the communities

⁵ First quote from Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?*, 11; Alexander Moseley, “Philosophy of Love,” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed October 30, 2018, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/love/>; Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 3, 137.

that wage it.” The study of political philosophy, therefore, will illuminate *who* Russia is, supply an understanding of *who* Putin is, and will offer an approach to anticipating Putin’s next use of the Russian military.⁶

Before continuing to methodology, a brief explanation of the schools of thought referenced above is necessary. First, Liberalism derives its meaning from the word, liberty. Simple enough except that Liberalism split into two distinct schools of thought known as Classical Liberalism and Modern Liberalism. Both agree that citizens are equal under the laws of the state. Liberty is for all, not some. Both agree to individual ownership of property. Liberty is not collectivist. Both agree to an impulse to manage change. The fundamental difference between Classical and Modern Liberalism is the government’s role in respect to equality. Classical Liberalism argues that the government must create an environment where all citizens have equal opportunity to access freedom, wealth, property, and so on. Modern Liberalism invokes the power of the government to compel that all citizens have equal distribution of freedom, wealth, property, et cetera. Modern Liberalists would advocate, as an example, for welfare and redistribution to ensure all citizens are on equal footing. Both Classical and Modern Liberalism embrace a robust dialogue between the *polites*, *polis*, and *politikos*. This dialogue invariably leads to government and societal upheaval, a situation the system is theoretically designed to withstand.⁷

Second, the school of Conservative political philosophical thought, in unison with Liberalism, agrees to the existence of a governing body, to individual ownership of property, and to equality of citizens under the law. However, whereas Liberalism welcomes an often raucous dialogue between the *polite*, *polis*, and the *politikos*, Conservatism is guarded against such a dialogue that could upend the existing government order. There is an impulse to resist change.

⁶ Colin S. Gray, *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare* (New York: Phoenix Publishers, 2007), 40.

⁷ For an in-depth explanation of these schools of thought, see Alexander Moseley, “Political Philosophy: Methodology,” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed October 30, 2018, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/polphil/#H4>.

Conservatism is skeptical of any activity that could destabilize functioning institutions, including internal rebellion, a coup, un-checked freedom of speech and publication, international involvement in state matters, and democratic institutions. Conservatism encourages private ownership of property as it minimizes internal unrest and mitigates poverty.⁸

Third, Socialism removes the individual from the social construct. Socialism as a school of thought agrees upon the existence of a governing body, but individual ownership of property is extinct, and citizens are not equal under the law. The state is the only and total expression of the collective society (*polis*). It controls all power, communications, modes of thought, and means of production.⁹

Methodology

It is possible to focus solely on Putin's actions and habits to assess his political philosophy. However, this approach is reductive and ignores that Putin, like any member of a society, is also a socialized product of the complex history and beliefs of his people. Further, it ignores the potential use of history and beliefs to influence or control people, an opportunity Putin and his lieutenants often exploit. Three vectors of research and analysis—military activity, political aims, and ideology—balanced against Russia's persistent security dilemmas and employed across multiple historical periods, supply a means to assess Putin's political philosophy.¹⁰

Before continuing, it is useful to describe the persistent security dilemmas that Russian leaders must address to provide for the security and prosperity of their state. The first dilemma is geographic. Peter the Great's favorite predecessor and Russia's first tsar, Tsar Ivan IV (commonly known as Ivan the Terrible), 1533 to 1584, inherited a state that was landlocked and

⁸ For more information, see also Moseley, "Political Philosophy: Methodology."

⁹ For more information, see also Moseley, "Political Philosophy: Methodology."

¹⁰ For a thorough explanation of the human condition in relation human understanding and interaction with the social world, see Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City: First Anchor Books Edition, 1967).

threatened on three sides: by the Mongols, the Ottomans, and the Swedes. Ivan IV recognized the geographic security dilemma: enemies encircled his state, and Russia's inability to access the sea limited freedom of movement, of maneuver, and Russia's political or economic potential. To address the geographic dilemma Ivan IV exercised two broad aims: harness the potential of the state under the leadership of one undisputed leader – theoretically enabling rapid and decisive security decisions – and turn Russia's attention to the west – gaining access to the closest seas.¹¹

To address the first aim, Ivan IV, though a devout member of the Russian Orthodox Church, ascribed the voice of divine Providence to his office. With this change, he replaced the church as the body that communicated the will of God for earthly matters, and he became the first Muscovite autocrat. As historian R. Khazarnufsky put it in his collection of essays, *Landmarks*, “submission to the will of the tsar was essential for only he embodied the integral truth of the individual and the universal. Where the power of the tsar had once been thought to be arbitrary or abstract, it now affirmed a higher purpose.” Successive Russian leaders likewise chose to limit the Orthodox Church's influence in state –earthly – affairs. It is important to note that autocratic governance was not abnormal in the imperial period analyzed in this monograph. Catherine the Great famously kept a life-long correspondence with Voltaire who encouraged her natural inclination towards autocracy, highlighting her as a positive example of an enlightened despot and addressing her as the “brightest star of the North.”¹²

¹¹ Sergei F. Platonov, “The Heritage of Muscovy,” in *Peter the Great Changes Russia*, 2nd ed., ed. Marc Raeff (London: D. C. Heath and Company, 1972), 4, 6; for a description of the terms, movement and maneuver, see US Department of the Army, *Field Manual (FM) 3-0, Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017).

¹² Krishan Kumar, *Visions of Empire: How Five Imperial Regimes Shaped the World* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2017), 218; Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 146; R. Khazarnufsky, “Introduction,” in *Landmarks: A Collection of Essays on the Russian Intelligentsia*, ed. Boris Shragin and Albert Todd, trans. Marian Schwartz (New York: Karz Howard Publishers, 1977), xvii; Marc Raeff, “Introduction,” in *Peter the Great Changes Russia*, 2nd ed., ed. Marc Raeff (London: D. C. Heath and Company, 1972), xiii; Feofan Prokopovich, “The Heroic Tsar,” in *Peter the Great Changes Russia*, 2nd ed., ed. Marc Raeff (London: D. C. Heath and Company, 1972), 39; Mikhail M. Bogoslovskii, “Peter's Program of Political Reform,” in *Peter the Great Changes Russia*, 2nd ed., ed. Marc Raeff (London: D. C. Heath and Company, 1972), 47-62; Catherine II, *Memoirs of Catherine the Great*, trans. Katherine Anthony (New York: Alfred A. Knoff Inc., 1927), 304; Francois-Marie Arouet Voltaire, *Candide and Philosophical Letters*, ed. and trans. by Ernest Dilworth

To address the second aim, Ivan IV embarked on mostly unsuccessful military and diplomatic ventures to reach a sea. Future Russian leaders expanded and experienced more success in these efforts, most impressively in the imperial period by Peter the Great and Catherine the Great. Ivan IV additionally developed Russia's first mechanisms to centrally manage the state, which Peter the Great expanded upon, again with the view to harness the potential of the state as well as to enable expansion to the west.¹³

The geographic security dilemma persists, enemies remain to the west and the southeast, much of the Russian territory is landlocked, and access to the sea is still challenged. Along with the dilemma there remains Ivan IV's same fears of encirclement and of having Russian political and economic potential constrained.¹⁴

The second security dilemma is the environment. Russia's harsh climate and terrain place many constraints on Russian decision making. Some of these decisions include where to live and where to grow food. Most Russians live in the western part of the country to avoid the more severe winter climate in the middle and eastern parts of the country. Likewise, due to climate, most of the available arable land, just over 7.5% of Russia's total land area, is in the west and southwest of the country. These two facts alone, western location of the majority of the population and of available land for agriculture, keep Russia's security lens firmly focused on its western border to avoid loss of people, agricultural potential, and influence.¹⁵

The looming loss of control and influence in Ukraine in 2014 undoubtedly aggravated this security concern in President Putin's mind. Of all states, only two Eurasian states rank in the

(New York: Random House, Inc., 1956), 144-153, 173; Catherine II, *Memoirs of Catherine the Great*, 326; G.N. Komelova, "Catherine the Great and Her Age," in *Treasures of Imperial Russia: Catherine the Great from the State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg*, ed. Isabella Forbes and William Underhill (Memphis: Lithograph Printing Company, 1990), xv, xvii.

¹³ Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 143-155; Platonov, *Peter the Great Changes Russia*, 3.

¹⁴ George Friedman, "10 Maps that Explain Russia's Strategy," *Business Insider*, February 1, 2016, accessed December 17, 2018, <https://www.businessinsider.com/10-maps-that-explain-russias-strategy-2016-1#now-russia-has-nothing-to-lose-10>.

