

Not one inch eastward and the realities of Russian insecurities: Exploring “the West’s” involvement in Maidan Protests

A Russian interpretation

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In memory of all those who have lost their lives and continue to suffer in the Russo-Ukrainian war, a tragic reminder of how politics can divide what shared heritage has long united.

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ABSTRACT

The conflict in Ukraine (2014-present) has been a subject of intense scrutiny, yet the influence of Western strategic objectives on this conflict from a Russian perspective remains insufficiently examined. This thesis addresses this gap by examining Russia's perceived security concerns and the strategic motivations driving its responses. For this reasons, primary sources from Russia, the US, and Ukraine are utilized. This multilingual study has granted some innovative results. The research reveals that Russia has valid reasons to views NATO, particularly the US, as a direct threat to its status as a great power, a view intensified by Western involvement in the Orange and the Maidan Revolution. The study demonstrates that Russia's response of annexing Crimea was a rational decision within the realist theoretical framework. Initially, under Kuchma, Ukraine's balancing act between Russia and the West preserved Russian influence. However, as Ukraine's pro-Western orientation grew, particularly under Yushchenko, Russia's insecurity deepened. This was intensified by Western support for opposition during the Maidan protests, which Russia, based on the research, had valid reasons to believe that it was Western supported, aimed at weakening Russia's strategic position that they had under Yanukovich's leadership. It argues that Russia's actions were a rational response to security fears, challenging non-realist perspectives that often dismiss Russia's security concerns as perceived. The research calls for further investigation into Russian and US's archives and decision-making processes to fully understand the complex dynamics at play. Overall, this thesis stresses the significance of considering great power insecurities and strategic interests in the framework of international conflicts, specifically when assessing the rationale behind Russia's annexation of Crimea, marking the beginning of Russo-Ukrainian war.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CIA: Central Intelligence Agency

CRS: Congressional Research Service

EU: European Union

FRY: Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1992-2003)

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

IMF: International Monetary Fund

IR: International Relations

MP: Member of a Parliament

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NDI: National Democratic Institute

NED: National Endowment for Democracy

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

OSCE: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

US: United States of America

USG: United States Government

USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

VR: Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament)

WW2: World War Two

INTRODUCTION

Currently, the war in Ukraine is perhaps the most contested topic socially and academically to the point of IR theoreticians becoming world famous. For example, realist IR scholar John Mearsheimer's video on why Ukraine is the West's fault has now gathered almost 30 million views on YouTube.¹ Amidst the plight for democracy, European integration and the change of Ukraine's political alignment lays deeper currents of power play between the two global superpowers. For example, since the end of the Cold War, the United States (US) has been deeply involved in Eastern Europe, spending over \$26 billion from 1992 to 2005 on aid to former Soviet states.²

This investment focused on promoting free markets, building security partnerships, and supporting the shift from authoritarianism to democracy, with a significant portion directed toward Ukraine. As for Russia, Ukraine's geopolitical location is undoubtedly critical for Russia's economy and security as it hosts the largest naval base in the Black Sea, controls oil pipelines to Europe, is industrially a breadbasket for Europe, and has historically been a pathway for Western powers to conquer the East (e.g. WW2, Napoleons invasion). Reflecting on this complexity, this thesis undertakes the task of unraveling the Russo-Ukrainian war focusing on the predominant roles of the US and Russia, with an aim of understanding Russia's position, thus challenging the repeated claim of an "unprovoked invasion" by the political elite from NATO countries, official documents, and some academics.³ Hence, the objective of this thesis is not to justify the 2022 invasion but rather to comprehend the motivations and actions of the two great powers that led to the revolution and consequently war. Therefore, this thesis will analyze their geopolitical motivations and the impact of their strategic choices in Ukraine.

Openly, the thesis will explore the US' commitment to spreading democracy and its substantial financial pledge intended to redirect post-Soviet satellites towards a market-oriented economy and democratic governance. Furthermore, the thesis will delve into Russia's geopolitical interest in Ukraine, its concerns about the deflection of its traditionally allied neighbour towards the West, and Russia's need to protect its security interests. Therefore, this thesis seeks to explore the extent to which the conflict in Ukraine, which began with the Maidan protests in November 2013 and concluded with the removal of President Yanukovich from Ukraine on 22nd of February 2014, was influenced by the strategic objectives of the US, within the broader context of geopolitical

¹ The University of Chicago, "Why Is Ukraine the West's Fault? Featuring John Mearsheimer." YouTube, September 25, 2015.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrMiSQAGOS4&t=1533s&ab_channel=TheUniversityofChicago.

² Curt Tarnoff, "U.S. Assistance to the Former Soviet Union," (Congressional Research Service: March 2007), 1

³ Rotar, Natalia. "How Ukrainian society is mobilizing and uniting in the light of the Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine." *European Journal of Transformation Studies* 10, no. 2 (2022): 265-267.; The White House. "On One Year Anniversary of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine, Biden Administration Announces Actions to Support Ukraine and Hold Russia Accountable." The White House, February 24, 2023. <https://shorturl.at/xPN9S>; European Parliament. "European Parliament Resolution of 16 February 2023 on One Year of Russia's Invasion and War of Aggression against Ukraine (2023/2558(RSP))." Official Journal of the European Union, August 11, 2023. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52023IP0056>.

tensions in the regions since the end of the Cold War. In Russian political discourse, the terms “the West” and “the US” are used interchangeably, with “the West” (or “the collective West”) broadly signifying NATO member states, in which the US is a dominant force, which goes hand-in-hand with realism in IR. The notion of “the West” as a collective term for NATO member states and various European organizations is deeply entrenched in academic discourse and remains a prevalent concept in Russian official rhetoric.⁴ Given that this thesis examines Russia's perspective, it will adopt this framework to better understand Russia's security concerns. This leads to the research question:

From Russia’s perspective to what extent is the conflict in Ukraine (2014-present) influenced by the strategic objectives of “the West” within the broader context of post-Cold War geopolitical tensions, and how justifiable are Russia's perceived security concerns?

What has become a famous promise in IR academia that NATO will not expand “one inch eastward”, Russia has repeatedly voiced its concerns about NATO’s expansion.⁵ Especially after declining Russia into NATO in 2000, according to NATO’s 10th Secretary-General George Robertson.⁶ A historical example of this is the Monroe Doctrine, which states that any intervention of foreign powers in the Americas is a hostile act against the US. This foreign policy doctrine was demonstrated multiple times during the Cold War, perhaps the best during the Cuban crisis when the Soviets piled their missiles close to the US border which almost resulted in a nuclear war. Biden’s “Everything south of the Mexican border is America’s front yard”, confirms the existence of this doctrine today.⁷ This foreign policy was further amplified by the Wolfowitz Doctrine in 1992, which identified Russia’s resurgence as a threat to the US’s primacy in the new world order, stating America’s right to intervene where its interests are threatened.⁸ NATO demonstrated this to Russia, with their military capabilities during the time of unipolarity when it unilaterally bombed FR Yugoslavia in 1999 and proceeded to act against its charter, despite strong Russian opposition, which further diminished trust between the two blocs. Much like the US, Russia came up with its version of the Monroe doctrine that has been repeatedly violated by a defensive military alliance, by expanding further East to its border, highlighted in all of Russia’s military doctrines from 2000 to the present.⁹

⁴ Comai, Giorgio. "Who said it first? 'The collective West' in Russia's nationalist media and official statements." *Text as Data and Data in the Text* (2023).; Sunami, Artem N. "Non-realistic elements in the Russia/"collective West" conflict." *Socioloshki Pregled* 57, no. 2 (2023): 519-540.; Agafonov, Anton. "Western Security Community" and Russia: Mutual Construction of Insecurities." PhD diss., University of Ottawa (Canada), 2010.

⁵ Sarotte, Mary Elise. "Not one inch eastward? Bush, Baker, Kohl, Genscher, Gorbachev, and the origin of Russian resentment toward NATO enlargement in February 1990." *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 1 (2010): 119-140.

⁶ Rankin, Jennifer. "Ex-Nato Head Says Putin Wanted to Join Alliance Early on in His Rule." *The Guardian*, November 4, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/04/ex-nato-head-says-putin-wanted-to-join-alliance-early-on-in-his-rule>.

⁷ Biden, Joe "Remarks by President Biden in Press Conference." *The White House*, January 20, 2022. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/01/19/remarks-by-president-biden-in-press-conference-6/>

⁸ National Security Council. "Defense Planning: Guidance FY 1994-1999 April 16, 1992." National Archives. Accessed September 6, 2024. <https://www.archives.gov/files/declassification/iscap/pdf/2008-003-docs1-12.pdf>.

⁹ President of the Russian Federation. "Voennaya Doktrina Russiskoy Federacii." *Prezident Rossii*, February 5, 2010. <http://www.kremlin.ru/supplement/461>; President of the Russian Federation "Voennaya Doktrina Russiskoy

The fact of the matter is, that the political and military influence that Russia had on Eastern Europe collapsed in 1990, while the US largely expanded to the detriment of Russia, thus perfectly portraying a zero-sum game in IR theory. Perhaps best summarized in Putin's 2008 Munich speech "...against whom is this expansion intended?".¹⁰

Therefore, the causes of the war in Ukraine have attracted several histories and IR scholars, for example, Singh who argues that Ukraine has independent ambitions to have a state without pro-Russia leaders, unlike Yanukovich who was Putin's puppet, and could finally fulfill its citizen's wishes by dissuading "its little brother position from Russia".¹¹ Similarly, Kogler and many other scholars argue that the war in Ukraine is a fight between democracy and dictatorship, in which Russia threatens the world's democratic order, thus defending Ukraine is defending Europe.¹²

Furthermore, many scholars go into Ukraine's complex historical background, examining the country's long-standing cultural, linguistic, and political ties to both Russia and Europe. During the 1990s, Samuel Huntington notably characterized Ukraine as a "cleft country," highlighting its position as a battleground where Eastern and Western influences converge along an internal "fault line".¹³

In this way, some scholars, like this thesis, focus on Maidan. For example, Kulyk and Weigel argue that Maidan was a key moment where Ukrainians found themselves in a true sense of citizenship and national identity recognizing Ukrainian European values, and leaving Russia behind.¹⁴ Other scholars point out the dangerous divisions within Ukrainian borders, resulting in the "war of identities".¹⁵ This term often comes up in literature, referring to the war in Ukraine as a clash of two different ethnocultural groups divided in language, memory politics, nationalism, and European versus Eurasian identity.¹⁶ Some even go as far as arguing that the war in Ukraine was inevitable, as is the nation's disintegration, because of these conflicting

Federacii" Electronic Library, April 21, 2000. https://elib.biblioatom.ru/text/yadernoe-nerasprostranenie_t2_2002/p543/; President of the Russian Federation. "Voennaya Doktrina Russiskoy Federacii." *Sovyet Bezopasnosti Russiskoy Federacii*, 2014. <http://scrf.gov.ru/security/military/document129/>.

¹⁰ Putin, Vladimir, "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy," The Kremlin (The Government of the Russian Federation, February 10, 2007), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>.

¹¹ Singh, Danny. "Ukrainian Desire for Political Autonomy and NATO Accession." In *The Tripartite Realist War: Analysing Russia's Invasion of Ukraine*, Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, (2023): 83-120;

¹² Kögler, Hans-Herbert. "Democracy or dictatorship? The moral call to defend Ukraine." *European Journal of Social Theory* (2023); Stefanishyna, O. L. G. A. "Ukraine Needs a Clear Path to NATO Membership." *Foreign Policy Insider* (2021); Person, Robert, and Michael McFaul. "What Putin fears most." *Journal of Democracy* 33, no. 2 (2022): 18-27; Malinowski, Representative Tom, John J. Hamre, and Andrew Lohsen. "Democracy in Danger: The Russian Threat to Ukraine."

¹³ Samuel P. Huntington. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. London: Simon & Schuster. 1996

¹⁴ Weigel, George. "WHAT UKRAINE MEANS." *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*, no. 333, May 2023; Kulyk, Volodymyr. "National identity in time of war: Ukraine after the Russian aggressions of 2014 and 2022." *Problems of Post-Communism* (2023): 1-13.

¹⁵ Zhurzhenko, Tatiana. "A divided nation? Reconsidering the role of identity politics in the Ukraine crisis." *Die Friedens-Warte* (2014): 249-267.

