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**ANALYSIS OF RUSSIA'S VIEWPOINTS ON INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS ON THE EXAMPLES OF BESLAN TERRORIST
ATTACK UNTIL UKRAINE CRISIS**

Bachelors Thesis

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I hereby declare that I have compiled the paper independently and all works, important standpoints and data by other authors has been properly referenced and the same paper has not been previously presented for grading.

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ABSTRACT

From the emergence of the Russian Federation, it has always been a big player in the international field and will continue to do so in the future. Its viewpoints and policies have shaped the arena of international relations in many different ways. The research was conducted by analyzing various articles, academic papers and speeches. This paper brings out different policy changes, viewpoints and opinions on what were Russian motivations, actions and policies in Beslan terrorist attack, Russo Georgian war and Ukraine Crisis and how they changed the situation in the political scene.

This paper focuses on three different conflicts and analyzes the motivations, causes and effects of these conflicts on Russia and how it shaped Russian policy and political situation.

Keywords: Russia, Beslan, Russo-Georgian war, Ukraine crisis, EU, NATO

INTRODUCTION

Russia is involved in a number of frozen conflicts, that have created tension in the European region. Due to its influence in many parts of the globe, Russia is a relevant country in terms of military strength, energy and influence. Russia is one of the key players in contemporary international relations and has had impactful moments since the fall of the Soviet Union, and it has thrived as a new country with some remnants of the past. Russia has been involved in many controversial conflicts and disputes, and still maintained its posture as a dominant power in the world. Russia is a country that has thrived, even against the growing mistrust that Western powers have had on Russia.

This bachelor's thesis will focus on the analysis of the three conflicts, Russian viewpoint on these conflicts and the actions that these viewpoints conveyed from the beginning of the Beslan terrorist attack up until the Ukraine crisis. It will keep in mind what decisions Russia has made and how Russia was affected by these decisions. It will focus on what were the preemptive conditions for the conflict, what the conflict was about, and what changed after the event. The paper will focus on the Beslan terrorist attack, Russo-Georgian war and the Ukraine Crisis. It will describe and analyze what caused, what happened during and after the conflicts. The paper will analyze how the Russian perception in these conflicts has changed Russia's views and policies and how it has affected Russia. The way Russia has acted has hugely affected how other countries perceive Russia and has changed the policies affecting Russia. The thesis is: Russia, through its own actions has pushed itself away from the Western powers of Europe and the United States.

The main research questions of this thesis will be:

1. What are the causes and effects of these three conflicts?
2. What has Russia done to push itself away from Western countries?
3. What changed in the policy of Russia?

1. BESLAN

1.1. What led to Beslan?

The preconditions for the Beslan incident were starting to show after the fall of the Soviet Union and culminated at the two Chechen wars. The first Chechen war was a rebellion by the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria against the Russian Federation, which lasted from December 1994 to August 1996. However, Russia was not able to defeat the Chechens which drove Boris Yeltsin's legislature to pronounce a truce with the Chechens in 1996 and sign a ceasefire agreement a year later. Radical Islamists that emerged from Chechnya and other North Caucasian republics are the ones who committed various terrorist assaults later in a couple of years all through Russia, most outstandingly Russian apartment bombings in 1999, the Moscow theater hostage crisis in 2002, the Beslan school hostage crisis in 2004, the 2010 Moscow Metro bombings and the Domodedovo International Airport bombing in 2011. Some of these might be considered FSB's own action in order to create a reason to invading Chechenia again.

The second Chechen war started on 9 August 1999 when Islamist fighters from Chechnya penetrated Russia's Dagestan district, announcing it a free state and calling it a jihad until the point when all of the non-Muslims had been driven out. This is the same year when Putin first seized power from Yeltsin and stated according to an article by Roland Oliphant in the Telegraph "We will chase terrorists everywhere. If in an airport, then at the airport. So if we find them in the toilet, excuse me, we'll rub them out in the outhouse. And that's it, case closed" (Oliphant 2015). On 1 October, Russian troops entered Chechnya. Russian military and Chechen paramilitary powers confronted Chechen separatists in open battle and grabbed the Chechen capital Grozny after a winter attack that kept going from late 1999 until February 2000. Russia managed to win, but the separatist from North Caucasus locale kept on inflicting Russian losses and tried test Russian political command over Chechnya for a few additional years. Some Chechen separatists even committed terrorist attacks in Russia. The war ended with the accepted autonomy of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria and reestablished Russian government authority over the domain. The second Chechen conflict was a way for Putin to assert his leadership of Russia and show that Russia is still a power to be reckoned with in the international scene. Putin quickly gained a huge percentage of popularity in Russia even though his actions were not accepted by the international scene during this conflict. Putin used the Chechen wars to show to the Russian people that he is willing to go the length to ensure peace and stability in Russia. According to BBC "Human rights groups and