¹⁵ Ibid., "10 Maps that Explain Russia's Strategy."

top ten in terms of arable land; Russia, number three with 121.78 million hectares, and Ukraine, number 8 with 32.45 million hectares.¹⁶

The third security dilemma is distance coupled with its natural bedfellow, time. Russia is the largest country in the world consisting of over 17 million square kilometers, which is nearly twice the size of the second largest country in the world, Canada, at nearly 10 million square kilometers. The approximate time it takes to travel by air from one side of Russia to the other is eight and a half hours, and by train approximately seven days.¹⁷ These types of distances and the time associated with traveling the distances present hard security challenges in terms of offense and defense, reinforcement, and sustainment, to name only several challenges. Josef Stalin understood this when he engaged in diplomatic processes with Adolf Hitler in the late 1930s; he could ill afford a two-front war with both Japan and Germany. Each of these security dilemmas persist today.¹⁸

Putin and his lieutenants often recall two periods in Russian history to justify current decisions and actions—the Russian Imperial period beginning with Peter the Great and ending with Catherine the Great, and the Soviet period beginning with Vladimir Lenin and ending with Mikhail Gorbachev. Considering their importance to Putin, these two eras serve as the historical basis for comparison and analysis. Several key historical events make up the periods delineated by these brackets. Peter the Great christened what is known in Russian history as the Imperial Age: Russia became an empire and the tsar became not just a ruler of the city of Moscow, but an emperor of all the Russians. Catherine the Great nurtured the empire to its grandest fruition, while

¹⁶ “Agriculture>Arable Land>Hectares: Countries Compared,” NationMaster, accessed December 15, 2018, <https://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/stats/Agriculture/Arable-land/Hectares>.

¹⁷ “Moscow – Vladivostok Train,” TransSiberianExpress, accessed December 15, 2018, <https://www.transsiberianexpress.net/siberian-train.html>.

¹⁸ “The Largest Countries in the World,” World Atlas, last modified March 28, 2018, accessed December 15, 2018, <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-largest-countries-in-the-world-the-biggest-nations-as-determined-by-total-land-area.html>; for an excellent analysis of the strategic context surrounding Stalin’s security calculus in the late 1930s, see Stuart D. Goldman, *Nomonhan, 1939: The Red Army’s Victory That Shaped World War II* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2012).

Catherine's death in 1796 ushered in a period of steady decline for Russian prestige and power until the imperialist order gave way to revolution in 1917. Lenin, progenitor of the Soviet Union, mobilized communism during the period of revolution and civil war, while Leonid Brezhnev's tenure—ending with his death in 1982—ushered in a period of political and economic instability that led to the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991.¹⁹

Philosophical and Practical Continuities: Russian Imperial and Soviet Eras

Like the tsars and Soviets that preceded him, Putin believes that Russia needs strong, centralized leadership to recover from internal chaos and international humiliation. Observation and analysis of Putin's presidency leads to a conclusion that Putin's political philosophical approach, like the tsars before him, is conservative. The Soviets, of course, adopted a socialist approach. Whereas ideologically the tsars relied on autocracy and the Soviet's relied on democratic centralism, Putin relies on sovereign democracy. There is continuity between these three types of government. Though some observers believe that Putin slid precipitously from a liberal to a conservative approach beginning only in 2004, a study of his early expressions on the proper citizen-government relationship and best use of government power reveal enduring modes of thought.²⁰

A model of vertical and centralized leadership, sovereign democracy melds together tsarist and Soviet sources of power, including religion, morality, political, and military power projection. Though a democratic government according to its constitution, Putin's Russia is not a

¹⁹ Sergey Lavrov, "'Russia's Foreign Policy: Historical Background' for 'Russia in Global Affairs' magazine, March 3, 2016," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, last modified March 3, 2016, accessed August 8, 2018, http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2124391; Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 213; Nicholas Zernov, "The Establishment of the Russian Church," in *Peter the Great Changes Russia*, 2nd ed., ed. Marc Raeff (London: D. C. Heath and Company, 1972), 112, 120.

²⁰ Michel Eltchaninoff, *Inside the Mind of Vladimir Putin* (London: Hurst & Company, 2018), 7, 10, 33; for an enlightening view into Putin's early political thought that was undoubtedly viewed as pure propaganda without any real worth, see Vladimir Putin, *First Person: An Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait by Russia's President*, trans. Catherine A Fitzpatrick (New York: PublicAffairs, 2000), 83-207.

democracy in the way a US citizen would recognize. Carrying forward tsarist and Soviet fears of internal disorder and external meddling, plus the Russian tradition of servitude to the state, Putin's government manages internal and foreign policy closely for the people, not by the people. Democracy by the people, according to Putin, is akin to anarchy. Democracy by the people caused the internal chaos of the 1990s. The Russian leaders of this democracy by the people watched impotently as Russia's border states divested themselves of Russia's control while Europe and the US looked to strip away slivers of Russia's much prized sovereignty. None of these concerns are unique to Putin, as the sections below describe.²¹

Russian Imperial Political Philosophy

Russian Imperial tsars practiced a political philosophy of conservatism adapted to an ideology of autocracy. Analysis of the military activity, political aims, and ideology of the tsars elucidates this conclusion. The imperial period spanned over two centuries between 1682 to 1917, beginning with Peter the Great and ending with Tsar Nicholas II. As noted previously, the research and analysis of the imperial era in this monograph only addresses the period from Peter the Great's reign, 1682, to the death and end of the reign of Catherine the Great, 1796. During this period, the tsars used their military to gain new territories, squash civil unrest, and as a tool of diplomacy. Russian political aims stayed mostly consistent; (1) establish and sustain international political power and influence particularly in Europe, (2) geographic expansion to reduce security dilemmas, increase economic potential, and increase respect for Russia.²²

²¹ Eltchaninoff, *Inside the Mind*, 33; Marcel de Haas, *Russia's Foreign Security Policy in the 21st Century: Putin, Medvedev and Beyond* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 3; Saul Bernard Cohen, *Geopolitics: The Geography of International Relations*, 3rd ed. (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 217; Lilia Shevtsova, "Russia's Choice: Change or Degradation," in *Can Russia Reform? Economic, Political, and Military Perspectives*, ed. Stephen J. Blank (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2012), 1.

²² Georgii V. Plekhanov, "Peter the Great—An Oriental Despot," in *Peter the Great Changes Russia*, 2nd ed., ed. Marc Raeff (London: D. C. Heath and Company, 1972), 183-87; Duc de Saint-Simon, "His Personality and Habits," in *Peter the Great Changes Russia*, 2nd ed., ed. Marc Raeff (London: D. C. Heath and Company, 1972), 19; Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 213-461. The reader might be surprised that these aims sound familiar to the political aims often stated by President Putin.

Six tsars ruled Russia during the thirty-seven-year period between Peter the Great's 1725 death and Catherine the Great's 1762 ascension to the throne. These include; Empress Catherine I, second wife of Peter the Great, 1725 to 1727; Emperor Peter II, grandson of Peter the Great, 1727 to 1730; Empress Anna, niece of Peter the Great, 1730 to 1740; Emperor Ivan VI, nephew of Empress Anna, 1740 to 1741; Empress Elizabeth, daughter of Peter the Great, 1741 to 1762, and Emperor Peter III, nephew of Empress Elizabeth and husband of Catherine the Great, 1762. Broadly, these rulers stayed the course on many of Peter the Great's initiatives including improving the military arm of the state. The work these rulers carried out in their sometimes precipitously short reigns—Catherine the Great's husband only ruled for six months before being deposed by his wife—does not warrant in-depth discussion in this monograph. Their energy remained focused primarily on internal matters due to political instability and national unrest given the fact that none of Peter's sons was alive at the time of Peter's death, he did not appoint a successor, and he abolished primogeniture during his reign.²³

During Peter and Catherine's respective reigns, Russia transitioned from a virtual non-entity in international politics, still considered a corrupt, backwards mud-pit by most neighbors, to a politically powerful, prestigious, and well positioned state actor that controlled vast swaths of strategically important territory. By Catherine the Great's death in 1796 the empire included the land between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea, parts of modern-day Finland, Siberia east to the Bering Sea and Sea of Okhotsk, and large swaths of modern-day Georgia, and Kazakhstan. As Karl Marx wrote in 1853 when he warned the British parliament against Russian expansionism in the matter of Turkey, "As to Russia's antipathy against aggrandizement, I allege the following facts from a mass of acquisitions of Russia since Peter the Great. The Russian frontier has advanced toward Berlin, Dresden and Vienna about 700 miles; toward Constantinople, 500 miles;

²³ Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 242-253; Catherine II, *Memoirs of Catherine the Great*, 263-278.

toward Stockholm, 630 miles, and toward Tehran, 1000 miles.” The rise of a militarily and politically powerful Russia, a course begun by Tsar Ivan IV, aggressively nurtured by Peter the Great, and brought to maturation by Catherine the Great, irreversibly upset the established balance of power in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.²⁴