¹⁶ Mylogorodska, Zhanna. "Ukraine's East-West regional division." In *Reinventing Eastern Europe: Imaginaries, Identities and Transformations*,. Transnational Press London, (2017): 23-36

identity differences.¹⁷ Similarly, Wilson argues that Russia is Ukraine's constitutive other, going as far as arguing that Ukraine is a "post-colonial" nation.¹⁸

On the contrary, Riedel goes into the argument of "fratricidal war" considering the complex history of the Kyivan Rus, ultimately concluding the same national identity which fell victim to political infighting for power in the region since the Kyivan Rus (10th-13th centuries).¹⁹ Or as Kissinger had put it "The West must understand that, to Russia, Ukraine can never be just a foreign country."²⁰ The identity and historical arguments outline the importance of understanding that Ukraine cannot be compared to any other state in its socio-political makeup while corresponding to the IR theoretical framework of constructivism. This aligns with Russia's view as a revisionist state, in which according to some literature, Russia has always been an expansionist and aggressive state with a deep belief of being surrounded by external threats.²¹ Furthermore, there are a handful of authors that focus on Russia as a declining superpower which sparks nostalgia and a narrative of a glorious past, thus the need to return to its old borders.²²

Many authors, but also Western politicians, emphasize the role of Putin as the cause of the war. Rak, Khodarkovsky, and Snyder, amongst others, have argued that Putin's tsarist authoritarian rule, characterized by nationalism, expansionist foreign policy, and imperialism is the direct cause for Russia's aspirations to invade and intervene in Ukrainian politics by installing their puppet authoritarian leader Yanukovich and finally invading, once Ukrainian people democratically chose its path to the West as shown in Maidan.²³ In short, Putin's vision of a Russian World and his efforts to maintain Russia's sphere of influence in its "near abroad" has led to direct interventions in neighboring countries, Georgia and now Ukraine. By promoting a narrative of Russian exceptionalism and historical grievances, Putinism as a framework has served to justify Russia's annexation of Crimea and the "unprovoked" invasion of Ukraine.²⁴

Overall, a fruitful debate over Russia's decision-making and its perception of the causes of this war is missing, especially concerning the Maidan protests. In academia, it seems that the details of Russian perception of this revolution and how it came to be, have been overlooked, despite the subsequent Russia's invasion of Crimea, which in my opinion should have caused concerns

¹⁷ Zaharchenko, Tanya. "POLYPHONIC DICHOTOMIES: MEMORY AND IDENTITY IN TODAY'S UKRAINE." *Demokratyzatsiya* 21, no. 2 (2013).; Robert Seely. "Ukraine's Identity Crisis." *Moscow Times*. June 12, 1994.

¹⁸ Wilson, Andrew. "Ukraine at war: Baseline identity and social construction." *Nations and Nationalism* (2023).

¹⁹ Riedel, Sabine. "Ukraine in Conflict of National Identity." (2022).

²⁰ Henry A. Kissinger, "How the Ukraine crisis ends." *The Washington Post*, Wednesday, March 5, 2014.

²¹ Charalambides, Yiannos. "A Russian Revisionist Strategy on the Rise?." *Strategic Analysis* 46, no. 2 (2022): 141-156; Kotoulas, Ioannis E. "Russia as a Revisionist State and the 2022 Invasion of Ukraine." Publishing House "Baltija Publishing" (2022).

²² McGlynn, Jade. "Historical framing of the Ukraine Crisis through the Great Patriotic War: Performativity, cultural consciousness and shared remembering." *Memory Studies* 13, no. 6 (2020): 1058-1080.

²³ Snyder, Timothy. "Ukraine holds the future: The war between democracy and nihilism." *Foreign Aff.* 101, (2022); Khodarkovsky, Michael. "Russia's War in Ukraine: How the 19th Century Imperialism and 20th Century Fascism Found Home in the 21st Century Russia." *The Journal of East Asian Affairs* (2022): 95-112; Bäcker, Roman, and Joanna Rak. "Why did Putin go too far? The rationality of Vladimir Putin's decision to begin a war with Ukraine." *Society Register* 6, no. 3 (2022): 57-71.

²⁴ Cohen, Roger, and Nanna Heitmann. "Putin's Forever War." *International New York Times* (2023); Rivera, Sharon Werning, Julian G. Waller, Scott Radnitz, and Daria Khlevnyuk. "Ideological and Conspiratorial Underpinnings of Russia's War against Ukraine." *Russian Analytical Digest (RAD)* 299 (2023).

about the events surrounding the Maidan protests. More specifically, Russian concerns argued in this thesis can be summarized by: a) the West, dominated by the US, is the enemy that wants to undermine Russia's interests in pursuit of a unipolar world; b) The West is aggressively pushing Ukraine to join NATO to maximize its power, thus minimizing Russian; c) Maidan is a Western orchestrated coup d'état, where a democratically elected Yanukovich was ousted by pro-Western puppets; d) If Ukraine (at least in 2013 controlled-borders) joins NATO it would hardly tip the balance of power in the region, presenting an existential crisis which is augmented by the Russian-speaking population in the East and South.

Thereby, the view that Putin's rule is autocratic, is more than evident, however calling the war in Ukraine "unprovoked" is what will be tested. Therefore, this thesis will attempt to cover this gap in research, focusing on the question of Russia's insecurity over Ukraine's Western alignment. In this way, it primarily attempts to add to the prevailing bibliography, while it also challenges the existing narrative of the political elite in NATO countries.

Methodology and Structure

The analysis will be built on a careful examination of both secondary and primary sources. Secondary sources will primarily serve to provide historical context and deepen the analysis of primary sources. The primary sources will include a balanced selection of Russian and Western documents to explore the Russian perspective on the West's initiative to integrate Ukraine into its sphere of influence, thus testing the "unprovoked" narrative. Simultaneously, Western sources will be analyzed to determine whether Russian concerns are genuine, meaning if they reflect a response to the West's strategic objectives of expanding political, economic, and especially military influence in Ukraine, or if they are a product of Russian misinformation to justify the war.

Given the recency of the topic and the ongoing war, access to broad information is constrained, as both sides are likely withholding information that could sway public opinion and impact public support for the war. Consequently, the primary sources will consist largely of speeches, interviews, and official statements from key figures such as Lavrov, Putin, Yanukovich, and Biden, Nuland, Payet as well as documents from the protest's leadership, military doctrines, and legislative records from bodies like the VR, the US Congress, and the EU. Additional sources will include opinion polls, leaked cables (such as from WikiLeaks), and archived materials from NGOs and the US embassy in Kyiv. This analysis will draw upon materials in Russian, Ukrainian, and English, presenting a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the perspectives involved, therefore giving the research an innovative edge. Naturally, this thesis encourages further research of Russian documents and insights that could be available in the future, contributing to an enhanced understanding of the Russian perspective.

Western primary sources offer valuable insights into their engagement with Ukraine during the Kuchma and Yushchenko administrations, with a focus on their involvement during the Maidan protests. Although declassified information is lacking, leaks and the overall transparency of Western relations with Ukraine and Russia provide crucial depths, especially when viewed from Russia's perspective. For example, NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg remarks that Putin was

bent on preventing Ukraine from joining NATO, stating that “he (Putin) went to war to prevent NATO, more NATO, close to his borders”.²⁵ From Russia’s perspective, this quote (available on NATO’s website) is a confession that Western politicians were aware of Russia’s concerns about NATO’s enlargement on Russia’s borders, but decided to ignore it. The US’s 2017 National Security Strategy states that “Russia views the NATO and EU as threats”.²⁶

Equally important are the primary sources from Russia and Ukraine, which shed light on their views of Western decision-making. These sources highlight how actions, even if well-intentioned, can be perceived as threatening to Russia's interests in Ukraine. Speeches, interviews, and cables expose the continuity of Russia’s security concerns and indicate that Ukrainian and Western leaders were aware of Russia’s likely response if certain "red lines" were crossed. While it could be argued that this insecurity is an attempt to justify Russia’s own power maximization pursuit, thus primary sources would not be precise, but conclusions from these sources will also be combined with Western primary sources and historiography to assess their credibility and validity.

Precisely this combination of the context and conclusions that can be derived from disparate sources will be a vital part of this analysis, given that one source might not be sufficiently clear, but pondering multiple documents can offer a different perspective. This can yield much more useful information about the goals of the West and Russia’s perception of these objectives. Throughout the paper, it will be clear when a conclusion stems directly from one primary source and when it is elaborated by the writer, having used data from different, but related, sources.

Overall, integrating primary sources from various countries is essential for obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the developments, and this approach will be a key element of this research. This thesis follows a chronological structure, beginning with an analysis of Russia’s security concerns in Ukraine, culminating in the events of Maidan. The analysis begins with examining the presidencies of Kuchma and Yushchenko. It will explore how Kuchma’s balancing act between the West and Russia, known as Kuchma’s doctrine or the multi-vector policy, shifted under Yushchenko, who pledged to pursue NATO membership for Ukraine. Additionally, the chapter will discuss Viktor Yanukovich’s rise to power and his brief presidency, highlighting Western decision-making and Russia’s response to these developments. The thesis argues that Russia perceived Yushchenko’s presidency as a significant threat, particularly after the 2008 Bucharest Summit, which intensified Russia's reliance on hard power tactics, including economic coercion, to counter what it saw as the West's push for Ukraine to join NATO.

The second chapter, which is the central focus of this thesis, examines the Maidan protests and the surrounding events. This chapter will predominantly address the aspects that Russia raised concerns about, such as the EU AA, the role of NGOs, the West’s involvement in what Russia perceives as a coup, the violence during the protests, the ousting of Yanukovich, the emergence

²⁵ Stoltenberg, Jens. “Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at Joint Committee Meeting at the European Parliament.” NATO, September 7, 2023.

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_218172.htm?selectedLocale=en.

²⁶ The White House. “National Security Strategy of the US.” Trump White House Archives, December 2017. <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>, 25

of a new right-wing government, and Ukraine’s subsequent realignment with the West. By critically analyzing key Western primary sources, this chapter will argue that Russia’s concerns about NATO’s expansion to its borders and significant Western involvement in what can indeed be considered a coup d’état were, to a considerable extent, valid. For Russia and realist academia, these developments are explained by the West's strategic objectives to bring Ukraine into its sphere of influence.

Following this analysis, the third chapter will explain Russia’s response to Maidan, including its decision to annex Crimea, which quickly escalated into a proxy-like conflict between the West and Russia in the Donbas region. This chapter will provide an overview of Russia’s motives, contributing to the academic debate by incorporating perspectives from all sides and encouraging further research into similar or related factors. Other reasons that led to the war should be investigated, or why Russia did not launch a full-scale invasion in 2014. Therefore, the complex interests and aspirations that contributed to the war in Ukraine will be thoroughly explored.

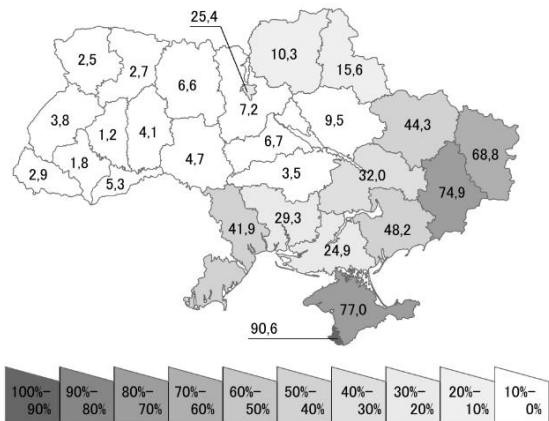


Figure 1: Percentage of people with Russian as their native language according to 2001 census. Data: <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/language/>; Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language_policy_in_Ukraine#/media/File:Ukraine_census_2001_Russian.svg

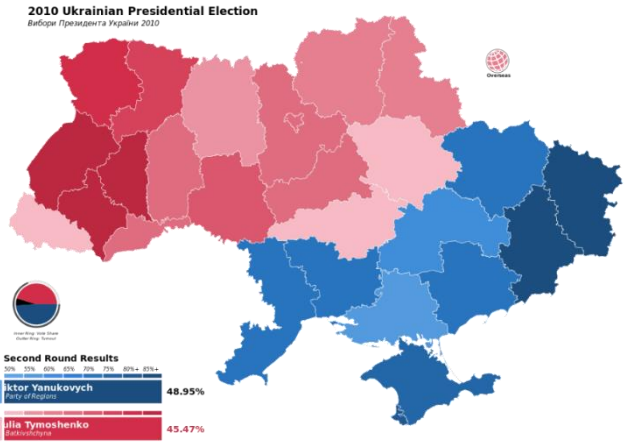


Figure 2: 2010 Ukrainian Presidential Election Second Round Map. Data: <https://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vp2010/wp313f0d8.html?PT001F01=700>; Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2010_Ukrainian_presidential_election#/media/File:2010_Ukrainian_presidential_election,_second_round.svg

ANALYTICAL AND HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK

This thesis will primarily examine the period from the Orange Revolution to the Maidan Revolution and the subsequent war (2004-2014). To provide a comprehensive understanding, it is essential to consider academic perspectives that support Russia's viewpoint on NATO's expansion into Ukraine and valid reasonings for Russia's insecurity. These perspectives often employ both offensive and defensive realist frameworks to explain the dynamics of IR.