some Western governments accused Putin of breaking Russian and international law in his pursuit of his Chechen opponents. (The European Court of Human Rights has found against Russia in 232 "right to life" cases, effectively ruling that Russia repeatedly committed murder during its Chechen campaign) but that has done nothing to dent Putin's popularity. In Chechnya, hundreds of soldiers and thousands of Chechens died. Hundreds of thousands of Chechens fled to claim asylum outside Russia, but Russia's territorial integrity was secured, and Putin had begun his task of restoring Russian prestige" (BBC 2014). Later however, Putin said that the second Chechen war was apart of the Global fight against terrorism, thus silencing the international scene. In 2001 Putin openly criticized the US for invading Iraq against the International Law even though Russia had also committed crimes against the people of Chechenia during the Chechen wars.

1.2. Beslan school shooting

As mentioned above, the radicals that emerged from the Chechen wars are to blame for the Beslan school siege. While Putin promised to fight terrorism no matter where no matter when it was ill-equipped to do so as seen from the Beslan school siege. Chechen terrorists took control over a school in the town of Beslan in Russia's North Caucasus district, Taking about a thousand people as hostages in terrible conditions. The hostages weren't even given food or water during the three-day siege. After two days Russian military stormed the school, setting off a full-scale fight with the assailants after explosions occurred in the school. When it was all over more than 334 individuals were dead, including 186 school kids. This not only showed how incompetent the Russians were but also according to Foreign Policy, Anna Nemtsova says that "the massacre at School Number One also showcased the malaise at the heart of Russia's system of government. The clumsiness with which security forces staged their attack on the hostage-takers seemed to attest to a complete lack of disregard for civilian life. Censorship and disinformation marred official communications with the public. Nor was anyone within the Kremlin ever brought to account for the disaster" (Nemtsova 2014). Even before the terrorist act started the Russian new that there was an increased threat of terrorism, and they did nothing to stop it. Nadia Khomami wrote in an article "The authorities had been in possession of sufficiently specific information of a planned terrorist attack in the area, linked to an educational institution. Nevertheless, not enough had been done to disrupt the terrorists meeting and preparing. Insufficient steps had been taken to prevent them [the terrorists] travelling on the day of the attack; security at the school had not been increased, and neither the school nor the public had been warned of the threat" (Khomami 2017).

Since there were also many errors in the line of command and the right authorities did not cooperate, the worst happened, and that is why there were so many victims. If the operation was better organized, instead of just rushing in, then there would not have been as many casualties.

1.3. Consequences of Beslan

After Beslan Putin started comprehensive reforms in terms of counter-terrorism, he used the terrorist movements as an excuse to improve his control over the Russian military further. Especially over the FSB which he used to gain power in Russia. Russia was in pressing need of reforms and that in its current state due to the transition from the Soviet Union to a "democracy" Russian defense and security were instead pushed to the sidelines due to political and economic issues. The outdated coping mechanism with terrorism that remained from the USSR had been proven to be ineffective, especially on the example of Beslan. Putin said in his statement about the Beslan terrorist attack: "We stopped paying the required attention to defense and security issues, and we allowed corruption to undermine our judicial and law enforcement system. Furthermore, our country, formerly protected by the most powerful defense system along the length of its external frontiers overnight, found itself defenseless both from the east and the west. We must create a much more effective security system, and we must demand from our law enforcement agencies action that corresponds to the level and scale of the new threats that have emerged" (Putin 2004). He wanted to improve Russian readiness by centralizing the command of anti-terrorist organizations in Russia and was working on developing a new, more effective way for anti-crisis management system in order to take preemptive action against terrorists. He also wanted to address the situation in North Caucasus.