Russia remained at war much of Peter and Catherine the Great’s respective reigns. Their military accomplishments against the Ottomans, the Persians, and the Swedes gave Russia access to, and in some areas, ownership of warmer water ports. Compared to ports off the coast of Siberia, ports in the Black Sea, Caspian Sea, and Baltic Sea gave Russia previously unknown political and economic power. From these seas, Russia could project military power into Europe and the Middle East with the new Russian Imperial Navy that Peter created, as well as exert political and economic influence in these same areas. Additionally, access to these seas began to address each of Russia’s persistent security dilemmas; geography, environment, and distance plus time. The conclusion of the twenty-one-year Great Northern War against the Swedes bought Peter’s most decisive victory in terms of land and peoples, access to the Baltic Sea, and irrevocably removed Sweden as the dominant regional power.²⁵

During Catherine’s reign, the decisive 1774 Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, which ended the Russo-Turkish War, gave Russia at least four new privileges; safe passage through the Turkish Straits into the Mediterranean Sea for commercial purposes; the right to maintain a Russian Black Sea Fleet; the right to build an Orthodox Christian Church in Ottoman-controlled Constantinople,

²⁴ Barbara Jelavich, *A Century of Russian Foreign Policy: 1814—1914* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1964), 4, 7; Squarespace, “Imperial Russia: Geography,” Freeman-Pedia, accessed December 16, 2018, <https://www.freeman-pedia.com/imperial-russia/>; Karl Marx, “The Turkish Question—The Times—Russian Aggrandizement,” *New York Daily Tribune*, June 14, 1853, accessed November 1, 2018, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030213/1853-06-14/ed-1/seq-6/>; Britain actually supported Russian naval expeditions against the Ottoman Empire in the Russo-Turkish War of 1768 to 1774; Britain’s enemy was France and France was allied with the Turks. For more information, see Jelavich, *A Century*, 19; Raeff, *Peter the Great Changes Russia*, xvii; B. H. Sumner, “Peter’s Accomplishments and Their Historical Significance,” in *Peter the Great Changes Russia*, 2nd ed., ed. Marc Raeff (London: D. C. Heath and Company, 1972), 188-194.

²⁵ Kumar, *Visions of Empire*, 225; Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 238-239, 213-241.

and the recognition of Russia as the “protector” of the Ottoman Empire’s Orthodox Christian peoples. These last two, linked to the schism of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1653 caused by conflict between the “Old Believers” and the Patriarch Nikon of Moscow, and the aspiration of Catherine to remove the Ottoman Empire from Constantinople, harassed Europe and the Ottomans for generations.²⁶

Military activity thus was a tool of Peter and Catherine to achieve the imperial political aims of addressing Russia’s persistent security dilemmas, expanding the empire, and exerting international political influence. The military additionally served the important function of keeping the state apparatus safe from its own people. Russia’s historically multi-ethnic and notoriously restive population proved itself a constant source of consternation for both Peter and Catherine. Internal rebellions threatened to overthrow the tsar on more than one occasion, most famously during the 1773 to 1774 Pugachev Rebellion early in Catherine’s reign.

Catherine, an early admirer of liberal political philosophical Enlightenment ideals quickly reversed course to a starkly conservative and autocratic approach towards internal security following the Pugachev Rebellion. Though she remained an admirer of political liberalism, the realities of her empire as she saw them, and the reality of her role as the parent-protector of Russia—a role initially fashioned for the sitting tsar by Ivan IV—held no place for liberalist individualism of the citizenry. The French Revolution further aggravated the thought that unrest

²⁶ “Treaty of Peace (Küçük Kaynarca), 1774,” *Empire in Asia: A New Global History*, accessed January 1, 2019, http://www.fas.nus.edu.sg/hist/eia/documents_archive/kucuk-kaynarca.php; Kumar, *Visions of Empire*, 225; Jelavich, *A Century*, 21; Patriarch Nikon of Moscow introduced process reforms to the Russian Orthodox Church. The stated desire of these reforms was the closer alignment of process between Russian and Greek Orthodox traditions to reduce confusion. The impacts of the reforms were the increased power of Patriarch Nikon, validation of the Russian Patriarch’s claim to leadership of the Eastern Orthodox Christian faith, and the schism of 1653 between those who supported the reforms, and those who did not, labeled the Old Believers. Russian leaders, including Putin, use the schism to political advantage. For more information, see Kumar, *Visions of Empire*, 221. Catherine, in conjunction with Emperor Joseph II of Austria, conspired to partition between themselves Ottoman-controlled lands on the European continent, and christen a new Greek Empire with its imperial seat at Constantinople and with Catherine’s grandson, aptly and intentionally named, Konstantin, as ruler. For more information, see Jelavich, *A Century*, 22.

could spawn self-deterministic thoughts by the empire's multi-ethnic population and thereby threaten the integrity of Russian lands, or the person of the tsar themselves. The effect on Russian leadership psyche of the fear of internal unrest is significant and perpetual. It is a key determinant of the leadership's political philosophy. The following sections revisit this topic.²⁷

Soviet Political Philosophy

Perhaps they were the most gifted, the strongest of our people. But their mighty energies were vainly wasted, wasted abnormally, unjustly, hopelessly. And who was to blame, whose fault was it? That's just it, who was to blame?

—Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Notes from the House of the Dead*

The Soviet Union adopted a socialist political philosophy, tailored to the Russian context through Leninism and Stalinism. Simultaneously, persistent Russian security dilemmas forced Soviet leaders to view international relations through a realist lens. The central tenets of the socialist—realist political philosophy changed little during the sixty-five-year period from Lenin's rise to the end of Brezhnev's tenure. Lenin, the dominant political father of the Soviet Union, adopted Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel's ideology of communism, a branch of socialism. Lenin militarized communism and shaped it into a radical ideological form embodied in an embryonic new system of government, the Soviet Union. Stalin brutally nurtured Lenin's legacy and over the course of twenty-nine years calcified the militarized ideology into a system of

²⁷ As an example, Catherine undertook a two-year effort during the beginning of her reign to personally re-write and organize the jumbled laws of Russia. She wrote the laws, called the Great Instruction, or Nakaz, according to her understanding of the writings of Enlightenment thinkers including Voltaire, Diderot, and Montesquieu. A new legislative commission organized by Catherine and consisting of nobility from across the empire slashed the draft Nakaz into less than half of its original form, which Catherine allowed. She understood her power rested with the favor of the nobility. For more information, see Catherine II, *Memoirs*, 299-307; Komelova, *Treasure of Imperial Russia*, xvii; as an example, she bought Diderot and Voltaire's personal libraries upon their death and she created many organizations aimed to educate and care for her people, as well as took a personal interest in expanding cultural and scientific endeavors. For more information, see George R. Havens, *Selections from Voltaire: With Explanatory Comment Upon His Life and Works*, 2nd ed. (New York: Appleton – Century – Crofts, Inc., 1930), 439; Komelova, *Treasures of Imperial Russia*, xvii-xix; Jelavich, *A Century*, 25; Komelova, *Treasures of Imperial Russia*, xvii; Lenin viewed nationalism as a tool to undermine imperialism, but also as a threat to socialism; a contradiction uncomfortably sustained throughout Soviet existence. For an in-depth discussion on the topic, see Wladyslaw W. Kulski, *Peaceful Co-Existence: An Analysis of Soviet Foreign Policy* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1959), 189-202.

government and way of thought that unapologetically affected a vast sweep of societies.