The slightest push for Ukraine to join NATO alarmed academics of potential conflict ever since joint exercises in 1997 between the two. Former US National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski articulated Washington's perspective on post-independent Ukraine in his 1997 book *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*. "Without Ukraine," he elucidated, "Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire."²⁷ Brzezinski contended that integrating Ukraine into Washington's sphere of influence would deal a significant blow to Russia and facilitate the US in becoming "the key arbiter of Eurasian power relations."²⁸

For these reasons, in his 2000 article titled "NATO Expansion: A Realist's View," Kenneth Waltz, a prominent defensive realist, anticipates many of the arguments later articulated by Mearsheimer, particularly regarding the potential consequences of NATO's enlargement within the context of a shifting global power structure. Waltz suggests that there are valid justifications for Russian concerns regarding NATO's expansion not only to former Warsaw Pact nations but also to former Soviet republics such as Ukraine. Waltz emphasizes the absence of reason for NATO's expansion with no logical stopping line West of Russia. He further argues that such enlargement would drive Russia closer to China, given NATO's perceived violation of assurances made in the early 1990s. Waltz believed that the US would push Ukraine's accession, citing Brzezinski in June 1998 that Ukraine should prepare to join NATO by 2010.²⁹

For Waltz, NATO's expansion seemed irrational, but for Mearsheimer, a prominent offensive realist, ambitious foreign policy strategy named liberal hegemony is to blame, as NATO initiated its expansion by displaying it was an offensive military alliance in the 1999 bombings of the Federal Yugoslav Republic, and pushing the accession of Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland in the same year, despite Russia's concerns.³⁰ Furthermore, according to Mearsheimer the rubicon was crossed during the Bucharest summit in 2008 when the US wanted to spread the sphere of influence by declaring Georgia and Ukraine into NATO.³¹ In this way, Putin was provoked, beginning with the Orange Revolution in 2004 and ending with the illegal overthrow

²⁷ Brzezinski, Zbigniew K., 1998 *The grand chessboard: American primacy and its geostrategic imperatives* / 1st ed 1997, 45

²⁸ *Ibid.* xi

²⁹ Waltz, Kenneth N. "NATO Expansion: A Realist's View." *Contemporary security policy* 21, no. 2, (2000): 23–38

³⁰ Mearsheimer, John J. "The Tragedy of great-power politics." *Foreign Aff.* 100, (2003): 50

³¹ Mearsheimer, John J. "The causes and consequences of the Ukraine war." *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development* 21, 2022, 12-27; Mearsheimer, J, "Playing with Fire in Ukraine.", 2022 *Foreign Affairs*, [https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/playing-fire-ukraine.](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/playing-fire-ukraine); Mearsheimer, John J. "Why the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault: the liberal delusions that provoked Putin." *Foreign Aff.* 93, 2014, 77.

of pro-Russia President Yanukovich through a “coup”. Therefore, Putin’s response to invading Crimea, fearing it would hold a NATO naval base that would disorder the power balance in the Black Sea, and further destabilize Ukraine until it abandoned its efforts to join the West, only looks like a rational decision.³² This, according to Mearsheimer, is Geopolitics 101, as “great powers are always sensitive to potential threats near their home territory”, leaving Ukraine to be a buffer state of enormous strategic importance.³³

Consequently, Mearsheimer’s central arguments can be summarized as follows: Firstly, the cause of the war in Ukraine is the Western policy of expanding NATO and the EU, which prompted fear of a similar “promotion of democracy” in Russia. Secondly, the balance of power, where Ukraine is an existential crisis to Russia’s security, Ukraine’s accession to the West would hardly tip the balance of power. Thirdly, Putin is a strategist who acts rationally within the basic principles of realism and power politics. Finally, Russia wants to make Ukraine a neutral buffer state between itself and the West.³⁴

However, Mearsheimer fails to appreciate how and to what extent was this caused by the strategic objectives of both great powers, i.e. his claims of a “coup” in Maidan and the US and Russia’s involvement in it. Put simply, this thesis positions itself within ongoing scholarly discourse by aligning with Realist IR scholars such as Mearsheimer and Waltz, who emphasize geostrategic competition for Ukraine for maximization and a zero-sum game. In this way, it highlights the parallels between offensive and defensive realism in analyzing Russia’s perspective.

Before starting the analysis, it is useful to distinguish between the competing frameworks in a more general, theoretical sense not only tied to interpretations of the causes of the war in Ukraine. In short, liberalism emphasizes the role of international institutions and cooperation, arguing that states can achieve mutual gains through diplomacy and collective security, rejecting the idea of power politics as the only possible outcome. Constructivism, on the other hand, focuses on the importance of ideas, history, identities, and norms in shaping state behavior, asserting that IR is constructed through social interactions and shared understandings, emphasizing social construction. Post-colonialism critiques the remaining impacts of colonialism on global politics, highlighting how historical power imbalances and narratives continue to influence current international relations and perpetuate inequalities.

Although constructivism highlights the role of Putinism, and post-colonialism emphasizes Russia's quest for imperial revival, these theories alone do not offer a comprehensive framework for understanding the Russo-Ukrainian conflict from the Russian perspective. Realism, in contrast, aligns more closely with both Russian and Western primary sources by focusing on power dynamics and strategic interests. While realism is often criticized by academics as a convenient justification for Kremlin actions, in my opinion same could be argued for liberalism, post-colonialism, and constructivism for the other side of the argument.³⁵ To narrow the scope,

³² Mearsheimer, Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West’s Fault, 77

³³ Ibid. 82

³⁴ Kleinschmidt, Jochen. "OR, differentiation theory, and the war in Ukraine." *International Politics* 56, 2019, 428

³⁵ Kuźniar, Roman. "Mearsheimer and the Poverty of His Realism." *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs* 23, no. 4 (2014): 141-152.

this thesis incorporates some Russian preconceived positions such as the dominance of the US in shaping Western security policies, Western-aligned institutions (World Bank, IMF, EU, NATO), and also Ukraine's status as a split state (figure 1 and 2). This might cause the thesis to look one-sided as it attempts to capture all the possible insecurities Russia has in Ukraine. These assumptions resonate with realist interpretations, reflecting the strategic and geopolitical considerations that drive Russia's actions, thus sturdily aligning with the realist framework.

In this context, the thesis will also address the following sub-questions: to what extent did Ukraine's political evolution from Kuchma to Yanukovich, influenced by realist power dynamics of Western involvement, set the stage for the Maidan protests and the subsequent conflict between the West and Russia? What were Russia's reactions to the Orange Revolution, and how can they be compared to the ones in Maidan? From Russia's perspective, is the Maidan revolution a Western-instigated coup d'état, or is it a useful justification to invade Crimea and subsequently Ukraine? To what extent did the Western support for the removal of Yanukovich provoke a strategic response from Russia, leading to the war? Is Russia insecure in Ukraine, if so, why? To what extent was Russia provoked to invade Crimea and subsequently begin the Russo-Ukrainian war?



Figure 3: Bucharest Summit 2008, Western leaders and Yushchenko

Source: <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/nato/photoessay4/06.html>

CHAPTER I: PRELUDE TO WAR.

UNRAVELING UKRAINE'S PATH TO MAIDAN

Internally, ever since Ukraine's independence in 1991, there has been a disagreement in Ukrainian political discourse between the two paths Ukraine should take, one for the future aimed at allying with the West, and one for the past, aimed at balancing between East and West. Perhaps Kuchma's presidency from 1994-2005 demonstrates this the best, as Ukraine's foreign policy became known as a "multi-vector" (or "Kuchma's doctrine") balancing between the East and

West.³⁶ This foreign policy was augmented in Kuchma's inauguration speech in 1999, where (what perhaps today seems contradicting) he highlighted the need for close cooperation of a strategic partnership with Russia, the US, and joining the EU as the "essence and goal of its (Ukraine's) foreign policy".³⁷ Many critics evaluated this policy as manipulative to both the West and Russia, as it placed Kuchma's pursuit to stay in power the primary objective of the regime, through corruption resulting in various scandals.³⁸ As Kuchma set on both chairs, he signed the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership on May 31st, 1997 with Russia and a month later he signed a special partnership agreement with NATO participating in the Iraq War and even put forward the idea of joining the alliance.

During Kuchma's presidency, a referendum in 2000 saw 81.7% of voters support decentralization, which aimed to transform Ukraine into a federal state, because of its diverse regional identities (figure 1 and 2).³⁹ However, the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe criticized the proposal, arguing that a second chamber in Ukraine's unitary system would slow the legislative process.⁴⁰ Despite the referendum's broad support and legal backing from Ukraine's Constitutional Court, the reform was suspended, with accusations that it was an attempt by Kuchma to consolidate power. This decision reflected broader concerns from Western diplomats and the EU about the risks of federalization, which they believed could increase Moscow's influence over Ukraine.⁴¹

As Kuchma also highlighted in his inauguration speech, "restoration of our country's reputation in the Council of Europe is among the most urgent", as well as the Ukrainian path to join the EU, could explain the decision to prologue and ultimately close the discussion to bicameral Ukraine.⁴²

In this way, the European Commission perhaps downplayed the benefits of federalization as a mechanism to balance domestic political interests of stabilizing between the regions which usually have to confront views on Ukraine's political developments. Whatever the cause may be, this setback led to the rise of the Party of Regions, led by Viktor Yanukovich, which became Ukraine's dominant political force starting in 2006, intermittently controlling the government.⁴³ Although unable to fully implement their federalization agenda, they successfully pushed through legislation making Russian a status of a regional language in 2012.

³⁶ Gnedina, Elena. "Multi-Vector Foreign Policies in Europe: Balancing, Bandwagoning or Bargaining?." *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 7 (2015): 1007-1029.

³⁷ Kuchma, Leonid. "Druha Promova Prezydenta Kuchmy Pid Chas Tseremoniyi Inavhuratsiyi ." Vikidzherela, 1999. <https://shorturl.at/ku3gR>

³⁸ Riabchuk, Mykola "Ukraine's 'muddling through': National identity and postcommunist transition". *Communist and Post-Communist Studies.*, 45, (2012): 439–446.

³⁹ Central Voting Committee. All Ukrainian Referendum , 2000. <https://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/r001/webproc0r;>

⁴⁰ Council Of Europe. "Constitutional Referendum in Ukraine. Opinion Adopted by the Commission at Its 42nd Plenary Session (Venice, 31 March 2000)." Venice Commission: Council of Europe, March 31, 2000. <https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL%282000%29014rev-e>

⁴¹ Tatsiy, Vasyly, and Svitlana Serohina. "Bicameralism: European tendencies and perspectives for Ukraine." *TalTech Journal of European Studies* 8, no. 1 (2018): 116;; Yarovoy, T. S. "Rol' lobizmu v protsesi stanovlennya ta rozvytku systemy derzhavnoho upravlinnya v Ukraini: 2000—2004 roky—period probudzhennya protestnykh nastroyiv ukrayins'koho narodu." *Investytsiyi: praktyka ta dosvid* 23 (2019): 124

⁴² Kuchma, Leonid. "Druha Promova Prezydenta Kuchmy Pid Chas Tseremoniyi Inavhuratsiyi ." Vikidzherela, 1999. https://uk.wikisource.org/wiki/Друга_промова_Президента_Кучми_під_час_церемонії_інавгурації

⁴³ Riedel, "Ukraine in Conflict of National Identity", 2022, 18

1.1 Maidan Before Maidan: The Orange Revolution

In summary, Viktor Yanukovich is seen by the Ukrainian opposition and the West as a pro-Russian candidate who won the presidential elections in 2004 by a margin of 3%. However, most foreign observers and civil society believed that this advantage was achieved due to unfair and rigged elections resulting in peaceful mass protests in Kyiv and Western parts of the country from November 2004 to January 2005. Consequently, the Central Election Commission of Ukraine scheduled an unconstitutional third round of elections with the re-vote going to a pro-Western candidate Yushchenko, who pledged to put Ukraine in NATO and EU.⁴⁴

Famously, Yushchenko suffered TCDD poisoning in September which was quickly presented as an attack by Russian secret agents, to meddle in Ukraine's election. Although to this day the poisoning remains a mystery, his popularity as an oppositionist to Russia surged. Furthermore, there were many political attacks on Yushchenko's wife Kateryna which were labeled as propaganda, however, an indisputable reality is that she was a high-ranking US State Department official, working at the white house and US treasury for many years under different administrations.⁴⁵ Because of the discontent with Yushchenko's victory, Yanukovich's supporters in South and East regions went as far as to threaten secession from Ukraine.⁴⁶ In this way, the orange revolution perhaps marks the first open show-off between Russia (through separatist Ukraine) and the West in establishing their sphere of influence over Ukraine, thus offering a deeper understanding of the events that unfolded during Maidan's revolution and the current state in which those South and East regions stand under Russian occupation. Consequently, many realists and Russian politicians see Maidan as "another Orange Revolution".⁴⁷



Figure 4: Yushchenko visibly poisoned with protestors during the Orange Revolution. *Source:* <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/11/was-it-inevitable-a-short-history-of-russias-war-on-ukraine>

⁴⁴ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2003 - Ukraine, 19 December 2002, <https://www.refworld.org/reference/annualreport/freehou/2002/en/51254>

⁴⁵ Neuman, Johanna. "Passion Led American on Road to Kyiv." Los Angeles Times, December 29, 2004. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2004-dec-29-fg-kateryna29-story.html>.

⁴⁶ Gerlach, Julia. *Color revolutions in Eurasia*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, (2014): 11

⁴⁷ Minesashvili, Salome. "European Identity and Foreign Policy in Georgia and Ukraine Since 1991." In *European Identities During Wars and Revolutions: Change Under Crises in Georgia and Ukraine*: (2022): 72; Mearsheimer, John J. "Why the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault: the liberal delusions that provoked Putin." *Foreign Aff.* 93 (2014): 85.