Some of the changes can be seen with the passing of a new law on counter-terrorism in 2006. According to Mariya Y. Omelicheva: "The new counterterrorism law places complete responsibility for the terrorist incidence management on the counterterrorism operation headquarters. The police, army units, firefighters, and other human and technical resources are transferred from the jurisdiction of their respective ministries under the full authority of the operation headquarters. In addition, in February 2005, President Putin decreed the creation of the National Counterterrorism Committee (NAK), tasked with the coordination of counterterrorism policies and operations among 17 federal agencies. The regional counterterrorism committees led by the regional administration chiefs perform the NAK's functions in the regions. The operational

headquarters charged with the direction of counterterrorist operations were placed within the federal and regional counterterrorism committees. The Russian government expanded and specified the parameters of a counterterrorism operation. It legalized the utilization of military and operational-combat measures in counterterrorism operations and authorized the chief of a counterterrorist operation to order the creation of a combined group of forces that can include military forces for participation in counterterrorism” (Omelicheva 2012). Since Russia labeled the Chechen war as a global war on terror with the change in its laws to use preemptive strikes on terrorism, it seemed to have persuaded the western powers that Chechen conflict is just another front against terrorism by indicating the link between the rebels and al-Qaeda. Putin used the preemptive strikes using the cover of attacking terrorism, while actually using its military to achieve control and stability in the country, and later used this as an excuse for not to engage in negotiations with the Chechens and was able to act swiftly and make domestic changes to justify his actions.

Although during the Chechen wars, Putin managed to get the Western powers off his back, he was not so successful in maintaining this position. An article of Matthew B. Ridgway Center states that "The West, for its part, objects to the “reforms” instituted by President Putin since Beslan and the Kremlin’s “managed democracy.” It is concerned about Moscow’s movement away from democracy and toward a re-embrace of totalitarianism” (Banovac et al. 2007). After Beslan US and the EU started to raise suspicions in terms of Russia but were willing to look past some issues, such as the right 232 right of life cases, in hopes of a more stable and friendly Russia.

2. GEORGIA

2.1. Munich speech 2007

One of the pretexts foreshadowing Russian invasion to Georgia is one of the most famous speeches by Putin where he openly criticized the Western powers. This came to be because of the tension between the US and Russia. Putin showed his dismay over global dominance and the military actions that the US has taken. He stated that the unipolar US lead world does not work today's democracy, because democracy is about majority rule over minorities, and that would go against the principles of democracy. One center of authority, force and decision making does not work with democracy. He said that the unipolar world has only created more military conflicts, and the number of people killed by those conflicts has not decreased. The opposite, the number of people killed has significantly increased, and this has increased tensions. Putin also mentioned that use of force should be an exceptional measure, at the same time condoning some of the US military actions as illegitimate. He thinks that the only organization that could allow the use of force as a last mean is the UN, not the EU nor NATO; otherwise, international law would not be taken seriously and therefore people would not trust international law. Putin also criticized the Adapted Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces and that NATO member states have not ratified it, because Russian soldiers have not yet pulled out of Georgia and Moldova. Putin argued that while Russia has honored the agreement and said that Russian soldiers are moving out of Georgia at an accelerated pace but is threatened by NATO forces that are moving closer to Russian borders and anti-missile defense systems. This is imposing new virtual walls on Russia, almost like the Berlin wall. Another point that is worth mentioning is that Russia promised to honor the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) agreement and not hide any weapons of mass destruction (Putin 2007).

This statement showed the displeasure that Putin has with the West and that Russia wants to be treated more seriously. Putin was not pleased with the direction that the international scene is going and by becoming one of the stronger powers in the world, Russia wanted to be more respected and treated as an equal to the US. Putin thinks that the US uses its power to impose its will on other countries, and Putin strongly objects that. While Putin was correct in some points, for example since 2007 the US has been militarily active in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya and NATO

presence near Russia has made the nation anxious, and tensions seem to keep on growing. This has given rise to the extremist in the Middle-East, threatening international security with terrorism. However, Russia under Putin has not exactly had a clean slate either. Russia is continuously invading other countries airspaces, has been involved in a number of conflicts, Russia has meddled in other countries elections, some of the people from Putin's opposition have been killed or have disappeared. When it comes to nuclear weapons, Russia is stepping out of the INF after the USA stepped out, because Russia was building nuclear missiles with mid range while Putin promised to remain transparent in this issue.