Successive Soviet leaders' political thought fluctuated between the legacies left by these two leaders, vilifying one, apologizing for the other to sustain power and to manage the system each inherited. What remains for the purposes of this monograph is to, first, understand the security dilemmas the Soviet state faced, second, understand the political aims of Leninism and Stalinism, third, analyze how the military supported these aims.²⁸

The security dilemmas faced by the Soviet state did not change from those faced by Peter the Great and Catherine the Great; geography, environment, and distance plus time. The risk associated with these dilemmas was high for the Soviet's pre-1941 given that they lacked allies. Russia's historical antagonists, including Europe and China, remained hostile, the environment became no less prohibitive to life than in previous centuries, and the Russian landmass remained massive. Post-WWI and especially post-WWII the entrance of the United States into the international arena changed Soviet security calculus. From a military perspective, the United States showed its ability to target Russia with kinetic effects from stand-off: Russia lost the strategic advantage of depth that only future investment in deterrence could restore. Additionally, the United States showed its intent and very real ability to compete across all available military domains with the Soviet Union, either with and through multinational international institutions such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), or unilaterally. From a diplomatic perspective, the United States tempered its action and rhetoric against other potential threats, such as China, to constrain Russia. In fact, the entire US national security view of the world coalesced

²⁸ Josef Stalin, *Problems of Leninism* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1947), 14, 325; Arthur Bullard, *The Russian Pendulum: Autocracy—Democracy—Bolshivism* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1919), 5; Vladimir I. Lenin, "Lecture on the 1905 Revolution," Marxists Internet Archive, accessed November 1, 2018, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/jan/09.htm>; Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, trans. Michael B. Petrovich (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1962), 70-1, 101-2, 190.

around the idea of the Soviet threat; from the sublime, nuclear deterrence, to the ridiculous, vegetarianism as a sign of communist thought.²⁹

Leninism, as Stalin famously said, is the “theory and tactics of the proletarian revolution in general, and the theory and tactics of the dictatorship of the proletariat in particular.” Lenin understood the necessity of the marriage between political power and the military during his short time as the leader of the Soviets. He knew that Russia could not achieve its political object without the power of a military either as an active or deterrent force. Lenin saw this when the Imperial Russian Army supported the Tsar during the Revolution of 1905, but later both tacitly and actively supported the revolutionaries in 1917 due to their disappointment with the Tsar’s military leadership in WWI, and their exhaustion from the same war.³⁰

The failure of the 1905 revolution affected Lenin deeply. He was disappointed that the soldiers of the Imperial Russian Army did not support the uprising. He was disappointed by the inability of the peasants, formerly serfs and still the largest group of Russian citizens, to either mass enough force against the tsarist government, or to destroy enough of the estates of the nobility, thus freeing themselves from their slave masters. He was angered at his fellow revolutionaries for their acceptance of government concessions that while they did establish the first ever Russian constitution and Duma, in truth the absolute power of the monarch remained intact.³¹

²⁹ Author’s personal experience in the first grade, 1986.

³⁰ First quote from Stalin, *Problems of Leninism*, 13; Patreon, “Ten Minute History – The Russian Revolution (Short Documentary),” YouTube, last modified December 31, 2016, accessed November 2, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZ55ZvBe07U>.

³¹ Lenin, “Lecture on the 1905 Revolution;” Bullard, *The Russian Pendulum*, 5; it is an interesting fact that a 1905 worker’s rights march in St. Petersburg, then Russia’s capital, led by a Russian Orthodox priest touched off the Revolution of 1905. Father George Gapon mobilized many workers and presented the government with a list of demands on behalf of the workers. This fact, the rallying capability of a Russian Orthodox priest, is an important consideration during the tsarist and Soviet times, as well as the current day. See George Gapon, *The Story of My Life*, (New York: E. P. Dutton & CO., 1906), accessed November 5, 2018, <https://ia800200.us.archive.org/13/items/storymylifebyfa00gapoog/storymylifebyfa00gapoog.pdf>.

The school of legal Marxism proved itself a failure in 1905: Lenin was a staunch opponent of this school. Legal Marxism valued the use of economic and political mechanisms to achieve social progress and an ordered decline of capitalism to achieve the communist utopia. Lenin became even more convinced that his approach, Orthodox Marxism, was the only and best approach to achieve a communist state and destroy capitalism. Orthodox Marxism, later named revolutionary socialism, attached a moral rather than economic or political significance to achieving social progress. Coloring revolution with a moral component gave propagandists a pretense for claiming universal authority, responsibility, and power because morals are assumed universal. Not only was war inevitable—this new moral imperative made means used to achieve war's ends now irrelevant.³²

Accordingly, a military must exist to support the proletarian revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat; i.e., the political aims of the proletarian leadership. Lenin faced several immediate challenges, however, in the necessary marriage of political aim with military power. First, he had to reconcile Russia's current military weakness and persistent geographic vulnerability with current realities that threatened the security of the homeland, including the ongoing WWI. Second, he had to identify the focus of the military once constituted—either supporting the world proletarian revolution or enforcing the first steps of a domestic dictatorship of the proletariat. Third, he had to decide what to do with the remains of the Imperial Russian Army. Peasants of the lowest class, former serfs, made up most of the military, as they were forced into conscription. These soldiers were by and large uneducated, probably even illiterate, yet they expected recompense of some sort for their efforts if they supported the revolution. The officers of the Imperial military, even if they did support the revolution, could not be trusted.

The government as a unified instrument of power did not yet exist to handle these types of questions before Russia dove headlong into a civil war that lasted from 1917 to 1922. Lenin

³² Khazarnufsky, *Landmarks*, xxiii-v; Bullard, *The Russian Pendulum*, 4.

and his Bolshevik faction emerged victorious, though bloodied and bruised, with the support of the newly created Red Army and Soviet Navy. Russia's former allies, disillusioned and bitter at the Soviet Union following its withdrawal from WWI on March 3, 1918, aided the anti-Bolshevik coalition. Allied support to their enemies confirmed for the Bolsheviks the pariah-like character of the capitalist system that sought to take advantage of Russia during a time of great strategic vulnerability. Additionally, the war reinforced their own "ideological and national perceptions" of the inevitability of warfare against capitalist states until Bolshevik ideology and war making ability ultimately destroys capitalism.³³

The Bolsheviks, therefore, realized even more deeply Russia's military weakness and geographic vulnerability; they truly felt her persistent security dilemmas. To offset these challenges, Lenin, Stalin, and the leaders of the 1920s and early 1930s initially kept the energy of the military focused inward to protect the homeland and to enable the domestic dictatorship of the proletariat. Though Lenin and Stalin both believed that Socialism must expand outside of Russia to survive, they prioritized protection and ideological growth of the homeland as a first step over expanding the revolution. Compounded with their own homeland security concerns and their belief in the unpreparedness of socialist groups in other states to conduct their own proletariat revolutions, the Bolshevik's sharpened the decision to focus Soviet military energy domestically.³⁴

Lenin faced the third challenge – what to do with the remains of the Russian Imperial military – with a temporary suspension of ideological zeal. Catastrophic Red Army losses early in the Russian Civil War forced Lenin to suspend his zeal for an ideologically pure Red Army; recruitment was difficult and contested. Realizing that an army organized along ideologically pure lines does not an effective fighting force make, the Bolsheviks allowed various classes to

³³ Ken Booth, "The Military Instrument in Soviet Foreign Policy," in *Soviet Strategy*, ed. John Baylis and Gerald Segal (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1981), 75-76.

³⁴ Booth, "The Military Instrument," 90.

serve in the army, including former bourgeois Russian Imperial officers. In fact, by the end of the war nearly 80% of the senior Red Army commanders were former Imperial Russian Army officers. Understood in the context of Russia's persistent security dilemmas that force a realist view of the world and the moral imperatives of Leninism, Lenin's temporary ideological suspension not only makes sense, it becomes a logical necessity. Likewise, Stalin tolerated, even endorsed for a time, the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch who was stoking patriotic fervor against the invading Nazis during WWII. Stalin's infamous purges undoubtedly resolved some of the ideological dilemmas the Russian Civil War created, but neither Lenin, Stalin, nor their successors remained foolish enough to ignore the primacy of security dilemmas over ideological dilemmas for too long.³⁵

Stalin, facing the same security dilemmas as Lenin before him, kept the Red Army on a footing of strategic defense and deterrence. However, the establishment of the functioning Soviet state, relative economic stability even during the Great Depression, advances in military industrialization, weapon modernization, Soviet military successes in WWII, infrastructure to support strategic mobility – this last vitally important given deep concerns of a two front war – plus the debilitating effect of two world wars on European social orders gave Stalin opportunities for military adventurism unavailable to Lenin. Stalinism was born from these events: it is a political insight linked to decisions that valued overwhelming Soviet military force and collective economic power to enable dominant Soviet leadership of the world-proletariat revolution.³⁶

Stalin, like Lenin believed in the “militant minority” of an “enlightened proletariat” whose job it was to lead and conduct revolution “*for*, but not *by*, the people” Lenin, though

³⁵ “The Red Army: Early History,” Russian Archives Online, accessed November 1, 2018, <https://www.pbs.org/redfiles/rao/gallery/old/redarmy.html>; Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, 47, 62.