1.2 The West and Orange

Historically, the CIA has been working directly with ultra-nationalists to undermine the interests of the USSR, beginning right after WW2. The declassified documents describe project Aerodynamic in which prominent Ukrainian fascist war criminals, such as Mykola Lebed, participated in gathering information and assisting the political goals of the US.⁴⁸ This thesis will not make an argument of historical continuity of using Ukrainian ultra-nationalists for its interest, nor it find such statements useful, but for Russia believing that this was only Cold War politics would be naïve. Unlike Russia, the US does not hide its funding of its “democracy building” in Ukraine through various NGOs and USAID that spiked just before the elections. For example, the Western press published that the US had spent \$65 million on elections to aid political organizations opposing Yanukovich.⁴⁹

This was done through NGOs such as NDI, National Endowment for Democracy (NED), Freedom House, the Republican Party's International Republican Institute, the State Department, USAid, and Soros's Open Society Institute.⁵⁰ This is further confirmed by Ron Paul, a representative of the State of Texas in Congress who gave a hearing in front of the Committee of International Relations in the House of Representatives, bashing the same “tens of millions of dollars” US-funded NGOs and the US's meddling in Ukraine's elections: “...what is worse is that many of these grantee organizations in Ukraine are blatantly in favor of presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko...It is clear that a significant amount of US taxpayer dollars went to support one candidate in Ukraine... What we do not know, however, is just how much US government money was spent to influence the outcome of the Ukrainian election.”⁵¹

Furthermore, the US 108th Congress unanimously passed a resolution “S. Con. Res.106” which pledged support for the Ukrainian democratic transition which are “prerequisites for that country's full integration into the Western community...including into organizations such as NATO”.⁵² Additionally, the Congressional Research Service (CRS), has openly bragged about the success of the US foreign policy in placing Yushchenko in power stating that the “US officials supported the Orange Revolution...hailing Yushchenko's ultimate victory”, while providing “...assistance to Ukrainian non-governmental organizations that monitored the election and conducted exit polls to detect fraud”, which in fact later called the election fraudulent.⁵³ Thus,

⁴⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, *AERODYNAMIC*, vol. 1, March 27, 1950, released 2007, https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/AERODYNAMIC%20%20%20VOL.%201_0004.pdf.

⁴⁹ “U.S. Spent \$65M to Aid Ukrainian Groups.” *Associated Press—Fox News.com*, February 10, 2004. <http://www.foxnews.com/story/2004/12/10/us-spent-65m-to-aid-ukrainian-groups/print>.

⁵⁰ Traynor, Ian. “US Campaign behind the Turmoil in Kiev.” *The Guardian*, November 26, 2004. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/nov/26/ukraine.usa>.

⁵¹ COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS. “UKRAINE'S ELECTION: NEXT STEPS HEARING BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH CONGRESS SECOND SESSION DECEMBER 7, 2004 Serial No. 108–161.” U.S. House of Representatives Committee Hearings, 2005. https://commdocs.house.gov/committees/intlrel/hfa97187.000/hfa97187_0.HTM.

⁵² the US Congress. “108TH CONGRESS 2D SESSION S. CON. RES. 106 .” gov.info, October 2004. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BILLS-116s617pcs/pdf/BILLS-116s617pcs.pdf>.

⁵³ Woehrel, Steven. “Congressional Research Service Report RL33460 Ukraine: Current Issues and U.S. Policy.” *WikiLeaks*, September 10, 2008. https://wikileaks.org/wiki/CRS:Ukraine:Current_Issues_and_U.S._Policy,_September_10,_2008.

playing a salient role in the uprising against electoral fraud, according to NDI's director McFaul.⁵⁴ Therefore, there is no doubt about the involvement of Western structures in placing Yushchenko in power, but it is subject to debate to what extent it influenced the protests. In this way, the Orange Revolution remains an example to Russia as a continuous political pressure from the West to bring Ukraine into its orbit, more specifically NATO.

1.3 Russia and Orange

Although there are no records of official state funding from Russia's side, Russian state-owned media and oligarchs close to Putin have been collaborating with Yanukovich and his Party of Regions in what mass media and opposition describes as robber capitalists or the "Yanukovich Families" with an estimated net worth of \$12 billion utilized within the dominant heavy industry sectors situated in Yanukovich's stronghold of Donetsk.⁵⁵ After Yanukovich's victory Putin publicly congratulated Yanukovich, but despite his victory, minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov stated that he did not think that this revolution was in the interest of the Ukrainian people, but that Russia would respect the choice of the Ukrainian people. Furthermore, Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs was persistent in the fact that the only regret they hold is that the demands of civil society are not only supported but "...heated up by the representatives of individual foreign states".⁵⁶

Additionally, such statements from European capitals that they do not recognize elections unless Ukraine's next step is joining the West is an example of how "...someone would really like to draw new dividing lines in Europe".⁵⁷ In this way, Russia was framing the revolution as a direct intervention by Western powers, which is politically and economically shown, but it dismissed other factors, such as corruption, election fraud or EU integration. Furthermore, Putin and Lavrov held many meetings with European and US leaders regarding the situation. For example, Dutch Prime Minister Balkenende stated that after the talks in Hague, both delegations agreed for Ukraine to be a stable, democratic country that prospers, agreeing on the third round of elections. Perhaps unexpectedly, Putin stated after the meeting with the Spanish Prime Minister that "If Ukraine wants to join the EU, if it is accepted, we can only rejoice."⁵⁸ Although accusations of Western interference never halted, during his visit to Germany, Vladimir Putin announced at a press conference in Schleswig on December 21st, his readiness for dialogue with Yushchenko.

⁵⁴ McFaul, Michael (May 2006). "[Importing Revolution: Internal and External Factors in Ukraine's 2004 Democratic Breakthrough](#)" (PDF). *Stanford University Center on Democracy, Development, and The Rule of Law*.

⁵⁵ BBC. "Ukraine Crisis: Yanukovich and the Tycoons." BBC News, December 11, 2013. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25323964>; Kuzio, Taras. "Russianization of Ukrainian national security policy under Viktor Yanukovich." *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 25, no. 4 (2012): 562-565.

⁵⁶ Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "IN RELATION TO THE CONCLUSION OF THE SECOND ROUND OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN UKRAINE." Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, November 23, 2004. https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1658465/?lang=en.

⁵⁷ Ukrainskaya Pravda. "Rossiya Obidelas Na Evropu Za Porerzhku Yushenko." Ukrainskaya Pravda, November 26, 2004. <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2004/11/26/4383310/>.

⁵⁸ Putin, Vladimir. "Press Statements and Answers to Questions Following Talks with the Prime Minister of Spain, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero." President of Russia, Official Website, December 10, 2004. <http://www.special.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22742>.

Therefore, one could conclude that Russia's reaction to Yushchenko's victory and the Orange revolution was somewhat diplomatic and very careful towards Ukraine, but the same could not be said towards the West. Russia's diplomatic structures criticized Western involvement as an act against democracy. For the West, the aim might have been a support the civil society to integrate Ukraine into the EU by interfering in Ukraine's undemocratic election processes, but for Russia, it was perceived as meddling in its sphere of influence. Today, the Orange Revolution remains a contested debate, whether the West installed Yushchenko to act in the interests of Washington or if this revolution was a will of the Ukrainian people to fight against Russian influence in their country. Essentially, Russia was sure of Yushchenko's economic and political support from Western institutions, however, their insecurity over Yushchenko's (West's) victory was not such a cause for concern to represent an existential threat, as seen by the lack of hard power politics during the protests. This is because Russia has, a much-discussed, huge grip on the Ukrainian economy, which it used to pressure Yushchenko during his presidency, but also the surging popularity of Yanukovich and his Party of Regions which had significant influence in VR.

1.4 The Crumbling Orange Promises: Rise of Yanukovich

Yushchenko's presidency was marked by many scandals, controversies, and incidents, resulting in the plummeting of his approval rating, from 52% following the election to below 3% in 2009.⁵⁹ During Yushchenko's presidency, despite the influx of US taxpayer funds and a significant input of foreign direct investment, which rose from \$1.7 billion in 2004 to \$9.2 billion in 2007, Ukraine continued to face corruption, political instability, and economic decline.⁶⁰ For example, Russia refused to continue subsidizing the Ukrainian economy under Yushchenko as gas prices internationally began to rise in 2004, thus firing the first government over corruption scandals involving Ukrainian state-owned gas companies.⁶¹ Because the two parties did not agree, Russia shut down its gas supplies, and Ukraine began the unauthorized withdrawal of gas that was meant for export to the European market for its own demand. The crisis concluded with an agreement that Ukraine would pay off its debt using transit payments and for gas at the "European market prices".⁶²

Moreover, it was later established that anti-Putin Russian oligarch exiled in England Boris Berezovsky was funding the Orange Revolution, allocating \$15 million to Yushchenko's entourage, naturally seeing much criticism from the opposition.⁶³ Another example of deepening political polarization is the constitutional crisis in 2007, where Yanukovich was accused of

⁵⁹ "Opinions and Views of the Population of Ukraine in April 2009." FOM-Ukraine, April 29, 2009.

<https://bd.fom.ru/report/map/du090430>

⁶⁰ Grodsky, Brian. "Lessons (Not) Learned: A New Look at Bureaucratic Politics and US Foreign Policy-Making in the Post-Soviet Space." *Problems of Post-Communism* 56, no. 2 (2009): 43-57; Bojczun, Marko. "Origins of the Ukrainian crisis." *Critique* 43, no. 3-4 (2015): 403

⁶¹ News Russia. "Putin: Ukraine Is Able to Buy Gas at Market Prices." VestiRU, 2005.

<https://www.vesti.ru/article/2349105>.

⁶² Stern, Jonathan. "Natural gas security problems in Europe: the Russian-Ukrainian crisis of 2006." *Asia-Pacific Review* 13, no. 1 (2006): 32-59.

⁶³ Varfolomeyev, Oleg. "DID BEREZOVSKY FINANCE UKRAINE'S ORANGE REVOLUTION?" The Jamestown Foundation, *Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 2 Issue: 173*, September 19, 2005.

<https://jamestown.org/program/did-berezovsky-finance-ukraines-orange-revolution/>.

recruiting individual MPs to increase the majority in the parliament. Consequently, Yushchenko, by a presidential decree, dissolved the VR and justified this drastic measure by citing the need to prevent the consolidation of power by Yanukovich. These crises and many others, contributed to the declining popularity of Yushchenko, as many Ukrainians grew frustrated with the ongoing political instability and lack of effective governance.

Furthermore, extensive analysis has been conducted on the 2008 Bucharest summit, revealing that only about 20% of Ukrainians, according to opinion polls, supported joining NATO.⁶⁴ Despite this, President Yushchenko persistently advocated for Ukraine's membership in the alliance. Therefore, the public's discontent with the Orange Revolution's unfulfilled promises and economic difficulties set the stage for Yanukovich's victory that came in the 2010 presidential election. Despite the strengthened relationship between NATO and Ukraine under Yushchenko, marked by the signing of the Declaration to Complement the Charter that reaffirmed West's 2008 Bucharest Summit decision supporting Ukraine's future membership, these policies did not appear to align with the VR's support for Yanukovich's stance.⁶⁵ This stance focused on appealing to voters in eastern and southern Ukraine, emphasizing closer ties with Russia and economic pragmatism, but also a stabilizing force to the political instability. In this way, Russia perceived Yushchenko as a puppet of Western interests, particularly due to his relentless push for NATO membership. As a result, Russia employed aggressive hard power tactics, such as manipulating gas supplies, to undermine Ukraine's economy and discredit Yushchenko's administration. These actions significantly contributed to the erosion of Yushchenko's public support, paving the way for Yanukovich, who promised to restore stability and improve ties with Russia, gaining a decisive advantage in the 2010 presidential election.

1.5 Yanukovich's Walk on Tightrope

Yanukovich's campaign was successful against former Prime Minister Tymoshenko as she was associated with the poor government's handling of the 2008 economic crisis. This time all international organizations observing the election asserted that the elections adhered to universally accepted democratic principles and reflected the true will of the Ukrainian people.⁶⁶

At that moment, perhaps it came as a surprise to Russia, that the Western institutions did not intervene in the elections as the pro-EU Tymoshenko voiced her complaint that "an honest court will assess that Yanukovich was not elected President of Ukraine and that the will of the people had been rigged".⁶⁷ However, through WikiLeaks, it became apparent that Yanukovich managed to gain sympathy from the policymakers in Washington due to the lobbying efforts of US political

⁶⁴ Slovoidilo. 30 years of independence: How the attitude of Ukrainians towards NATO has been changing. <https://www.slovoidilo.ua/2021/08/24/infografika/suspilstvo/30-rokiv-nezalezhnosti-yak-zminyuvalosya-stavlennya-ukrayincziv-chlenstva-nato>

⁶⁵ Bond, Ian. "THE EU, NATO AND UKRAINE: PROSPECTS FOR FUTURE CO-OPERATION." *The War in Ukraine: Lessons for Europe* (2015): 138.

⁶⁶ Rettman, Andrew. "EU Endorses Ukraine Election Result." EUobserver, February 8, 2010. <https://euobserver.com.proxy.library.uu.nl/news/ar88ec482a?aid=29431>.

⁶⁷ Tymoshenko, Yulia. "Sooner or Later an Honest Court Will Assess the Fraudulent 2010 Elections." Yulia Tymoshenko Official Website, February 20, 2010. <https://web.archive.org/web/20100225000534/http://www.tymoshenko.ua/en/article/uv4w2uwz>.

consultants engaged by Yanukovich and the Party of Regions since 2005, and Tymoshenko's own mistakes.⁶⁸

For example, one cable criticized Tymoshenko, describing her as a "power-hungry populist" and someone who "does not have a stable foreign-policy advisors" unlike Yanukovich.⁶⁹ This trend continued from 2008, up to the election in 2010, as numerous cables coming from the US embassy in Kyiv, continued to disapprove of Tymoshenko quoting a Ukrainian oligarch that Tymoshenko has plans to "offer up the country to Russia on a silver platter", while Yanukovich would pursue "pragmatic relations with the US".⁷⁰ Further stating that Tymoshenko's decisions and policies regarding Russia would be driven by what she thought would gain her more support or votes, rather than by a consistent set of values or beliefs about what is right or best.⁷¹ Unlike in 2005, policymakers in the US did not publicly voice any opinion about candidates, as they perhaps followed Kuchma's words that these elections were a choice between "bad and very bad", according to their information.⁷² Consequently, Yanukovich won the election by 3% symbolizing a victory for the return of multi-vector politics, but also the continuation of the divide between Eastern and Western Ukraine (figure 2).