As seen in the 5-day war in Georgia in 2008, Russia already contradicted to the statement that the UN should be the only legitimate institution, by engaging in warfare as a last means. Russia engaged in war and annexed South Ossetia and Abkhazia and used this to create an illegal referendum to declare the independence of those two regions. This also contradicted Putin's statement of Russians moving out of Georgia and showed that while Putin considers International Law important, Russia will in some cases break it to serve its own interests.

2.2. The Rose Revolution

The Rose Revolution started after the parliamentary against the rigged elections of the parliament. The demonstrators demanded the resignation of Eduard Shevardnadze, a man who ruled Georgia for over 30 years altogether, as its Soviet-period Communist Party manager and its longest-serving post-autonomy president. According to an article in Foreign Policy, "when Shevardnadze's attempt to pronounce his coalition victorious after an election riddled with fraud triggered massive protests, he allegedly fled the country, allowing a coalition led by Tbilisi city councilman Mikhail Saakashvili to take control" (Tsomaia 2009).

According to the Huffington Post, from 1995-2003 Eduard Shevardnadze was the Georgian president. During his time there was a lot of corruption, and his parties' popularity decreased significantly through time. At 2003 there was a parliamentary election, and there were suspicions of it being rigged by Shevardnadze, and in 2004 he was replaced by Saakashvili. During Shevardnadze's administration, there was instability, which leads to economic stagnation and poverty (ADST 2015). This likewise prompted the need for progress. After the fixed decisions, there were peaceful challenges. The protestors conveyed rose to demonstrate the peaceful idea of

the dissents and Saakashvili took the chance and requested that the president stepped down and later took over his position. This was the end of the Rose Revolution.

2.3. Causes of Russo-Georgian war

One of the causes for of the Russo- Georgian war is the pro-Western policy that Georgia had taken after the Rose Revolution. Since Georgia was seeing a lot of progress and economic success after overthrowing the Russian sided president. According to Karatnycky "Saakashvili's descent from the political heights has been long and steady. His first term in office was, arguably, an unqualified success: He removed an entrenched corrupt elite, implemented free-market reforms, drastically reduced red tape, and prompted impressive economic growth. But by his second term, Transparency International and other international monitoring groups claimed he was tolerating the rise of a new kleptocracy by empowering businessmen closely linked to his political party"(Karatnycky 2018). Saakashvili was a strong pro-NATO and pro-west president. And his pro-western mindset led to the Russo-Georgian conflict.

Since the relations between Georgia and Russia have not been precisely friendly with there being constant pressure between those two states. And it got even worse after Shaakasvili came to power According to Gobronidze from the very beginning there was a sort of inherent collision between the Georgian and Russian national projects. This became the primary source of conflict between the two states. Georgia viewed Russia as a threat, while Moscow began to question the new contours of Georgian foreign policy" (Gobronidze 2016). At some point of time, Russia imposed sanctions on Georgian wines, and therefore Georgia began searching for different nations to import their wine too, which likewise prompted the decline of the Georgian economy and the strains with Russia were further increased. Gobornidze also stated that "the harder Russia tried to maintain its influence; the more skeptical Georgia became. Thus, Tbilisi started seeking integration within the EU and NATO. In 1999 Georgia became a member of the European Council. Moreover, the nation's leadership officially announced their intention for Georgia to become a member of NATO" (Gobornidze 2016).

The third cause was that Russia viewed the NATO expansions as a threat and wanted to stop them any way possible. The tension between Russia and NATO was already quite high and because of

the fear of being encircled by NATO was one of Russia's more significant issues, Medvedev could not allow another border country to become a NATO state. Medvedev also wanted Georgia to remain in the influence sphere of Russia since Georgia was in the USSR and used to be a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). According to an article in Politico: "Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Belarus, and Ukraine — he is either trying to get those countries back into his realm or, if he's not able to, he at least makes sure those countries are totally unattractive to the West," said an official familiar with the German presentation. Those states, of course, were all part of the Soviet Union until its sudden collapse in 1991" (Glasser 2017). After the war, Georgia stepped out of the CIS. Like Ukraine and Georgia, the Baltics are the border nations of Russia and having NATO member states so near Russia is terrible for Moscow, particularly when Moscow needs to have an impact in the former USSR members. Georgia is a vital nation to have bases in, in light of the fact that it associates Russia, Asia and Europe. Moreover, Georgia is proximate to Russia's Volga district, its cultivating heartland and its path for Caspian Sea oil.