³⁶ Mark E. Miller, *Soviet Strategic Power and Doctrine: The Quest for Superiority* (Miami: University of Miami, 1982), 16-20; Booth, “The Military Instrument,” 79; Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, 26, 101-2, 175; Waldemar Gurian, “Introduction,” in *Soviet Imperialism: Its Origins and Tactics*, ed. Waldemar Gurian (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1953), 10; Wiktor Weintraub, “Soviet Cultural Imperialism in Poland,” in Gurian, 101; Michael Pap, “The Ukrainian Problem,” in Gurian, 61.

disappointed with the active insufficiency of the peasants, or as he called them, the “lethargic masses,” also understood that the poor or often non-existent infrastructure in the Russian countryside made communication and mobilization nearly impossible. The cities, however, were the hubs of industrialization and home to the industrial worker, the proletariat. These areas offered fertile ground for rapid communication, mobilization, and, due to unimaginably poor wages and living conditions, were primed to act on revolutionary ideas. The proletariat and their industrial capability became the asset for Lenin and his cohort to violently overthrow the monarchy in 1917. Likewise, they were the asset, joined to Soviet military power and diplomatic acumen, for Stalin to balance Russia’s security dilemmas and socialist ideological dilemmas with a realist approach.³⁷

Lenin and later Stalin expected the educated and capable of the proletariat to form the “dictatorship of the proletariat” militant minority that led the revolution on behalf of the Russian people and later, the world. This dictatorship formed the so-called elected body of the Soviet state. Reflecting a fundamental split that occurred in 1903 within the Orthodox Marxists, the ideal of a dictatorship of the proletariat formed the core of communist party leadership philosophy that became known as democratic centralism; top down control of the state. This idea of democratic centralism is vital to understanding the Soviet system domestically and internationally, as well to understand how this concept compares to the autocracy of the tsars and as discussed later, the “sovereign democracy” of Putin’s government. A description of democratic centralism appeared in Article 19 of the Party Statutes (*ustav*):³⁸

³⁷ Quotes from Bullard, *The Russian Pendulum*, 5. emphasis in the original; Robert Conquest, *The Soviet Political System*, ed. Robert Conquest (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1968), 13.

³⁸ First quote from Stalin, *Problems of Leninism*, 16; Conquest, *Soviet Political System*, 95-104. The split involved those who “advocated a broad-based party open to anyone who subscribed to its programme and was willing to work under its direction (while retaining the right to think and influence party policy), [the Menshevik faction], [and] Lenin [who] envisaged a narrow, closed body of dedicated, disciplined revolutionaries, strictly subordinate to centralized direction and operating as the militant vanguard of the working masses [that became the Bolshevik faction].” Conquest, *Soviet Political System*, 95.

(a) the election of all leading Party bodies from the lowest to the highest; (b) periodical reports of Party bodies to their Party organisations and to higher bodies; (c) strict Party discipline and subordination of the minority to the majority; (d) absolutely binding character of the decisions of higher bodies for lower bodies.³⁹

Section (d) of Article 19 captures the idea of democratic centralism best; all ideas and decisions are made at the top, are indisputable, and it is the duty of every good communist to enforce these actions. Failure to do so or even giving the perception of not doing so could result in expulsion from the Party, internment, death. This idea pervaded domestic as well as international policy.

Domestically, the dictatorship enjoyed authority above the written laws of the state, for as Stalin said, “the dictatorship of the proletariat is the rule—unrestricted by law and based on force—of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie, a rule enjoying the sympathy and support of the laboring and exploited masses.” The effect of this policy was to create local fiefdoms controlled closely by Party members, reduced or non-existent legal transparency, and confused bureaucratic processes that made managing normal day-to-day matters a tortuous process.⁴⁰

The effect internationally inside the Soviet satellite states was a dictatorship of the “father” Soviet state over fledgling and, as Soviet leaders viewed it, never quite mature enough junior states. Satellite states including the Baltics, Poland, Belarus, Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Yugoslavia, and East Germany were fed a steady diet of propaganda in the form of school instruction, news, and official visits touting the superiority of the Russian communist over local communist leadership. Treaties of any sort that did not directly include the input and approval of the Soviet Union were forbidden, local to national politics were closely monitored and directed,

³⁹ Conquest, *Soviet Political System*, 98.

⁴⁰ Quote from Stalin, *Problems of Leninism*, 43; for an entertaining satire that gives great insight into the Soviet state and its impact on day-to-day life and death (written over the course of a decade before the author’s death in 1940 and published with limited circulation first in 1966), see Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, rev. ed., trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 92-100.

the Soviet state controlled all trade and made itself the prime benefactor of its satellite states' natural resources, and each state was occupied by Soviet armed forces.⁴¹

Stalin's military machine did not rest after WWII. He recognized the threat to the Soviet Union and to the world-proletariat revolution that the clear US strategic power projection capability posed; only the United States could touch the Soviet Union from a distance and from a position of strength. He and his successors distrusted foreign intentions and they understood Russia's strategic weaknesses. But they also saw opportunities for territorial and ideological expansion, supported by the military. Through multiple diplomatic and institutional means, such as the Warsaw Pact and brutal internal controls, and with a growing Soviet military projection capability, Stalin through Brezhnev cemented Soviet dominance of the states on its periphery. Further, with a Soviet nuclear strike capability, the Soviet Union cemented its status as the other superpower in the bi-polar Realpolitik balance of power competition with the United States.⁴²

Throughout, the Soviet military remained intimately linked to political aims, while also staying true to a doctrine that addressed Russia's persistent geographical strategic security concerns. NATO's emergence and growth, the US nuclear threat, China's overtly anti-Soviet rhetoric, and President Richard Nixon's engagement with China kept Soviet military energy focused on defense and deterrence first, military adventurism second, though certainly not a distant second. Military activity abroad sought to influence or control the balance of power competition with the United States, Europe, and China. The Soviet Union achieved the power and prestige it desired, but as the balance of power games wore on, it achieved these desires at the

⁴¹ Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, 139, 145, 178; these methods are similar to the methods used by the Vogon's in *The Hitchhikers Guide to Galaxy*, to suck a planet's resources dry, or at a minimum create a puppet state until that state is of no more use, or presents a threat, at which point the state is destroyed. For more information, see Douglas Adams, *The Ultimate Hitchhikers Guide: Five Complete Novels and One Story*, rev. ed., (New York: Gramercy Books, 2005), 1-144; Pap, "Ukrainian Problem," 43-74; Weintraub, "Soviet Cultural Imperialism," 91-112.

⁴² Booth, "The Military Instrument," 81-2; Malcolm Mackintosh, "Soviet Foreign and Defense Policy," in *The Political Implications of Soviet Power*, ed. Lawrence L. Whetten (New York: Crane, Russak & Company, Inc., 1977), 21; Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, 90.

cost of a Soviet-led world-proletariat revolution. The Soviet Union, to ensure its own survival, developed an aggressive détente with capitalist nations. Soviet security dilemmas and Realpolitik revealed a state willing to compromise some ideological zeal to survive.⁴³

Putin's Political Philosophy

A product of the Soviet Union, Putin watched his country—in which he took immense pride—crumble before his eyes. Along with the country itself, the pride its citizens felt in the once powerful state also crumbled. Working for the KGB in 1991, Putin experienced the same confusion and lack of direction as his compatriots as he sat in his KGB offices in East Germany. With a young family and now no discernible future, the young Putin stumbled back to Russia from East Germany, and then back to his hometown of St. Petersburg. There he reorganized and rebuilt his future. Gaining the sponsorship of a local St. Petersburg political power-player, Anatoly Sobchak, Putin divested himself of his KGB offices and learned the political trade. During these years in St. Petersburg, Putin developed a sense of the political power that he believed could rebuild the country.⁴⁴

Like the tsars and Soviet leaders, Putin continues to live with a Europe, and since the 1990s, a US leadership cadre that views Russia derisively as a “backward” country, unwilling either to embrace modern democratic liberalism or surrender portions of its sovereignty for the greater good in the model of the European Union (EU). Pervading Putin's political outlook are the ideas that the EU and United States expect something more of Russia in regard to its approach

⁴³ Mackintosh, “Political Implications,” 26, 30. Mackintosh specifically argues that, “The Soviet Union's main preoccupations are with its national security, its superpower status, its relationship with the United States, its confrontation with the West in Europe, and its problems with China.”