Before leaving office, however, by granting the Hero of Ukraine award, Yushchenko rehabilitated the ultranationalist war criminal, as Russia and its speaking population in East and South regions see, Stepan Bandera, who was responsible for leading the ethnic cleansing of Russians, Poles, Jews, and Roma in Ukraine. This controversial decision deepened the existing divisions in Ukraine, presenting the trend of Western-leaning politicians to the right-wing nationalist support. The case study of Bandera has been widely investigated by academia, revealing the deep complexities within Ukrainian national identity and politics.⁷³

Bandera's legacy is deeply intertwined with Ukraine's historical struggles for sovereignty and self-determination. For many in Western Ukraine, Bandera represents resistance against both Soviet and Nazi oppression, while for East and South regions, he remains a symbol of division

⁶⁸ Marples, David R. "The Yanukovich Election Campaigns in Ukraine, 2004 and 2006: An Analysis." *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 35 (2010): 265.; Kuzio, Taras. "Leaked Cables Show U.S. Was Wrong on Ukraine's Yanukovich." RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, March 31, 2011.

https://www.rferl.org/a/commentary_us_was_wrong_on_ukraine_yanukovich/3542980.html;

⁶⁹ US Embassy in Ukraine. "UKRAINE: FIRTASH MAKES HIS CASE TO THE USG." Wikileaks. Accessed June 30, 2024. https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08KYIV2414_a.html.; US Embassy in Ukraine. "UKRAINIAN-RUSSIAN RELATIONS AFTER YUSHCHENKO: A PREVIEW" Wikileaks. Accessed June 30, 2024.

https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10KYIV184_a.html

⁷⁰ U.S. Embassy in Ukraine. "FORMER TYMOSHENKO INSIDER CALLS HER DESTRUCTIVE, WANTS HER OUT OF POWER." Wikileaks. Accessed June 30, 2024.

https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10KYIV278_a.html ;

⁷¹ US Embassy Kyiv. "UKRAINE: FIRTASH RETURNS TO SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT." Cable: 09KYIV427_a, March 6, 2009. https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09KYIV427_a.html.

⁷² US Embassy in Ukraine. "FORMER PRESIDENT KUCHMA ON UKRAINIAN ELECTION, FOREIGN POLICY" Wikileaks. Accessed June 30, 2024. https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10KYIV190_a.html

⁷³ Rossolinski-Liebe, Grzegorz. *Stepan Bandera: The life and afterlife of a Ukrainian nationalist*. BoD–Books on Demand, 2014.; Crstocica, Raul. "Stepan Bandera: The Life and Afterlife of a Ukrainian Nationalist. Fascism, Genocide, and Cult." *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe: JEMIE* 15, no. 1 (2016): 117; Motyl, Alexander. "Ukraine, Europe, and Bandera." *Cicero foundation great debate paper* 10, no. 05 (2010): 6.; Rudling, P. A. Yushchenko's Fascist: The Bandera Cult in Ukraine and Canada. *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society*, 3(2), (2017): 129-187.

and ethnic violence against ethnic minorities. Thus, Yushchenko's decision to honour Bandera was not only an approval of his actions during WW2 but also a political tactic to harden a distinct narrative of Ukrainian independence that echoes in the West of the country. The figure of Bandera, therefore, shows the complex interplay of internal and external influences in shaping Ukraine's national discourse. Therefore, for some, complicating any reductionist interpretations of Ukrainian politics as simply a battleground for Western or Russian influence. Nonetheless, this polarization within Ukraine, embodied by the controversial figure of Bandera, has been a key element in Russia's narrative, as it portrays the conflict as a defensive response to Western encroachment on its historical sphere of influence. Particularly, in referring to post-Maidan leadership as "the heirs of Banderites...".⁷⁴ Conversely, rather than countering this narrative, Western-aligned leaders have to an extent reinforced it, as exemplified by the recent Yaroslav Hunka scandal in the Canadian House of Commons. In post-Maidan Ukraine, Bandera represents only the tip of the iceberg of broader right-wing agendas, the latest of which includes the VR's decision to ban the Russian Orthodox Church, a move that is seeing almost no criticism from Western leaders.⁷⁵ Therefore, from Russia's perspective, the West's silence (or support) for such figures and actions by Western-aligned politicians is seen as a strategy to alienate Ukraine from Russia in creating a particular perceived Russophobic narrative.

However, in his first year of presidency, Yanukovich annulled Yushchenko's decision, advocating for a "neutral state" that would not join any military alliance and continue Ukraine's "strategic goal" of entering the EU, representing a triangular relationship between Russia, EU, and Ukraine.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, this relationship was to be short-lived as the US heavily criticized the Kharkiv Pact which Yanukovich established in the first months of his presidency, where Russia sold cheap natural gas to Ukraine in return for a continuation (until 2042) Russian lease on Sevastopol and other naval facilities in Crimea. In effect, the Ukrainian economy kickstarted, showing economic growth of 9.8% during Yanukovich's presidency, lowering the unemployment rate, while keeping debt-to-GDP below 41%.⁷⁷ Yanukovich's team asserted that such a tactic would not impede the progress into EU integration as the Foreign Minister spokesman had put it "We want to move towards the west. But the best way of doing this is to get gas from the east."⁷⁸

Furthermore, Yanukovich kept close relations with the IMF and EU institutions, becoming the IMF's third-largest borrower.⁷⁹ Perhaps, in this way portraying the zigzagging exterior politics seen during Kuchma's multi-vector politics. However, in November 2011 Yanukovich was

⁷⁴ President of the Russian Federation. "Obrashcheniye Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii." President Rossii, September 21, 2022. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69390>.

⁷⁵ VR "Pro Zakhyst Konstytutsiynoho Ladu u Sferi Diyal'nosti Relihiynykh Orhanizatsiy." Official website of the Parliament of Ukraine, August 20, 2024. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/en/3894-IX?lang=en#Text>.

⁷⁶ Interfax-Ukraine. "Yanukovich: Ukraine Will Remain a Neutral State." Kyiv Post, January 7, 2010. <https://web.archive.org/web/20100121145322/http://www.kyivpost.com/news/politics/detail/56539>. Alexe, Theodor. "Eu, Ukraine Agree on 'road Map' for Visa-Free Travel." RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, November 22, 2010. <https://www.rferl.org/a/2227271.html>.

⁷⁷ "Ukraine ." World Bank Open Data. Accessed July 8, 2024. <https://data.worldbank.org/country/Ukraine>.

⁷⁸ The Guardian. "Ukraine Extends Lease for Russia's Black Sea Fleet." The Guardian, April 21, 2010. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/apr/21/ukraine-black-sea-fleet-russia>.

⁷⁹ Kyv Post. "Government to Direct Most of International Monetary Fund's Loan to Currency Reserves." Kyiv Post. Accessed July 8, 2024. <https://www.kyivpost.com/>.

called paranoid by the press because he claimed that “arms are being bought in the country and armed attacks on government agencies are being prepared.”⁸⁰ It is widely accepted in academia that his administration was marked by pervasive corruption, authoritarian practices, and the erosion of democratic institutions.⁸¹ Nonetheless, it perhaps became clear to Russia that Yanukovich was the only political option to hold Ukraine away from the Western sphere of influence, highlighted by Yanukovich’s pragmatist approach.

CHAPTER II:

THE MAIDAN UPRISING: SUPERPOWERS IN THE SQUARE

The Maidan Revolution, also known as the Euromaidan, was a complex event with several short-term causes. They were a series of demonstrations that concluded with the Revolution of Dignity removing Yanukovich and his party from the country. Some short-term causes argued in a large body of literature mostly focus on themes of Yanukovich’s presidency; corruption, economic mismanagement, jailing of political opponents (Tymoshenko primarily), and rejection of the EU’s Association Agreement (AA) in 2013. However, only a small body of literature is concerned with examining Russia’s perspective on the Maidan protest. This aspect is often overlooked because it is either regarded as the will of the Ukrainian people to instigate regime change or dismissed as a Russian anti-West conspiracy theory. Moreover, in academia, a new term was coined, “NGO-crazy”, for the type of power structure where Western-funded NGOs “use access to domestic policy-makers and Western donors to influence public policies”.⁸²

Orysia Lutsevych who was herself an executive director for the Open Ukraine Foundation, argues that NGOs in Ukraine monopolize discourse, erode democracy, and supersede institutions.⁸³ In other words, Western-funded NGOs did not represent the civil society since they are not formed from the bottom-up approach but act in the interests of foreign actors. The nuanced roles and effects of the US from the Russian viewpoint remain underexplored. This, this gap calls for an in-depth balanced examination of the complex interplay of domestic and international factors in the Maidan protests.

2.1 The EU Association Agreement

Yanukovich’s policy of EU integration and the maintenance of close economic cooperation with Russia ultimately cost him his presidency and the peace in Ukraine. Not only is it unhelpful to look at Yanukovich as Russia’s pawn, but also factually wrong. Yanukovich was dead set on EU

⁸⁰ Kyiv Post. “Creeping Paranoia.” Kyiv Post. Accessed July 8, 2024.

<https://archive.kyivpost.com/article/content/ukraine-politics/creeping-paranoia-116724.html>

⁸¹ Motyl, Alexander F. "Ukrainian Blues-Yanukovich's Rise, Democracy's Fall." *Foreign Aff.* 89 (2010): 125.; Kuzio, Taras. "Russification of Ukrainian national security policy under Viktor Yanukovich." *The Journal of Slavic military studies* 25, no. 4 (2012): 558-581.; Pleines, Heiko. "Oligarchs and politics in Ukraine." *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 24, no. 1 (2016): 105-127

⁸² Lutsevych, Orysia. *How to finish a revolution: Civil society and democracy in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.* London: Chatham House, 2013. 1

⁸³ *Ibid.* 4-7

integration as Reuters reported his more succinct view in September 2013 in a meeting with deputies from his Party of Regions. In this meeting Yanukovych for three hours “cajoled and bullied anyone who pushed for Ukraine to have closer ties to Russia”, arguing for “an agreement to deepen trade and other cooperation with the European Union.”⁸⁴ Even several Western institutions, such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, which receives funding from NATO, asserted that relations between Yanukovych and Vladimir Putin were strained.⁸⁵

If Ukraine joined the EU’s free trade zone, its iron and steel industry, particularly in Donbas, would struggle due to rising energy costs and intense competition, both locally and globally.⁸⁶ Many factories would have been closed or sold to European companies, while Western agribusinesses would devastate small farmers. This shift would place Ukraine's economy under EU control, offering little in return besides lifting customs barriers and allowing Western products and investments to flood the market. At the time, the EU was not ready to address Ukraine’s serious financial problems, offering only a modest loan of €600 million and a vague promise of €1 billion from the IMF.⁸⁷

This paled in comparison to Ukraine’s debt, insufficient even to cover its Gazprom obligations. Furthermore, Ukraine would face an estimated \$104 billion in costs to align with EU standards, a figure later revealed by the analysis of the Institute for Economics and Prognostics of the Ukrainian National Academy of Sciences to be closer to \$160 billion, far exceeding the EU’s proposal.⁸⁸ These financial burdens, along with other harsh reforms such as budget cuts, tax hikes, and a 40% increase in gas prices, would likely lead to social unrest and deepen the recession, mirroring the crisis in Greece, where unemployment had soared to 27% four years after the EU-IMF bailout.

Ukraine was severely impoverished, with nearly depleted reserves, making it unlikely to meet the debt repayment obligations it faced.⁸⁹ On November 21, 2013, President Yanukovych, with the support of Prime Minister Mykola Azarov, signed Legal Ordinance 905-r, halting negotiations with the EU. Despite pressure from some oligarchs and political groups in Kyiv, this move signalled a clear shift toward the Eurasian Economic Union with Russia which gave a short-term better deal to Ukraine. President Yanukovych's decision was driven by economic considerations

⁸⁴ Piper, Elizabeth. “Special Report: Why Ukraine Spurned the EU and Embraced Russia | Reuters.” Reuters, December 19, 2013. <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/special-report-why-ukraine-spurned-the-eu-and-embraced-russia-idUSBRE9BIOE2/>.

⁸⁵ Shumylo-Tapiola, Olga. “Putin and Ukraine: The Calm before the Storm.” Carnegie Europe, March 12, 2012. <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2012/03/putin-and-ukraine-the-calm-before-the-storm?lang=en¢er=europe>.

⁸⁶ EMERSON, Michael et al. *The Prospect of Deep Free Trade between the European Union and Ukraine*. Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), (2006):150,154 and 206.

⁸⁷ European Commission. “European Commission’s Support to Ukraine - MEMO.” An official website of the European Union, March 2014. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_14_159.