2.4. Russo-Georgian war

On August 8, 2008, following quite a while of forwarding and backward allegations and incitements between the opposite sides, and a progression of conflicts between South Ossetian state army and Georgian military troops, Saakashvili requested his troops to catch the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali. Russia quickly reacted by moving its troops to the outskirts and leading air strikes on Georgian positions in South Ossetia just as in Abkhazia.

Past conciliatory endeavors and helpful guide, the global network did little to stop the contention. "Nobody was happy to do battle for Georgia. No one was willing to go to war for Georgia. This was a time in which no one really wanted to provoke Russia. Dmitry Medvedev was president, and particularly American policy was to essentially hope that this could be leveraged into something more positive. So, to a large extent, Georgia was left on its own" (Pruitt 2018).

After Russia demanded the halt of its development into Georgia, a truce on August 12 finished the Russia-Georgia War. As indicated by an official EU fact-finding report in 2009, almost 850 individuals were killed amid the five-day strife, while around 35,000 Georgians were left destitute. That equivalent reality discovering report reasoned that however, Georgia had started the war,

Russia had incited its neighbor over an extensive stretch and went overboard to that underlying artillery assault (Independent.... 2009).

With the United States, Great Britain and NATO requiring a truce, the contention proceeded for five days, as Russia rapidly assumed responsibility for Tskhinvali and moved its tanks and troops through Ossetia into Georgia, preventing just around 30 miles from Tbilisi, the Georgian capital. Despite the fact that Russia formally perceived South Ossetia and Abkhazia as free states after the war, a couple of different nations have gone along with them in doing as such. In the meantime, Georgia dismissed further from Russian impact in the outcome of the contention and consented to an affiliation arrangement with the EU in 2014.

2.5. Consequences of the Russo Georgian war

After the conflict tensions remained high, while Georgia was damaged by the war, it has still kept its pro-Western mindset and is looking for ways to get out of the Russian sphere of influence. But doing that can cause another military conflict in the region. The EU and NATO will try to solve this matter diplomatically and look for peaceful solutions since they could not interfere in the war itself, but there is no possible solution to this problem. At least not in the foreseeable future. When Medvedev made a statement about the Russo-Georgian war, he said that Russian peacekeepers were killed, and Russia wanted to recognize the sovereignty of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The first consequence was that Russia showed that it is capable of pushing back NATO expansions in its neighboring countries and maintain its influence in the region, as can be seen in the annexed regions in Georgia, where Abkhazia and South Ossetia are heavily dependent on Russian money due to poverty. In conjunction with this influence, Russia can influence whether Georgia is able to join NATO in the future or not. Since one of the preconditions of joining NATO is the ability to maintain integrity inside ones' national borders and in light of the fact that Georgia can't keep up authority over its own region, thus demolishing the opportunity of joining NATO and deferred it for quite a while and on the off chance that they make another endeavor of working with NATO, Russia can cause turmoil in South-Ossetia and Abkhazia again and ruin the opportunity once more. Even now Russia is engaged in the “creeping annexation” in Georgia, by slightly moving the borders of Georgia more and more towards Georgia without any real consequences.

Russia showed the world that he could in some cases, ignore international law without any real consequences; for example, according to Michael Emerson, Russia has never fulfilled its obligations under the six-point peace plan. David Olliver has said: “Russians violate the terms of the nearly decade-old peace treaty by refusing to allow international observers into South Ossetia. What’s more, they continue to refuse to withdraw troops to pre-war locations, as Georgia has already done” (Olliver 2017). Russia got away with this with seemingly no real repercussions, only a frowned upon look by the international scene.

Since EU member states wanted to maintain a good relationship with Russia, they did not want to interfere with Russian business. However, that showcased EU’s incapability to defend and help an OSCE member. According to Cohen and Hamilton “The war also demonstrated the weaknesses of NATO and the EU security system, because they provided no efficient response to Russia’s forced changing of the borders and occupation of an Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) member state. The war demonstrated fissures in Europe between the Western powers eager to maintain good relations with Russia, and the Eastern European states which, 20 years after the collapse of the USSR, retain a political memory of the Soviet occupation” (Cohen, Hamilton 2011). This action ended up undermining US—Russian relations. In hopes of maintaining good relations, the opposite happened. The EU was too heavily reliant on diplomatic measures, while Russia used swift military tactics to achieve its strategic goals.