⁴⁴ Putin famously said in 2005 that, “Above all, we should acknowledge that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster of the century.” In this same speech he outlines the reasons for this view, including loss of territory, loss of citizenship, and the rise of oligarchs. For the speech in its entirety, see Vladimir Putin, “President of Russia: Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, April 25, 2005, accessed February 18, 2019, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22931>; for an explanation of how Putin became familiar with Sobchak—he was tasked by the KGB to monitor Sobchak—and of how their relationship matured, and for a description of Putin's younger years and his rise through the political system of St. Petersburg, see Steven L. Myers, *The New Tsar: The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin* (New York: Vintage Publishing, 2016).

to governing than what Russia is willing to concede, and that Russia's military and energy might are the only levers of power the EU and the United States appear to take seriously. Additionally, just as Russian leaders have since Tsar Ivan IV, Putin must contend with Russia's persistent security dilemmas: strategically difficult geography, a harsh environment, and outsized distance plus time considerations. To contend with these challenges, Putin adopted the political philosophy of nationalist conservatism (think patriotism rather than fascism) expressed through language of sovereign democracy. The tools used previously enable a thorough description of Putin's political philosophy: analysis of Putin's ideology and political aims, and a critical review of Russia's military activity since 1999, the year Putin became the country's leader.⁴⁵

To understand Putin's aims, it is worthwhile to explore the nature and background of the man. He is disciplined, hard-working, protective and private with his personal life, expects loyalty, is in many respects an autodidact, loves sports and competition, is a night owl, drinks but is too disciplined to appear drunk in public, is a showman, is patient until he is not and then is fiercely impatient, and considers himself above all else a Russian patriot. He was proud to work for the KGB. As a child he idolized the patriotic Soviet spies he saw in movies. His temper and rough nature probably kept him from achieving more success in the KGB. He was a proud Soviet, though it would be fair to describe him even before the fall of the Soviet Union as a proud Russian first and a proud Soviet second. He demonstrated an individuality apart from strict collectivist Soviet doctrine, including his belief, initially developed by his mother, that there is a god besides the state. It would be too far to say that he was or is a deeply religious man, but like Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, Lenin, and Stalin before him, he recognizes the power the

⁴⁵ Shevtsova, "Russia's Choice," 31; Nalbandov, *Not by Bread Alone*, 3; for more on this, see Eltchaninoff, *Inside the Mind*, 13, 57-112, particularly the chapter on "The Eurasianst Dream"; also see, Haas, *Russian Foreign Security Policy*, 1-14; Cohen, *Geopolitics*, 217; Vladimir Putin, "Putin Bashes 'Russian Paris Hilton' Ksenia Sobchak: We Don't Want Russia Become Ukraine 2.0," *YouTube*, December 16, 2017, accessed February 18, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2uYfaTrM5Sg>.

Russian Orthodox Church holds to inspire patriotism in Russians and to justify the imposition of legalized morality.⁴⁶

Putin felt deeply humiliated by the Soviet collapse. He resented the loss of Soviet territories, which the international community celebrated, and became alarmed by increased foreign military activity along Russia's borders. In Putin's view, the rapid influx of liberal ideology and international organizations preaching democracy and private ownership yielded nothing but misery on a grand scale, aided and abetted by unmanaged corruption, the vulture of the Russian state. Like Catherine the Great, Putin believes that a single, powerful leader must lead Russia, and like Lenin, Putin believes that the psyche of the Russian masses are both incapable and uninterested in managing or participating productively in the nation's political future. Like Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, and Stalin, Putin identifies as the parent-protector of Russia; he knows best and will do best. Any hints of internal discord that could expose Russia once again to the capricious avarices of "western" powers confirms for him the need for this paternalistic, top-down view of the government-citizen relationship.⁴⁷

To understand Russia's military activity and political aims since 1999, it is important to gain an appreciation of the current disposition of Russia's security dilemmas. Excluding the Arctic, Russia's access to the sea in 2019 is more contested than in 1999. Moving in a clockwise direction starting at Russia's northern border, the Arctic Ocean remains a Russia-dominated space and a security buffer. To date, no strategic competitor has made sufficient investment in the Arctic to challenge Russia's preeminence. Interest rose among US security providers over the last

⁴⁶ Putin, *First Person*, 11, 42; Vladimir Putin, "President of Russia: Congratulations to Orthodox Christians and all Russians Celebrating Easter," April, 8, 2018, accessed February 18, 2019, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57221>; Sergi Lavrov, "Russia in the 21st Century of World Power," *Russia: Global Affairs*, December 27, 2012, accessed February 18, 2019, <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Russia-in-the-21st-Century-World-of-Power-15809>; Nalbandov, *Not by Bread Alone*, 34-6;

⁴⁷ Putin, *First Person*, 102, 129-30, 182-84; for an incredibly in-depth review of how Putin's ideology effected the power of regional governors and voting trends at the regional level, see Bryon J. Moraski and William M. Reisinger, *The Regional Roots of Russia's Political Regime* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017).

decade as the Arctic ice melted and discoveries of energy sources increased, but this interest remains tepid. The United States owns two icebreakers, one of which is broken, while Russia owns forty with eleven more under construction. China, which is most likely interested in the Arctic due to a projected 40% decrease in sea transport time to European markets via the Northern Sea Passage, is investing in icebreakers with two in production.⁴⁸

Russia stood up a new Arctic Command in 2015, setting up the first deliberate permanent Russian military presence in the Arctic since Soviet times. Conversely, though US forces in Alaska train for Arctic conditions, the Arctic remains a low priority for the US policy community and the Department of Defense (DOD). US national security documents barely mention the Arctic. The 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) mentions the region once, and in the context of improving positive cooperation in multilateral forums. Neither the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) nor the 2015 National Military Strategy (NMS) mention the region at all, while the 2018 Northern Command (NORTHCOM) Posture Statement dedicates only a brief section to the Arctic, focused on monitoring Russian activity and taking advantage of energy opportunities rather than investing the resources needed to penetrate the Arctic region for persistent military operations. Russia is cautious, however, of any increased US or NATO presence in the Arctic, and the growing potential security risks associated with increased foreign transit through the Northern Sea Passage. As a result, Russia is developing Arctic strategic deterrent and anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capability.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Robbie Gramer, "Here's What Russia's Military Build-Up in the Arctic Looks Like," *Foreign Policy*, January 25, 2017, accessed January 19, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/01/25/heres-what-russias-military-build-up-in-the-arctic-looks-like-trump-oil-military-high-north-infographic-map/>; Franz-Stefan Gady, "Russia and China in the Arctic: Is the US Facing an Icebreaker Gap?" *The Diplomat*, September 7, 2015, accessed January 19, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/09/russia-and-china-in-the-arctic-is-the-us-facing-an-icebreaker-gap/>.

⁴⁹ H.P. Smolka, "Soviet Strategy in the Arctic," *Foreign Affairs*, January 1938, accessed January 20, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/1938-01-01/soviet-strategy-arctic>; Donald Trump, *National Security Strategy* (Washington DC: The White House, 2017), accessed November 28, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>; James Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the America Military's Competitive Edge* (Washington DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2018), accessed

To the east, since 1999 Japan and China increasingly contest Russia's access to the Pacific Ocean. Access in the east is naturally already difficult due to extreme weather and the paucity of warm-water ports. Within the last decade, however, Japan's increasingly capable Self Defense Forces (SDF) enable Tokyo to project offensive military power in a way not envisioned by the creators of Japan's constitution. Ostensibly modernized to protect against the threat posed by an increasingly militaristic and regionally hegemonic China, Japan's SDF nevertheless likely allows Tokyo negotiating space with Moscow. The SDF capability also gives Japan some negotiating space in talks regarding the century-long Russia-Japan contested Kuril Island chain. These islands are a geo-strategically important island chain that is a spear into the head of Japan—from Japan's perspective—and makes sense as an A2/AD staging area to keep the entire Sea of Okhotsk a Russian sea, which is an obvious desirable geographic security buffer.⁵⁰

November 28, 2018, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>; Martin Dempsey, *National Military Strategy: The United States Military's Contribution to National Security* (Washington DC: Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2015), accessed November 29, 2018, http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/2015_National_Military_Strategy.pdf; Statement of General Lori J. Robinson, United States Air Force Commander, North American Aerospace Defense Command before the Senate Armed Services Committee, February 15, 2018, accessed January 19, 2019, http://www.northcom.mil/Portals/28/Robinson_02-15-18%20SASC%20Testimony.pdf?ver=2018-02-15-105546-867; John Grady, "Pentagon Balancing Military Needs in the Arctic, Future Infrastructure," *US Naval Institute News*, December 5, 2018, accessed January 19, 2019, <https://news.usni.org/2018/12/05/pentagon-balancing-military-needs-arctic-future-infrastructure>; Nicholas Fiorenza and Bruce Jones, "Moscow Warns Oslo Over its Plans to Receive Nuclear Submarines," *Janes 360*, February 13, 2019, accessed February 13, 2019, <https://www.janes.com/article/86361/moscow-warns-oslo-over-its-plans-to-receive-nuclear-submarines>; Alex Lockie, "Sweden Says it Built a Russian Fighter Jet Killer – And Stealth is Totally Irrelevant," *Business Insider*, February 8, 2019, accessed February 13, 2019, <https://www.businessinsider.com/sweden-built-a-russian-fighter-jet-killer-and-stealth-is-irrelevant-2019-2>; Bruce Jones, "Moscow to Resume Fast Jet Patrols of Arctic Airspace," *Janes 360*, February 8, 2019, accessed February 13, 2019, <https://www.janes.com/article/86260/moscow-to-resume-fast-jet-patrols-of-arctic-ocean-airspace>.