⁸⁸ Igor Burakovskiy et al. *Costs and Benefits of FTA between Ukraine and the European Union*. Institute for Economic Research and Policy Consulting Recommended for publication by the Academic Board’s Decision of Diplomatic Academy of Ukraine under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine (Protocol No. 1 as of October 13, 2010), (2010):32–5. http://www.ier.com.ua/files/Books/Ocinka_vytrat/ocinka_vitrat_eng.pdf.

⁸⁹ Kataryna Wolczuk and Roman Wolczuk, “What You Need to Know About the Causes of the Ukrainian Protests,” *The Washington Post*, December 9, 2013. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2013/12/09/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-causes-of-the-ukrainian-protests/>

and a pragmatic approach to perceiving in the short-term what is best for the Ukrainian economy and himself, as a decline in living standards would seriously undermine his promises of economic changes.

On December 17, just weeks after halting negotiations with the EU, Yanukovich travelled to Moscow, where Putin offered Ukraine a \$15 billion securities investment, including an immediate \$3 billion through bond purchases. Putin also reduced the gas price to \$268.5 per 1,000 cubic meters, down from \$400, saving Ukraine \$3.5 billion annually.⁹⁰ This deal was financially more beneficial for Ukraine, preserving its utility costs low, and stabilizing its economy and trade relations with Russia, its largest trading partner, especially after Russia threatened to pull out of the free trade agreement with Ukraine's economy to protect its own market because of the EU's cheap goods that would enter unhindered to Russian markets. The agreement was hailed by Prime Minister Mykola Azarov as a historic deal, stabilizing Ukraine's finances for about two years and opening the door to economic growth through industrial cooperation with Russia.⁹¹



Figure 5: Putin and Yanukovich sign the Russian–Ukrainian action plan. *Source:* <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19852/photos>

Key Western experts, such as James Sherr, argued that this agreement was a violation of sovereignty and economic coercion, concluding that Russia is considering Ukraine as its territory, but he did not argue the same when the EU proposed the deal.⁹² A wave of criticism of Yanukovich and his government unfolded by yesterday's Western allies such as EU officials, US

⁹⁰ Darina Marchak and Katya Gorchinskaya, "Russia Gives Ukraine Cheap Gas, \$15 Billion in Loans," *KyivPost*, December 17, 2013. <http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/russia-gives-ukraine-cheap-gas-15-billion-in-loans-333852.html>; Carol Matlack, "Ukraine Cuts a Deal It Could Soon Regret," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, December 17, 2013. <http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/articles/2013-12-17/ukraine-cuts-a-deal-it-could-soon-regret>; Shaun Walker and agencies, "Vladimir Putin Offers Ukraine Financial Incentives to Stick With Russia," *The Guardian*, December 17, 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/17/ukraine-russia-leaders-talks-kremlin-loan-deal>; David Stern, "Russia Offers Ukraine Major Economic Assistance," *BBC Europe*, December 17, 2013. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25411118>.

⁹¹ Bercean, Ioana-Nelia. "Ukraine: Russia's New Art of War." *Online Journal Modelling the New Europe* 21 (2016): 155-174.

⁹² Onyshkiv, Yuriy. "James Sherr: Ukraine 'Is in a Dangerous Situation.'" *KyivPost*, December 23, 2013. <https://web.archive.org/web/20140507085508/http://www.kyivpost.com/content/politics/james-sherr-ukraine-is-in-a-dangerous-situation-334161.html>.

leadership, and the Council of Europe, all expressing deep disappointment with the Ukrainian decision; attacking Ukrainian leadership and blaming Russian pressure for the Ukraine's re-alignment to the East.⁹³ Two days after signing the agreement with Putin, Yanukovich assured its citizens that Ukraine stayed on the EU path stating that "there isn't any contradiction about Ukraine's course on the integration issue. Generally, this is not about the integration, this is about economic relations".⁹⁴ It became apparent that at that point, the US and EU supported the Maidan movement, where initially peaceful pro-European protests escalated into violence, with snipers targeting both police and demonstrators.⁹⁵ Therefore, it was clear that Yanukovich chose a better deal, by neglecting the fact that an AA is only the start of a long and slow transition toward EU integration, whilst presenting a political victory in what Russia evidently saw as a competition for Ukraine.

2.2 Recipe for Democracy Promotion

Examining the funds for democratic transition from Russia's perspective, Euromaidan protests were financially prepared long before the event. For example, in her speech at the US-Ukraine Foundation Conference in 2014, Victoria Nuland stated "Since Ukraine's independence in 1991, the United States has supported Ukrainians as they build democratic skills and institutions, as they promote civic participation and good governance, all of which are preconditions for Ukraine to achieve its European aspirations. We've invested over \$5 billion to assist Ukraine in these and other goals that will ensure a secure prosperous and democratic Ukraine."⁹⁶ Similarly, when asked to comment on the protests in Ukraine, George Soros stated in a CNN interview that he

⁹³ UNIAN News. "Kwasniewski is Confident that Russia Pressured Ukraine to Abandon Its Association with the EU." Archived December 3, 2013, <https://web.archive.org/web/20131203044904/http://www.unian.net/news/606660-kvasnevskiy-uveren-chto-rossiya-davleniem-zastavila-ukrainu-otkazatsya-ot-assotsiatsii-s-es.html>; UNIAN News. "EU Disappointed by Ukrainian Government's Unexpected Decision - Ashton." Archived December 27, 2013, <https://web.archive.org/web/20131227010109/http://www.unian.net/news/606699-es-razocharovan-neojidannym-resheniem-ukrainskogo-pravitelstva-eshton.html>; UNIAN News. "Fule Cancels Tomorrow's Visit to Ukraine." Archived December 26, 2013 <https://web.archive.org/web/20131226220723/http://www.unian.net/news/606616-fyule-otmenil-svoy-zavtrashniy-vizit-v-ukrainu.html>; UNIAN. "The United States is Disappointed with Ukraine's Decision to Slow UNIAN, "Down Integration with the EU." Archived December 3, 2013. <https://web.archive.org/web/20131203044128/http://www.unian.ua/news/606760-uryad-ssha-rozcharovaniy-rishennyam-ukrajini-prizupiniti-integratsiyu-z-es.html>; UNIAN; UNIAN News. "Lithuanian President: Europe is Open to Ukrainian People, Not to Government." Archived December 20, 2013. <http://www.unian.net/news/613414-prezident-litvyi-evropa-otkryta-dlya-ukrainskogo-naroda-a-ne-dlya-pravitelstva.html>; UNIAN News. "Russia is Waging a 'Propaganda War' Against Ukraine – Swedish Foreign Ministry." Archived December 17, 2013. <http://www.unian.net/news/612361-rossiya-vedet-protiv-ukrainyi-propagandistskuyu-voynu-mid-shvetsii.html>; UNIAN News. "Germany Criticizes Russia Over Actions Towards Ukraine." Archived December 20, 2013 <http://www.unian.net/news/612840-germaniya-kritikuet-rossiyu-za-deystviya-v-otnoshenii-ukrainyi.html>

⁹⁴ Euronews. "Ukraine's Yanukovich Explains Russia and EU Ties Status, Criticises Western Politicians." Euronews, December 19, 2013.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20131226055255/http://www.euronews.com/2013/12/19/ukraine-s-yanukovich-explains-russia-and-eu-ties-status-criticises-western/>.

⁹⁵ Dunford, Michael. "Causes of the Crisis in Ukraine." *International Critical Thought* 13 (2023): 89–125.

⁹⁶ Nuland, Victoria. "Remarks at the U.S.-Ukraine Foundation Conference." US Department of State, December 13, 2013. <https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2013/dec/218804.htm>.

“...set up a foundation in Ukraine before Ukraine became independent of Russia. The foundation has been functioning ever since. And it played a — an important part in events now.”⁹⁷

There were huge numbers of NGOs and journalists that were financed by the West actively working to overthrow Yanukovych. An example is the NED, an NGO founded in 1983 with CIA Director William Casey playing a key role in its establishment.⁹⁸ The NED was designed to publicly support opposition groups, activist movements, and media outlets abroad, using propaganda and political activism to undermine and overthrow regimes. As NED official Allen Weinstein had put it in 1991, “a lot of what we do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA.”⁹⁹ Furthermore, former CIA officer and whistleblower, Philip Agee, revealed that the NED was created as a tool for a “propaganda and inducement program”, designed to undermine foreign governments under the guise of promoting democracy.¹⁰⁰ Thus, naturally, almost all of NED’s funding comes from the US Government (USG) agencies.¹⁰¹

National Endowment for Democracy
Statement of Activities
Year ended September 30, 2013
(With Comparative Totals for 2012)

	2013			2012 Total
	Unrestricted	Temporarily Restricted	Total	
Support and revenue:				
Grant revenue - government agencies	\$132,238,458	\$ -	\$132,238,458	\$140,475,007
Other grant and contributions	55,655	1,481,715	1,537,370	1,186,809
Other revenue, interest, and misc. income	288,112	-	288,112	431,235
Net assets released from restriction - satisfaction of program restrictions	1,715,408	(1,715,408)	-	-
Total support and revenue	134,297,633	(233,693)	\$134,063,940	\$142,093,051
Expenses:				
Program services:				
Federal grants programs	107,978,990	-	107,978,990	116,261,829
Other activities - federal	4,627,437	-	4,627,437	4,263,664
Other activities - non-federal	1,331,566	-	1,331,566	831,188
Total program services	113,937,993	-	113,937,993	121,356,681

Figure 6: NED Financial audit for 2013. *Source:*

<https://www.ned.org/docs/2013annual/2013%20NED%20Annual%20Report%20-%20audit.pdf>

Furthermore, six months before the ousting of Yanukovych, in an opinion piece for The Washington Post, Carl Gershman, who headed the NED from its beginning until mid-2021, discussed how his organization was actively working to pull nations within Russia's immediate sphere away from Moscow's influence. Gershman regarded Ukraine as "the biggest prize" in this strategy, implying that the country's integration into Europe would "accelerate the demise" of Russian President Vladimir Putin.¹⁰² This (presumably) non-governmental organization invested

⁹⁷ Zakaria, Fareed. Soros on Russian ethnic nationalism, May 25, 2014.

<https://cnnpressroom.blogs.cnn.com/2014/05/25/soros-on-russian-ethnic-nationalism/>.

⁹⁸ Casey, William J. “The Director of Central Intelligence, WJshington, D. C 20505.” Consortiumnews, October 2016. <https://consortiumnews.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/casey-meese.pdf>.

⁹⁹ Blum, William. Rogue State: A Guide to the World’s Only Superpower. *Monroe: Common Courage Press*, (2000): 180

¹⁰⁰ Stevenson, J., A drop of treason. *The University of Chicago Press*, (2021): 241

¹⁰¹ “Ned FY 2019 Financial Audit.” NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR DEMOCRACY, February 25, 2021.

<https://www.ned.org/ned-fy-2019-financial-audit/>. ; NED. “NED 2008 Annual Report - National Endowment for Democracy.” NED, 2009. <https://www.ned.org/docs/2013annual/2013%20WMD.pdf>, 3

¹⁰² Gershman, Carl. “Opinion: Former Soviet States Stand up to Russia. Will the U.S.?” the Washington Post, September 26, 2013. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/former-soviet-states-stand-up-to-russia-will-the-us/2013/09/26/b5ad2be4-246a-11e3-b75d-5b7f66349852_story.html.

around \$17 million in Ukraine between 2007 and 2012 to "stimulate civic activity," and allocated an additional \$1.1 million to support "independent" media.¹⁰³

For example, many media networks were founded earlier in 2013 but commenced their operations during the beginnings of the revolution such as Spilno TV starting on 21st November 2013, Hromadske on 22nd November and Espresso TV on 24th November, becoming viral and encouraging people to come to the protests. Therefore, naturally receiving funds from NED and various other Western-funded organizations; USAID, Soros's International Renaissance Foundation, and US and Dutch Embassies in Ukraine.¹⁰⁴

In addition, the role of media in revolutions, particularly in mobilizing mass participation, cannot be overstated. Many academics emphasize the crucial role of the media in the success of the Maidan protests, such as an online journalist Mustafa Nayyem.¹⁰⁵ Nayyem sparked the November protests by rallying his Facebook followers to gather in Kyiv's Maidan Square. However, in October 2012, Nayyem was one of six Ukrainians selected by Meridian International, a State Department-linked organization, to visit Washington, D.C., and observe the US Presidential election. Funded by the US embassy in Kyiv, this trip allowed them to learn about "the American electoral process" and discuss Ukraine's election progress with US officials.¹⁰⁶ During this visit, Nayyem met with prominent figures, including Senator John McCain, who expressed concern about Russia's influence in Ukraine, which Nayyem even published on his own YouTube channel.¹⁰⁷ While it is unclear if Nayyem's connections in the US influenced his decision to spark the Maidan protests, the US's role in promoting the movement both locally and globally, including the funding of mass media and civil society was significant. Therefore, for Russia it is not difficult to argue that the US strategically used its influence to shape the narrative surrounding the protests.