President Medvedev also outlined a five-point summary about Russian Foreign Policy. According to the Medvedev Doctrine (Freidman 2008):

1. Russia recognizes the primacy of the fundamental principles of international law, which define the relations between civilized peoples.
2. The world should be multipolar. A single-polar world is unacceptable. Domination is something we cannot allow. We cannot accept a world order in which one country makes all the decisions. Such a world is unstable and threatened by conflict.
3. Russia does not want confrontation with any other country. Russia has no intention of isolating itself. We will develop friendly relations with Europe, the United States, and other countries, as much as is possible.
4. Protecting the lives and dignity of our citizens, wherever they may be, is a clear priority for our country. We will also protect the interests of our business community abroad. It should be clear to all that we will respond to any aggressive acts committed against us.

5. There are regions in which Russia has vested interests. These regions are home to countries with which we share unique historical relations and are bound together as friends and good neighbors. We will pay particular attention to our work in these regions and build friendly ties with these countries, our close neighbors.

When it comes to these points, there have been contradictions in what the Russian leaders are saying and actually doing. In some cases, the points are almost the same as Putin pointed out in his famous Munich speech. In terms of upholding Medvedev's first point, Russia seems to break international law from time to time if it serves Russian interests. Secondly, Russia wants the power to be equal to the US or at least take Russia to the level of power it had during the Soviet Union, or at least close to it. Russia also does not want the US to be the world leader, because it just causes more conflicts. This is also linked to the Munich 2007 speech. The third point outlines that Russia is not looking for trouble, and if the EU's and the US's interest align with Russia, it will be willing to cooperate. The fourth point is somewhat troublesome because it aligns with what happened in Georgia and was used in the Ukraine crisis as an excuse for the annexation of large parts of these countries. This point also implies that what happened in those countries might happen again in the future, and now the doctrine gives cause for Russia to act in those situations. The fifth point could be linked with Russia's ambition to maintaining the influence in the former members of the Soviet Union and establishing a regional hegemony. The last three points are somewhat of an addition to the statements Putin made in the Munich speech, so after the Russo-Georgian war, Russia mostly maintains the same viewpoints.

3. UKRAINE

3.1. What led to the Ukraine crisis?

The prerequisites for the crisis were set by the Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich who publicly pledged to sign a deal with the EU to open borders for Ukrainian goods to get to the European free market. This was meant to pave the way for the later integration of Ukraine to the European Union. From the Russian standpoint, it would lose a close trading partner and former Soviet state to the west. However, at the last moment, Yanukovich fled the country in an attempt to deny the European future. After that, the pro-EU movement called Euromaidan started to protest

and eventually after the police opened fire at the rioters and killed about 130 people, an interim government led by the protest's leaders took power. Shortly after that, Russian soldiers without insignias, called the green men appeared and started to cause havoc in the country.

It could be implied that Russia attacked Ukraine to prevent it from moving out of the grasps of Russian influence and since the expert Russian president Yanukovich needed to escape, Russia took matters to its very own hands and assumed responsibility for the Crimean Peninsula. By doing as such Russia pushed back the talks between the EU and Ukraine. Some people would speculate that if the Russo Georgian war and Russian actions in that war had had a stronger, more decisive response, this conflict would not have happened. The experience that the Russian military got from the Georgian war helped improve its strategy and skill to allow this kind of annexation to happen.

Since the pro-EU government Ukraine would set a goal of becoming a western minded country, it would probably have joined NATO sometime in the future. This could be one of the reasons why Russia took action in Ukraine. As said by Treisman "Crimean operation was a response to the threat of NATO's further expansion along Russia's western border. By this logic, Putin seized the peninsula to prevent two dangerous possibilities: first, that Ukraine's new government might join NATO, and second, that Kiev might evict Russia's Black Sea Fleet from its long-standing base in Sevastopol" (Treisman 2016). NATO bases this close to Russia would pose a direct threat in Putin's view and similar to Georgia Russia wanted to regain influence in the area by denying possible further NATO enlargements.

When it comes to the second reason, which is also linked with the reason Russia annexed two regions in Georgia, is that Russia wants to maintain its Russian minded mindset in the region. Treisman also says that "annexation of Crimea as part of a Russian project to recapture the former territories of the Soviet Union gradually. Putin never accepted the loss of Russian prestige that followed the end of the Cold War, this argument suggests, and he is determined to restore it, in part by expanding Russia's borders" (Treisman 2016). But that was rendered almost impossible with the fleeing of president Yanukovich. At least without the military involved. So Putin sent undercover troops to Ukraine and played the card of helping to protect the interests and security of Russian people in Ukraine, to start the conflict.