⁵⁰ Brad Lendon, "Why You're Seeing More of Japan's Military," *CNN*, October 16, 2018, accessed January 27, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/15/asia/japan-military-visibility-intl/index.html>; Aaron Mehta, "With Massive F-35 Increase, Japan is Now Biggest International Buyer," *Defense News*, December 18, 2018, accessed January 27, 2019, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/asia-pacific/2018/12/18/with-massive-f-35-increase-japan-is-now-biggest-international-buyer/>; Alec Luhn, "Russians Protest Putin and Abe's Talks Over Returning Kuril Islands to Japan," *The Telegraph*, January 20, 2019, accessed January 27, 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/01/20/russians-protest-putin-abes-talks-returning-kuril-islands-japan/>.

China's twenty-first century economic boom and consequent military expansion gives Beijing the ability to contest Russia's access to all eastern sea lanes, apart from the Sea of Okhotsk, a desirable security buffer but one that, due to severe cold, proves less desirable as a sea lane. Russia's security reconsolidation and reprioritization following the 1991 collapse, its western security focus through much of the early 2000s, the economic shock of the 2008 global recession, and the impact of the 2014 international sanctions all contribute to the decline of Russia's naval capacity. Whereas China's navy is a massive growth industry with 53% of its fleet being built after 2010, 66% of Russia's aging fleet was "commissioned between 1985 and 1994." China out produces and outclasses Russia's blue water capability by degrees. Further, China's militarization of island chains in the East and South China Seas could potentially block Russia's outgoing access to the Pacific, while simultaneously block its incoming access from the Pacific. Neither one of these scenarios is comfortable for Moscow.⁵¹

To the southwest, since 1999, the former Soviet states of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, Iran, and Azerbaijan increasingly contest Russia's freedom of maneuver and freedom to exploit energy resources in the Caspian Sea. Iran is an especially prickly situation for Russia from a military perspective given that Iran's military is one of the most capable militaries in the region with significant A2/AD and strategic stand-off capabilities, as well as significant interests in exploiting Caspian Sea energy resources. Post-Soviet independence movements and NATO enlargement severely restricted Russia's freedom of maneuver in the Black Sea. Already constricted by NATO-member Turkey's administration of the Turkish Straits from freely accessing the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, Russia watched helplessly in the early

⁵¹ Quote from Christopher Cowan and James Mugg, "Comparing the Navies of Russia and China," *RealClear Defense*, May 8, 2017, accessed January 27, 2019, https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2017/05/08/comparing_the_navies_of_russia_and_china_111331.htmlhttps://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2017/05/08/comparing_the_navies_of_russia_and_china_111331.html; "The PLA Navy's Growing Prowess: A Conversation with Andrew Erickson," Bonnie S. Glaser, China Power Podcast, aired December 21, 2018, on China Power Project Podcast: Center for Strategic and International Studies.

2000's as Bulgaria and Romania, former Warsaw Pact states, joined NATO in 2004, and Ukraine and Georgia, former republics of the Soviet Union, courted European capitals in hopes of additional independence from Russia, and possibly NATO membership in the case of Georgia. Still too weak in 2004 to contest Romania and Bulgaria's turn to NATO, President Putin asserted Russia's personality forcefully in 2008—the war with Georgia—and 2014—the annexation of Crimea and war in eastern Ukraine—to avoid the total loss of freedom of maneuver in the Black Sea. Turkey, Bulgaria, and Romania remain challenges to Russian Black Sea access.⁵²

Regarding the Mediterranean Sea, Putin's best options to assure sea access and improve political position are in North Africa. The strategic importance of North Africa is indisputable. It is the land bridge from Europe to the Middle East, it supplies warm water harbor capability for navies wishing to threaten or intimidate the European continent, it is the western border of the Suez Canal, it is a source of untapped natural resources, and it is a consistent source of instability that threatens to unhinge Europe. Dominance of the conditions in North Africa give outsized influence on those who try to control movement and access across the Mediterranean. By virtue of Europe's relationship with the Mediterranean, a nation that is capable of projecting power from North Africa additionally has outsized influence on Europe and what British geo-strategist, H. J. Mackinder, termed the Heartland; the space between “the Baltic Sea, the navigable Middle and Lower Danube, the Black Sea, Asia Minor, Armenia, Persia, Tibet, and Mongolia.”⁵³

This influence stems from the strategic terrain in the Mediterranean, which includes: the Strait of Gibraltar; the Strait of Sicily, which at approximately 150km separates North Africa from Europe and the Western from Eastern Mediterranean Sea; the Suez Canal, the great battleground that either gives access to the lower Middle East and all of Asia, or opens into the

⁵² Cohen, *Geopolitics*, 245-9; US Department of Defense, *Fiscal Year 2016 Report on the Military Power of Iran* (Washington, DC, January 2017), accessed January 27, 2019, https://fas.org/man/eprint/dod_iran_2016.pdf.

⁵³ Halford J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: Study in the Politics of Reconstruction* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1919), 134-140.

Mediterranean Sea to European markets and European military weaknesses, and the Turkish Straits, the first sea entry to either the warm waters of the Mediterranean and the European continent from the frozen plains of Eurasia, or the underbelly of Russia's most jealously guarded territories. North African nations exert geographic relevance on the Strait of Gibraltar, the Strait of Sicily, and the Suez Canal. Reflecting the continuities of history, these points of strategic terrain and the states that are geographically relevant to them are the source of persistent big-power competition from the days of the Empire of Carthage to present day.⁵⁴

Today, the United States, Russia, and the European states represented by the European Union (EU) lead great power competition for control of these strategic points. The United States, which is represented militarily in the region by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), European Command (EUCOM), Africa Command (AFRICOM), and the US Navy's 6th Fleet, created a perceived regional power vacuum following the 2011 announcement of a strategic rebalance to the Pacific. The EU, like NATO, cannot agree whether immigrant flows, or an increasingly powerful Russia present the greatest threat to European sovereignty. This disagreement leads to sporadic, underfunded, half-hearted, or a non-existent military presence in the Mediterranean and its coastal areas. Russia, on the other hand, is actively expanding its regional military presence.⁵⁵

The 2015 out-of-area deployment to Syria and the creation of the still nascent Russian Mediterranean naval task force are examples of Russian regional military expansion. Politically, Russia is providing singular leadership in the resolution framework for the Syria conflict absent US expression of national interest. Putin adeptly increased diplomatic and military engagement

⁵⁴ John L. Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁵⁵ Congressional Research Service, *Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration's 'Rebalancing' Toward Asia, March 28, 2012*, by Mark E. Manyin, Stephen Daggett, Ben Dolven, Susan V. Lawrence, Michael F. Martin, Ronald O'Rourke, and Bruce Vaughn, accessed October 21, 2018, <https://fas.org/spp/crs/natsec/R42448.pdf>.

with NATO partner, Turkey, diplomatic and military engagement with Egypt and most recently, Libya. Russia's interest in the region is officially expressed in its 2015 Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation that sets its naval priorities through 2020.⁵⁶ They are:

1. "Pursuing a resolute policy to transform the region into a zone of military-political stability and goodwill;
2. Ensuring the sufficient naval presence of the Russian Federation in the region on a permanent basis;
3. Expanding cruise passage from the ports of Crimea and the Krasnodar region to the countries of the Mediterranean basin."⁵⁷

Contrast these priorities with the predecessor maritime doctrine of 2001:

1. "A focused course on its transformation into the zone of military-political stability and good-neighbourliness.
2. The maintenance of a sufficient naval presence of the Russian Federation in the region.
3. On the Atlantic Ocean – the development and capacity of fisheries, Maritime transportation, scientific research and monitoring the marine environment."⁵⁸

Russia's priorities expressed in 2015 remain active, but those expressed in 2001 are passive. In the 2015 language one sees a country confident of its ability to project power while remaining committed to diplomatic, military, and economic expressions of that power. The 2001 language reflects a Russia that exercises minor power status; a situation no longer present in

⁵⁶ TASS, "Black Sea Fleet Missile Frigates to Join Russia's Mediterranean Task Force," *Russian News Agency*, August 25, 2018, accessed October 10, 2018, <http://tass.com/defense/1018623>.

⁵⁷ Russia Maritime Studies Institute: United States Naval War College, "Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation," trans. Anna Davis, accessed October 15, 2018, https://dnnlgwick.blob.core.windows.net/portals/0/NWCDepartments/Russia%20Maritime%20Studies%20Institute/Maritime%20Doctrine%20TransENGrus_FINAL.pdf?sr=b&si=DNNFileManagerPolicy&sig=fqZgUUVRVrRkMsfNMOj%2FNarNawUoRdhvpFJj7%2FpAkM%3D, 22.