Moreover, there are also cases of Tech Camps where according to the Embassy's website "the US Embassy in Kyiv paired leaders in the technology community with civil society organizations to provide in-depth exposure to low-cost and easy-to-implement technologies. More than 60 civil society leaders from throughout Ukraine came together to get hands-on training in a variety of areas ranging from fundraising using crowdsourcing, citizen journalism, PR tools for NGOs,

¹⁰³ Paul Blumenthal, "United States Obscures Foreign Aid To Ukraine, But Here's Where Some Goes," Huffington Post, 7 March 2014

¹⁰⁴ Pleines, Heiko, and Esther Somfalvy. "Protests by journalists in competitive authoritarian regimes: repertoire and impact in the case of Ukraine (2010-14)." *Democratization* 30, no. 1, 2023: 107; Hromadske. "Hromadske, Annual Financial Report 2013." Web Archive, 2013. <https://web.archive.org/web/20140702153456/http://www.hromadske.tv/files/6/a/6aab00-annual-fin-report---eng.pdf> 6

¹⁰⁵ Orlova, Dariya, and Daria Taradai. "Facebook as an alternative public space: The use of Facebook by Ukrainian journalists during the 2012 parliamentary election." *Central European Journal of Communication* 9, no. 1 (16) (2016): 38.; Somfalvy, Esther, and Heiko Pleines. "The agency of journalists in competitive authoritarian regimes: The case of Ukraine during Yanukovich's presidency." *Media and Communication* 9, no. 4 (2021): 88

¹⁰⁶ Center, Meridian International. "Ukraine – 2012 U.S. Elections Program – October 14-23, 2012." Wayback Machine, 2012. <https://web.archive.org/web/20150425120234/https://www.meridian.org/exchange/customized-exchanges/past-projects/item/1338-ukraine-2012-us-elections-program>.

¹⁰⁷ Nayyem, Mustafa. "John McCain on Ukraine." YouTube, October 23, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DoDliosB78k>.

Microsoft software and programs for NGOs, and more.”¹⁰⁸ At the time this was a famous case as it was presented by a controversial pro-Russian MP in VR Oleg Tsaryov.

Tsaryov exposed the Tech Camp project as an information warfare against state institutions, using modern media to topple the Government; a project that is under the responsibility of the US Ambassador to Ukraine, Geoffrey Pyatt to provoke violent unrest to trigger infighting.¹⁰⁹ Which for Russia is exactly what unfolded days after Tsaryov’s statement in the VR. Finally, these same Tech Camps were funded by the usual suspects, NED, USAID, Soros’s Renaissance Foundations, Poland-America-Ukraine Cooperation Initiative, etc.¹¹⁰ Perhaps, Russia’s concerns for NGOs are best summed up by the former Assistant Secretary of the Treasury and a controversial figure in academia for his support of Putin, Paul Craig Roberts that “Ukraine or the western part of the country is full of NGOs maintained by Washington,” with the purpose “...to make Ukraine available for looting by USA banks and corporations and to bring Ukraine into NATO so that Washington can gain more military bases on Russia’s frontier.”¹¹¹

While the role of Western influence and funding in the Euromaidan protests is significant and well-documented, it is important to acknowledge that these actions were not solely responsible for the uprising. There are many academic critics of the narrative that Western intervention alone drove the revolution and argue that it ignores the agency of the Ukrainian people and the genuine reasons that led, as many as 800,000 people to the streets.¹¹² In this view, the protests were not solely a product of foreign manipulation but a reflection of a desire for change, whereas the USG agencies funding and controlling of the NGOs are just an example of the American support in “democracy building”, against an “authoritarian” leader Yanukovich.¹¹³

2.3 “A Victory for Democracy”

Initially, the first mass protests began on the 21st of November, after the suspension of signing the AA with the EU. At first, they were peaceful and included diverse categories of people ranging from families with kids to young students, without threat of force. However, days later on the 24th of November first acts of aggression began when political groupings came up with the terms, amongst others, to continue European integration, the resignation of the government for betraying national interest, stop political oppression, impeach Yanukovich, and call all

¹⁰⁸ States, Embassy of the United. “U.S. Embassy Hosted TechCamp Kyiv 2.0 to Build Technological Capacity of Civil Society.” archive.today: Embassy of the United States Kyiev, March 1, 2013. <https://archive.ph/cmTyh>.

¹⁰⁹ elektropostman. “MUST WATCH: Nov 2013 (Pre-Maidan!): Ukraine Deputy Has Proof of USA Staging Civil War in Ukraine.” YouTube, November 27, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9hO18TuBUM>.

¹¹⁰ Bandeira, *The World Disorder*, (2019): 191-2

¹¹¹ Paul Craig Roberts, “Washington Orchestrated Protests Are Destabilizing Ukraine,” Institute for Political Economy February 12, 2014.. <http://www.paulcraigroberts.org/2014/02/12/washington-orchestrated-protests-destabilizing-ukraine/>

¹¹² Onuch, Olga. "The Maidan and beyond: who were the protesters?." *Journal of Democracy* 25, no. 3 (2014): 45

¹¹³ Terzyan, Aram. "Towards democratic consolidation? Ukraine after the revolution of dignity." *Open Political Science* 3, no. 1 (2020): 183-191.; Soltys, Dennis. "Democratic Centralization and Institutional Development in Ukraine from the Maidans of 2004 and 2014: A Holistic Interpretation." *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 6, no. 2 (2020): 283-320.; McFaul, Michael. "Ukraine imports democracy: External influences on the Orange Revolution." *International security* 32, no. 2 (2007): 45-83.

democratic countries to apply sanctions to Yanukovich and representatives of his corrupt regime.¹¹⁴

After a rally, Svoboda supporters clashed with police outside the Cabinet of Ministers building, breaking through barricades and escalating tensions. On November 30, riot police used force to install a Christmas tree in Maidan Square, despite warnings, sparking widespread outrage. The protests turned violent, fueled by the Right Sector and alleged coordination between opposition leader Yatsenyuk and Chief of Staff Lyovochkin, who later aligned with the opposition.¹¹⁵ Although Minister of Interior Zakharchenko apologized for police actions stating that “riot police abused their power”, the incident intensified public anger and unrest.¹¹⁶

After the events on the 30th of November, Maidan gathered worldwide publicity, and from December law violations, including the involvement of neo-Nazi organizations and armed protesters, began to emerge, perhaps indicating a well-planned strategy to escalate the conflict. Svoboda activists, known for their anti-Russian and xenophobic views, were brought from Lviv in the eastern part of Galicia to Kyiv. Alongside them, about 500 armed paramilitaries from the Right Sector, under the command of Dmytro Yarosh, patrolled the streets in organized militias. Some of these individuals wore helmets and uniforms reminiscent of the Galicia SS division from World War II, bearing Nazi insignia. The militias' ranks were bolstered by football hooligans, further escalating tensions. On December 1, 2013, amid ongoing and increasingly violent demonstrations, Svoboda and Right Sector militias, led other activists in attacking and occupying government buildings throughout the district.¹¹⁷

Most notoriously was the toppling of Lenin's statue and the celebration of Bandera's birthday by a torchlight parade, portraying a clear political spectrum of right-wing groups in the protests.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, it did not help that in the first weeks of the protest EU politicians such as Lithuanian MP Loreta Grauzinienė and Polish Marcin Świąćick joined the demonstrators by holding speeches of support in Maidan Square.¹¹⁹ These visits by Western politicians only became more frequent and high-profile as the situation intensified, whilst important Western leaders immediately embraced the protestors through the media and criticized the Ukrainian leadership.

¹¹⁴ BBC. “Opozycja Prizivaet Obshenacionalnoi Zabastovke.” BBC News Ukraina, November 30, 2013. https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/ukraine_in_russian/2013/11/131130_ru_s_mykhailivskiy_protest.

¹¹⁵ Global Tree Pictures. “Ukraine on Fire.” YouTube, August 20, (2021): 36:20-37:47 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKcmNGvaDU&rc=1>; Kuzio, Taras. "Ukrainian kleptocrats and America's real-life House of Cards: Corruption, lobbyism and the rule of law." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 50, no. 1 (2017): 36

¹¹⁶ Susanna Capelouto, CNN. “Pro-EU Protesters in Kyiv Call for Government's Ouster.” CNN, December 2, 2013. <https://web.archive.org/web/20131203065900/http://edition.cnn.com/2013/12/01/us/ukraine-eu-protest-sunday/>.

¹¹⁷ Bandeira, Moniz, Luiz Alberto Moniz Bandeira, and Glaeser. *World Disorder*. Springer International Publishing, 2019: 204-205

¹¹⁸ BBC. “TORCH-LIT MARCH IN KYIV BY UKRAINE'S RIGHT-WING SVOBODA PARTY - BBC NEWS.” YouTube, January 2, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tHhGEiwCHZE>.

¹¹⁹ Post, Kyiv. “Euromaidan Rallies in Ukraine - Nov. 26 Coverage.” Kyiv Post Ukraine's Global Voice, November 26, 2013. <https://archive.kyivpost.com/article/content/euromaidan/euromaidan-rallies-in-ukraine-nov-26-coverage-332571.html>.

For example, “I see this as a defeat for Ukraine,” stated Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė, continuing “The current choice of the Ukrainian leadership means putting limits on the Ukrainian people's chances of achieving a better life.” EU Council President Herman Van Rompuy remarked that the parties had been “really close” to finalizing the AA in Vilnius but noted that “we need to overcome pressure from abroad”, while the Ukrainian opposition was creating a narrative through their media that Russian FSB and police came to Ukraine to create a “mass disorder”.¹²⁰ Additionally, US Senators John McCain (Republican) and Christopher Murphy (Democrat) were already on the front lines at Maidan. Acting as outspoken activists, they declared, “America stands with Ukraine” and “Ukraine will make Europe better, and Europe will make Ukraine better.”¹²¹



Figure 7: “Nazis in Kyiv do not bother Western politicians at all”, Russian state-owned media, 2014. Source: <https://russian.rt.com/inotv/2014-03-07/Nacisti-v-Kieve-sovershenno-ne>

The direct involvement of Senators McCain and Murphy in the Maidan protests not only represented a blatant interference in Ukraine’s internal affairs, but for Russia, it also exposed the geostrategic aims of the US behind the free trade negotiations with the EU. Moreover, Victoria Nuland made multiple visits to Kyiv, between December 6 and 12, meeting with President Yanukovich, where she exerted significant pressure. She demanded that Yanukovich take “immediate steps to deescalate the security situation and immediate political steps to end the crisis and get Ukraine back into a conversation with Europe and the International Monetary Fund.”¹²²

While in Kyiv, Nuland, accompanied by Catherine Ashton, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, also engaged with protest leaders such as Oleh Tyahnybok and Arseniy Yatsenyuk. Additionally, Nuland and US Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt visited Maidan Square, where they handed out food to the demonstrators as a “symbol of sympathy” for what Nuland described as the “horrible situation” created by Yanukovich, which had Ukrainians

¹²⁰ BBC. “Ukraine Protests after Yanukovich EU Deal Rejection.” BBC News, November 30, 2013. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25162563>; Interfax-Ukraine. “Russian Special Services, Police Arrive in Ukraine – Tiahnybok.” Interfax, December 9, 2013. <https://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/180456.html>.

¹²¹ The Guardian. “John McCain Tells Ukraine Protesters: ‘We Are Here to Support Your Just Cause.’” The Guardian, December 15, 2013. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/15/john-mccain-ukraine-protests-support-just-cause>; Walsh, Nick Paton, and Susanna Capelouto. “Ukrainian Protesters Get Visit from Sen. John McCain.” CNN, December 15, 2013. <https://edition.cnn.com/2013/12/14/world/europe/ukraine-protests/>.

¹²² Richard Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine—Crisis in the Borderlands*. London: I.B. Tauris, (2015): 86-8.;

turning against each other.¹²³ During the whole time of the revolution, opposition leaders were almost daily meeting with foreign ambassadors from the West, most notoriously foreign minister of Germany Guido Westerwelle, who could be seen almost daily walking with the protestors in the Maidan square.¹²⁴

Protestors used burning tires, tractors, machineries, Molotov cocktails, weapons, and occupied key Kyiv buildings. Administration and Trade Union building where they built their headquarters. Even the OSCE Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Janez Lenarčič stated that the government's request for protestors to unblock governmental buildings is “lawful” as it is “fully consistent with the acceptable restrictions on the freedom of assembly”.¹²⁵



Figure 8: McCain giving a speech in Maidan, Russian state-owned media, December 2013.

Source: <https://russian.rt.com/inotv/2013-12-16/Sky-News-Senator-Makkejn-stal>



Figure 9: “Maidan protesters release captured soldiers”, Russian media, February 2014. Source:

<https://www.rbc.ru/politics/21/02/2014/570417e69a794761c0ce6e70>

¹²³ Sputnik International. “Sandwiches Are Symbol of Sympathy to Ukrainians at Maidan: Nuland.” Sputnik International, December 18, 2014. <https://sputnikglobe.com/20141218/1015963186.html>.

¹²⁴ Balmforth, Richard. “German Minister Snubs Ukraine Leaders on Kyiv Visit.” Reuters, December 4, 2013. <https://web.archive.org/web/20200726055238/https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-ukraine-idUKBRE9B20BV20131204>.

¹²⁵ Interfax-Ukraine. “OSCE/ODIHR Deems Lawful Ukrainian Govt. Demand to Free Buildings Seized by Opposition.” Interfax-Ukraine, December 6, 2013. <https://web.archive.org/web/20140125152633/http://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/179789.html>.