3.2. Ukraine crisis

From 2014 until this day the province of Crimea is being occupied by Russian forces. According to CNN, after the revolution "little green men," who were Russian troops without insignias invaded Ukrainian territory and started to call people to riot against the Ukrainian government. They took the Crimean Peninsula and with an illegitimate referendum declared the independence of Crimea from Ukraine. Soon after that, Poroshenko came to power and signed the association agreement with the EU. Since then, there have been a number of armistices, which mostly have been violated by both sides. The Western powers, such as the US and the EU, have imposed sanctions (Thompson 2017).

In February 2014, Russian authorities started to gather in the Crimean Peninsula not long after the Western government took control in Kiev, fanning fears of an assault on Russian legacy in parts of Ukraine including Crimea. Troops without emblems in Crimea, swiftly occupied critical infrastructures, including Ukrainian army bases. It was just years after the fact that Putin openly conceded that these were in actuality Russian troops. Because the Ukrainian troops did not put an intense fight, they would withdraw a lot. Would-be dissenter authority and Russian officer Igor Girkin later described how he and other Russian officers forced the hand of nearby Crimean administrators to pass a movement for a choice to withdraw from Ukraine and join Russia. A dominant part of votes cast on March 16, 2014, supported severance. After two days, Moscow marked a revelation with self-declared Crimean authorities, sealing the annexation. Neither the vote nor the annexation was recognized by the United Nations. Ukraine signed peace accords with the separatists in 2015, calling for a cease-fire and political settlement in the east. While it helped to decrease the intensity of the fighting, the accords did nothing to determine the district's political stalemate (Vasilyeva 2018). Western powers are looking for diplomatic solution to this, but have not made any significant headway

Some battles like the battle for Donbas airport were very fierce and saw a lot of fighting. In defense for the Ukrainians, the soldiers that gave up their bases to the Russians with little or no effort were doing so, because the officials of the government were not sure what was going on and did not give orders in time. This gave a significant opportunity to Russia to quickly take over the vital military regions and the Crimean Peninsula. Due to East Ukraine having a lot of Russians since Stalin had them moved there about 50 years ago from the times of USSR to integrate Ukraine into

Soviet Russia better, it had pro-Russian protests, and that made it possible to hold a referendum in Crimea even though it was considered illegitimate by the UN.

But that wasn't the end of the conflict, and it still goes on. According to Amadeo, somewhere in the range of 2014 and 2018, the military clash between Ukrainian soldiers and Russian-upheld separatists has proceeded in eastern Ukraine. About 10,000 people have died. On November 25, 2018, Russian boats assaulted and boarded three Ukrainian vessels in the Crimean port of Azov close to the Black Sea. It placed a tanker to obstruct the port. It said Ukraine had violated Russian waters. The opposite sides consented to an arrangement in 2003 to ensure free passage through the strait. As of late, they've been harassing each other's boats. Critics at the United Nations Security Council meeting said Russia's assault was a violation of the international law. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization increased its military near the territory (Amadeo 2019).

3.3. Consequences of the Ukraine crisis

One of the first consequences was a wave of sanctions imposed on Russia by the EU and the US. The sanctions had a devastating effect on the Russian economy. Russian ruble started to lose value, causing a rapid decrease in oil prices. This led Russia to an economic crisis. The import ban on Russia increased inflation and had also affected food prices. Since most of the gas to Europe comes from Russia the EU is also affected by the sanctions in a non-direct way, and some businesses have suffered, but mostly in terms of economics, EU is managing just fine. After the sanctions, Putin was looking toward a more isolated, self-sustaining Russia. He knew the effect of sanctions on the Russian economy and currency, and He was pushing towards using not imported products, but creating new technologies by using natural resources for capital projects. Putin blamed the Western power for pushing Russia to isolation; Russia was always willing to cooperate and still is. However, in the eyes of the European Union and United States of America, Russia should blame itself for these sanctions. If Russia had not invaded Ukraine, things might be different.