⁵⁸ Center for Strategic Assessment and Forecasts, "The Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation for the Period Till 2020: Approved by the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation on 27 July 2001," last modified September 28, 2017, accessed October 21, 2018, <http://csef.ru/en/politica-i-geopolitica/510/morskaya-doktrina-rossijskoj-federaczii-na-period-do-2020-goda-7984>.

2015. This is how Putin now sees Russia. His actions in the Mediterranean region reflect this confidence and capability. Russia's dominance of the Black Sea through its ownership of Sevastopol, the stipulations of the Montreux Treaty, Moscow's increasing diplomatic and military engagement with Turkey and Egypt, its guaranteed access to the warm-water port of Tartus, and its new Mediterranean naval task force point to a deliberate movement west across the Mediterranean to gain control and influence.

To the west, Russia's access to the Baltic Sea is more contested than it was prior to Peter the Great's victory in the Great Northern War against Charles XII, King of Sweden. The former Soviet republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania joined NATO in 2004. Their NATO membership at once restricted Russian access to the Baltic Sea, thus limiting Russia's power projection capability against its old foes Germany and Poland, constrained energy exploration and exportation, and exposed St. Petersburg, Russia's intellectual capital and President Putin's hometown, to within touching distance of NATO. Russia retained the Kaliningrad Oblast, a geo-strategically important Russian exclave that isolates the Baltic States from fellow NATO Alliance members, complicating NATO response options to Russian activity in the Baltics. Since 2014, Moscow responded to geo-strategic weaknesses in the Baltic region by increasing its military presence in the Kaliningrad Oblast, including emplacing nuclear capable Iskander Missiles in the exclave. This military activity, while threatening to the United States and Europe, does not negate the fact that Russia's access to the Baltic Sea is restricted, an unacceptable situation for Moscow in the context of its persistent security dilemmas.⁵⁹

Given these strategic developments, in Russia's mind its access to the seas is once again threatened, its agricultural livelihood is under threat, and it lacks buffer-states to its west and east to mitigate its time plus distance dilemma. This current operational environment will remain

⁵⁹ Cohen, *Geopolitics*, 229, 249-250; Vasco Cotovio, Oren Liebermann, and Frederik Pleitgen, "New Satellite Images Suggest Military Buildup in Russia's Strategic Baltic Enclave," *CNN World*, October 17, 2018, accessed January 27, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/17/europe/russia-kaliningrad-military-buildup-intl/index.html>.

baring significant Arctic ice-melt, Japanese and Chinese mistakes, resolution of Caspian Sea energy conflicts, tamping down of the virulent anti-Russian narrative in Romania, stabilization of the political environments in Ukraine and Bulgaria, the development of an agreement with Turkey to turn a blind eye to Montreux Convention violations, and impactful influence operations in the Baltic States.

Conclusion and Implications

The research and analysis in this monograph yield the following implications: first, seeking an alternative reality to Russia's profoundly conservative political philosophy will elicit an uncooperative and violent spirit. The seventy-four-year Soviet era is a mere blip of Socialism in an otherwise long history of Conservatism. Neither good policy nor good sense support an effort to impose Liberalist views or have Liberalist expectations of the Russian government or the Russian people. Further, it is reductionist—even revisionist—to view Russian policy through only a Soviet lens. Doing so will unfavorably tarnish analysis of present or potential future Russian actions.

Second, as the Russian Orthodox Church is a vessel for patriotism, which breeds unity and social harmony, states or organizations that reject religious morality are easy enemies of Russia. Without religious morality there exists social relativism, therefore, there exists moral anarchy. Even a whisper of anarchy is unthinkable to Conservative political philosophical thought. The consistent recognition of the ability of the church to inspire patriotism illustrates Russian leaders' understanding that Russia still is a dominantly Christian country. She takes her leadership of the Eastern Orthodox Church seriously. The current discord between the Moscow and the Kiev Patriarchate bears close watching. Putin can ill afford a theological embarrassment that will bring into question his ability to nurture and lead his people's Church. Failure to

appreciate Russia's theological self-view limits understanding of Russian character and anticipation of Russian movements.⁶⁰

Third, as Putin must contend with the same security dilemmas his ancestors faced, his security decisions will reflect the same historical determination to mitigate or remove the risks associated with the dilemmas. His political philosophy offers a way to assess how, when, where, and why he will employ coercive force against these risks. Poor geography, a harsh and restrictive climate, and distance plus time each contribute to the maintenance or lack thereof of national accord, national pride, and national prestige, each core concerns of Conservatism. A great-power nation like Russia that perceives outside parties are restricting its potential will press against the constraints imposed upon it. A great-power nation that can project power will not allow a nation that mitigates the effect of a harsh and restrictive climate, like Ukraine, outside of its influence. Nor will this nation idly divest itself of security buffers that give it time to muster forces to react against a perceived threat.

Regarding geography, specifically access to the seas, Putin will have to mitigate rather than remove the risks. In at least the short term his navy is unable to compete with China, Japan, the United States, or NATO. Russia's A2/AD capability is substantial, but this capability cannot hold terrain such as the sea. In the Arctic, though the harsh climate supplies a natural defense, Putin is acutely aware of the threat ice-melt could pose to his northern border security. It is unlikely that Putin will reverse course on the build-up of the Arctic Command, though strategic strike forces will remain the primary defense.

More pressing than the Arctic is his neighbor to the east, China. Putin will nurture his relationship with Beijing. He cannot compete with China's navy and, short of a war or a major military build-up, he cannot contest China's regional hegemonic aspirations. The US preoccupation with focusing on the impact of China's actions on the United States rather than

⁶⁰ R. Khazarnufsky, *Landmarks*, viii.

thinking truly regionally makes Russia vulnerable to China, a situation that is historically not good for US national security. Putin is militarily weak in the east compared to China, so this friendship of convenience makes sense for Russia.

In the Caspian Sea region, Putin will nurture his relationship with Tehran. Iran supplies a natural and prickly buffer to Russia's southern approaches, and conveniently denies, degrades, and disrupts US aspirations in the Middle East. Russia and Iran are not natural or historic friends, but their friendship of convenience makes sense in the current context. Kazakhstan is an occasional source of strain to Putin, but Astana's recent unfriendliness to the United States shows its willingness to prioritize Russian security concerns. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is a constant source of regional tension, but it is unlikely that in the medium-term Putin will risk his relationship with Turkey for the sake of Armenia, or even Iran. Energy resources in the Caspian Sea are important to Russia, specifically to the coterie of powerful men who support Putin, but so far Putin seems to have convinced these barons that security concerns trump economic concerns.

In the Black Sea region, Putin will nurture his relationship with Turkish President Recep Erdoğan to undermine NATO, which still is the dominant threat to Russian geography, to potentially reduce Black Sea southern area threats, to unlock economic potential, and to assure sustained military and economic access to the Mediterranean Sea. Putin is becoming Erdoğan's partner of choice. Putin is taking advantage of US and EU lack of patience with Turkey's capricious politics and of NATO's reluctance to acknowledge Ankara's security concerns related to the Syrian conflict. Putin will seek the current status quo in Ukraine rather than try to overthrow the government and occupy Kiev. In terms of security dilemmas, the Ukrainian status quo is acceptable. The status quo is, broadly, a destabilized Donbass region that pledges fealty to Russia, an annexed Crimea owned by Russia, and a government in Kiev that cannot win tangible support from an international community that is shy of developing a political platform around a non-NATO, non-EU nation that is threatened by nuclear-capable Russia.

In the Mediterranean Sea, Putin will invest in control of the Strait of Sicily to create a significant security dilemma for NATO and the EU and increase Russian pride. Putin will increase DIME investment in the North African nations of Libya and Tunisia. These two nations are the weakest geographically relevant nations to the Strait of Sicily and the ones recently enduring the longest internal instability. This gives Russia the opportunity to argue for the stabilizing effect of its presence and influence in both nations, just as he successfully argued in Syria.

In the Baltic region, he will emphasize deterrence with Western Military District ground forces, strategic strike capability, and A2/AD assets. The Baltic states are a major security concern for the United States and NATO. Russia's military positioned itself to take advantage of the Baltic states' geographic and military weaknesses, but a direct approach to remove Russia's security dilemmas in this region does not make sense at this time. Russia's A2/AD capability is significant to the point that while the capability is unable to hold terrain, it does create anxiety in any nation that expects air dominance prior to the committal of ground combat forces. Russia will continue to focus on political meddling in the region, while increasing A2/AD.

Putin must contend with the same security dilemmas his ancestors faced. Beijing, Tehran, and Ankara are alliances of convenience. Controlling the Strait of Sicily is of geostrategic importance to controlling the Mediterranean and influencing Europe. Putin's DIME focus in these areas soothes the anxieties created by Russia's security dilemmas and her conservative political philosophy.

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