The second thing that happened was that Russia managed to damage its relations with the US and EU severely. While Trump, when he came to office, was willing to do business with Putin, nothing really softened their relationship, and the isolation of Russia only deteriorates those relations. This does not help Russian economic progress, because if this continues, according to Saradzhyan, "the costs for Russia of continued alienation from the West—due to this intervention and other points of discontent—are growing and may eventually become unaffordable unless one or both of two

things happen: either Russia finds a new economic model that will let its economy become competitive and grow at least as fast as the world's as a whole—all while semi-isolated from the West—or Moscow reaches a compromise on issues of major disagreement, including the Ukraine conflict” (Saradzhyan 2019). Because at the moment, the gap between Russian and the world's economy is getting bigger and bigger and will not eventually be able to compete.

Some of the goals of Russia have also been damaged by the decision to intervene in Ukraine. Saradzhyan says that “The intervention did considerable damage to other critical Russian interests: ensuring Russia can thrive, surrounded by friendly neighbors; maintaining productive relations with the United States and core European Union members; and ensuring the viability and stability of major markets for Russian exports and imports (Saradzhyan 2019). This has also caused Putin to lose his supporters, even though it rose in 2014 after the annexation of Crimea. This is mainly because it is harder for poor people to stay pleased with the current economy. Although the more affluent people are doing quite fine in Russia and the sanctions, have not affected them as much.

3.3.1 Russian pivot to the East

Due to the sanctions that have crippled the Russian economy, Russia has now started to look towards the East in order to find a new market that could best the Western powers economically. Russia now has started to form closer ties with China. Charap states that “within its ‘turn to the East’ Russia has prioritized its relations with China. Like the United States, Russia sees the rise of China as one of the most significant developments of the twenty-first century. Key projects, such as the nearly \$400 billion gas deal signed in May 2014 the countries within the Asia-Pacific. Russia’s need for deeper economic engagement with China as a result of deteriorating ties with other major partners is creating an imbalance in the Russia–China relationship that could have a strategic impact over time” (Charap et al 2016). The former significant partners of EU have pushed Russia to the sidelines in Europe, and that is why for Russia, it is important to join China as the new rising economic power in the region and become more engaged in the political and economical affairs in the Asia-Pacific and Russia will surely do so.

CONCLUSION

Russia's viewpoints have mostly remained the same, with the backbone of it being, that Putin does not accept the United States as a unipolar dominant ruler of the world and wants to return to the world, where there would be two or more powers that could enforce international law and where Russia would be one of those powers. Because then the world would be more stable and there would be fewer conflicts and deaths in the world in general. Although Putin and Medvedev have stated that the international law should be upheld, Russia seems to twist it and brake it according to its own national interests. This could be seen in the cases of Beslan, Georgia and Ukraine.

The second biggest viewpoint of Russia has been that it wants to remain a regional hegemony and keep its neighbor states under its sphere of influence and make them unattractive to the West. In cases of Georgia and Ukraine, both were moving in a westerly direction in terms of their political view, when Russia stepped in and annexed a part of their country, therefore pushing the NATO or EU talks further into the future and by doing so also sours the relations with the Western powers. Even though Russia claimed openness and that it was looking for trade partners from all over the world, its actions seemed only to push the West away.

The most reforms in policies occurred in Beslan, where Putin had to reform the whole counter-terrorism task force because it merely was outdated and ineffective. Law enforcement, communication and centralization of government and anti-terrorism organization were made more efficient. Putin also gained more control over the FSB making it his own political tool. He used the task force to remove its political opposition from its way.

These viewpoints mentioned above have created the issues that have distanced Russia and Western powers. While the EU has tried to maintain positive relations even after the Russo-Georgian war, Russia managed to cross the line by invading the Crimean Peninsula. After that, the US and EU both had no other option than to impose sanctions on Russia. In that sense, Russia's actions caused the sanctions that made Russia turn its back to the Western powers. The actions Russia took to maintain a sphere of influence in the region backfired and now Russia is economically in its lowest point since the end of the Soviet Union

At the moment Russia has played itself into a corner of economic problems. To solve them, Russia either has to rethink the importance of Crimea for Russia or come up with a new economic model in order to boost Russia's economy. Otherwise, Putin's support will continue to drop, and the more impoverished people in Russia will continue to suffer. However, Russia seems to be able to fix this by turning its back to the West and focusing more on multilateral ties within the Asia-Pacific.

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