Figure 10: “US Deputy Secretary of State hands out bread to protesters in Kyiv” (with Payet), Russian state-owned media, December 2013. *Source:* <https://actualidad.rt.com/actualidad/view/113884-subsecretaria-eeuu-nuland-galletas-manifestantes-kiev>

Perhaps the best example of mass media usage was when on the 25th of December a high-profile journalist Tetiana Chornovol was allegedly beaten by Yanukovych police, himself personally “ordering that attack” because of her journalistic investigations on Yanukovych’s regime.¹²⁶ The images of beaten Tatiana in the hospital circulated all over the world, blaming Yanukovych’s authoritarian regime and naturally being visited in the hospital by ambassadors of France, Sweden, Belgium, Lithuania the US, and Canada.¹²⁷ In reality, however, Tetiana was beaten over a road rage incident, and the perpetrators were subsequently sent to jail.¹²⁸ While there were incidents aimed to present Yanukovych as the dictator, the revolution itself led to widespread bloodshed, claiming the lives of 108 protestors, infamously called “the Heavenly Hundred”, but also killing 13 police officers and injuring between 200 to 300.¹²⁹

During this period, deputy leaders of the Svoboda party, Ruslan Koshulynskiy, and Oleg Tyahnibok were regularly meeting with US officials and later disclosed critical details. According to their account, the American representatives indicated that the lack of US intervention was due to the relatively low number of casualties at that point, reaching a figure of a hundred victims which was considered a necessary number to justify foreign involvement. Koshulynskiy further stated that the USG “waited until mass murder” occurred, so that the blame could be placed on the Ukrainian government.¹³⁰ Although this has not been confirmed by the primary sources in the US, it coincides with the suspicious events of some of the murders.

For example, the first casualty from a gunshot wound was Serhiy Nigoyan a famous Euromaidan activist who was shot from a hunting rifle on January 22nd, presumably by his own comrades who

¹²⁶ “Tatyana Chernovol: Tri Poslednih Goda Ya Rabotala Protiv Edinstvennogo Celoveka - Eto Viktor Fedorovic Yanukovych.” *Ukrainskaya Pravda*, January 8, 2014. <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/articles/2014/01/8/7009150/>.

¹²⁷ *Gazeta.ua*. “Chornovol Govoryan k Operacii, a Na Novi God Otpustyat Domoi.” *Gazeta.ua*, December 27, 2013. https://gazeta.ua/ru/articles/np/_cornovol-gotovyat-k-operacii-a-na-novyj-god-otpustyat-domoj/534457.

¹²⁸ “Zapys Videorejestratora Avto Tetjany Chernovol.” Video - *Ukrains'kyj tyzden*, December 25, 2014. <https://web.archive.org/web/20160305082108/http://tyzhden.ua/Video/97707>.

¹²⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Accountability for killings in Ukraine from January 2014 to May 2016*, United Nations, 25th May 2016, 3

¹³⁰ Braty Kapranovy. *Maidan: taemni faili*, Kyiv: Nora Druk, 2017, 23

were armed with hunting rifles.¹³¹ The investigation of the murder is still not solved today, but oppositionist mass media immediately blamed police brutality for his murder. The Maidan massacre that occurred in February 2014 took most of the lives, where according to the opposition, Russian snipers or Russian-trained Berkut special police forces shot protestors, under Yanukovich's orders.¹³² According to many academics, the Heavenly Hundred not merely affected the result of the revolution by tilting public opinion and universal support (perhaps much like Yushchenko's TCDD poisoning) but also became a persistent symbol of sacrifice and the strive for democratic changes in Ukraine, continuing to shape Ukrainian national identity and play an important role in the post-revolutionary political landscape.¹³³

However, ten years later we still do not know who shot the protestors, with only one the Deputy Commander of the Berkut regiment receiving a sentence. Apparently, it is difficult to prosecute because the "evidence and documents have been lost", while the scene of the crime has been tampered with and "cleaned up", after the successful coup, according to Zelenskyy.¹³⁴ Nonetheless, Ivan Katchanovski from the University of Ottawa has published studies scientifically detailing his assertion that the snipers were in buildings controlled by the protestors.¹³⁵ Although, it is difficult to conclude who exactly is responsible for the mass killings, nor it is within the scope of this thesis, however, perhaps a simple *cui prodest* would clarify. Of course, not constituting any evidence, but in my opinion, the only way Yanukovich could benefit from shooting the protestors is if he decided to eliminate the Maidan revolution at all costs, rather than killing a small number of protestors. On the other hand, the opposition would benefit greatly because it increased international support, delegitimized Yanukovich and his Government, strengthened the unity among protestors, mobilized public opinion, accelerated Yanukovich's ouster, created Martyrs, and unified the narrative.

The perpetrators of all crimes committed during the protests will most likely never be known because the Ukrainian parliament, immediately after the coup, created legislation No. 743-VII, effectively exonerating all participants. Additionally, article 9 of this law, it is forbidden to collect personal data; "law prohibits collecting, recording, accumulating, storing, adapting, amending,

¹³¹ Kudelia, Serhiy. "When numbers are not enough: The strategic use of violence in Ukraine's 2014 revolution." *Comparative Politics* 50, no. 4 (2018): 504; Katchanovski, Ivan. "The Maidan Massacre on February 18–19, 2014, and Related Cases of Violence During the EuroMaidan in Ukraine." In *The Maidan Massacre in Ukraine: The Mass Killing that Changed the World*, Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, (2024): 197-200

¹³² Danilova, Maria. "Ukraine: Yanukovich Ordered Snipers to Shoot." AP News, April 3, 2014. <https://apnews.com/general-news-f5855b135cc741c68bcd72357c9e7833>.

¹³³ Murray, Emma. "Heavenly fighters for Ukrainian civil society: the cultivation of democratic culture through the memorialization of the Revolution of Dignity." PhD diss., 2022.; Smytsnyuk, Pavlo. "Revolution, glory and sacrifice: Ukraine's Maidan and the revival of a European identity." 2022.; Jonsson, Stefan. "The Aesthetics of Protest on Kyiv's Maidan: Reflections on Political Emergence and the Twenty-First-Century Crowd." *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 90, no. 2 (2023): 373-406.

¹³⁴ Dickinson, Peter. "Unsolved Maidan Massacre Casts Shadow over Ukraine." Atlantic Council, February 20, 2020. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/unsolved-maidan-massacre-casts-shadow-over-ukraine/>.

¹³⁵ Katchanovski, Ivan. "The "snipers' massacre" on the Maidan in Ukraine." *Cogent Social Sciences* 9, no. 2 (2023)

renewing, using or propagating the personal information of people who participated in mass civil protests...such personal data shall be destroyed...”.¹³⁶

These complex and often contradictory events during the Maidan revolution show the multifaceted interplay of internal and external forces shaping the Russo-Ukrainian war. The strategic involvement of the US, coupled with the actions of the Ukrainian opposition, proposes a wider geopolitical struggle, displaying the new Cold War tensions between Western powers and Russia. While the precise details of who orchestrated the widespread violence may for some continue to be obscured, the aftermath unquestionably served the strategic objectives of the US by weakening Russia's impact in Ukraine and advancing Western-aligned, and most importantly, anti-Russian authority in the region. Accordingly, from Russia's perspective, these violent events openly supported by the West resulting in the emergence of new leadership in Ukraine can be seen as a direct threat, to a high extent validating their perceived security concerns within the broader geopolitical tensions.

2.4 A Revolution or Coup d'etat?

On February 21st, under increasing pressure from Western nations due to threatened sanctions on Ukraine and Yanukovich personally, the desertion of many of his former allies, and because of the massacres on the Kyiv streets, President Yanukovich was obligated to sign an agreement with opposition leaders to resolve the ongoing political crisis. The agreement, titled “Agreement on the Settlement of the Political Crisis in Ukraine,” required an immediate return to the 2004 Constitution, which would restore a parliamentary-presidential system of government. It also outlined the formation of a “government of national trust,” the undertaking of constitutional reforms, disarmament of the opposition, removal of security troops from Kyiv, cessation of violence, and the scheduling of early presidential elections by December 2014. This agreement, signed by Yanukovich, corresponding to all demands from the opposition and the West, and opposition figures Vitali Klitschko, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, and Oleh Tyahnybok, marked a significant moment.

Effectively, on paper, the Maidan revolution was over, but what unfolded in the following days, if seen from Russia's perspective, can be described as a textbook example of a coup d'etat. The Right Sector did not agree with the agreement. In front of the Maidan crowd, Yarosh stated that “Right Sector will not lay down arms. Right Sector will not lift the blockade of a single administrative building until our main demand is met — the resignation of Yanukovich.”¹³⁷ The following day, Yanukovich went by helicopter to Ukraine's second-largest city Kharkov, while his motorcade took the roads. As soon as he left Kyiv, armed groups seized control of the government buildings and his residence. According to Yanukovich, his motorcade came under

¹³⁶ VR of Ukraine Law, On the prevention of prosecution and punishment of persons in connection with the events that took place during peaceful assemblies, and recognition of certain laws of Ukraine as having lost their validity, Document 743-VII, February 21, 2014

¹³⁷ Higgins, Andrew, and Andrew E. Kramer. “Ukraine Has Deal, but Both Russia and Protesters Appear Wary.” The New York Times, February 21, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/22/world/europe/ukraine.html>.

fire, an attack he attributed to mercenaries based on information from his intelligence service.¹³⁸ On that same day, February 22nd, the VR unconstitutionally removed Yanukovich, arguing that the President had withdrawn from fulfilling his constitutional duties, voting 328-0, citing “circumstances of extreme urgency”. According to the constitution of Ukraine, to impeach the President Parliament needs to have at least 338 votes in favor and a review of the Constitutional Court. However, the opposition bypassed the law because they argued in the Parliament that Yanukovich himself agreed to resign and recorded a resignation statement but changed his mind, so there was no need to impeach him since Yanukovich had done it voluntarily.¹³⁹ Furthermore, the Right Sector was immediately included in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, where it remains to this day.¹⁴⁰

Naturally, the same day Yanukovich gave a statement in which he compared the situation to the rise of the Nazi Party in 1930s Germany, saying he would not resign, but what was unfolding is a clear example of a coup d’etat.¹⁴¹ This Government was instantly recognized by the West, with Biden stating that Yatsenyuk’s interim government had the full support of the US.¹⁴²

Fearing for his life, Yanukovich sought permission to enter Russia, where he arrived on February 24th and stayed there to this day. Despite mass media or Western politicians portraying Maidan protests as “a victory for democracy”, the truth is that much like on almost all political issues, the country was divided on the Maidan question by a familiar west-east line.¹⁴³

Therefore, the role of interim president was assumed by Turchynov, a close associate of oligarch Tymoshenko. Admiral Ihor Tenyukh, a prominent figure within Svoboda, temporarily took charge of Ukraine's Ministry of Defence, meanwhile, Dmytro Yarosh, the founder of the Right Sector, stepped into the position of vice-chairman of the National Security and Defence Council. Immediately after Maida frontrunners took power, on the 23rd of February the VR passed a law prohibiting the use of Russian as Ukraine's second official language. Although it was vetoed by the acting President Turchynov, it sent a clear message of who took power, thus sparking outrage and unrest among the country's Russian-speaking population.

Unsurprisingly for Russia, this government came through a coup and signed the AA with the European Union on March 21, 2014.¹⁴⁴ According to the polls, around 45% of Ukrainians

¹³⁸ Global Tree Pictures. “Ukraine on Fire.” YouTube, August 20, (2021): 1:02:1:02:57

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKcmNGvaDU&rc=1>

¹³⁹ Interfax-Ukraine. “Rada Removes Yanukovich from Office, Schedules New Elections for May 25.” Interfax, February 22, 2014. <https://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/192030.html>.

¹⁴⁰ Ukrainskaya Pravda. “Avakov: Predstavytely Pravoho Sektora y Samooborony Vojdut v Sostav Rukovodstva MVD.” Ukrainskaya Pravda, February 22, 2014

<https://web.archive.org/web/20140302060014/http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2014/02/22/7015717/>

¹⁴¹ Reuters. “Yanukovich Denounces ‘Coup’, Says Staying in Ukraine.” Reuters, February 22, 2014.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-yanukovich-idUSBREA1L0I220140222/>.

¹⁴² Reuters. “Vice President Biden Calls Ukraine PM Yatseniuk, Pledges U.S. Support.” Reuters, February 28, 2014. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-whitehouse-idUSBREA1R04W20140228/>

¹⁴³ Grigoryan, Arman. "Selective Wilsonianism: Material Interests and the West's Support for Democracy." *International Security* 44, no. 4 (2020): 158-9

¹⁴⁴ Bandeira, *The World Disorder*, 2019: 209-10

supported the demonstrations while 48% of them did not. Polls for the support of the protests go between 45% to 50%, while 42% to 50% opposed it, depending on the time the polls are taken.¹⁴⁵

Particularly, disturbing were the clashes in Odessa on the 2nd of May 2014, where anti-Maidan (pro-federalist) protesters, after being chased down by hooligans, found protection in the Trade Unions House, where the Right Sector and pro-Maidan activists threw Molotov cocktails, setting the building ablaze and burning 48 Odessans alive.¹⁴⁶ To this day, not one person was found responsible for these deaths, not the perpetrators, nor the law enforcement that did not show up to protect its citizens. As a nail to the coffin of the Odessan protesters, on May 30th, just a day after receiving Ukrainian citizenship, former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, who had actively supported the Maidan revolution, was appointed as the new governor of Odesa. Saakashvili's selection was controversial, given his close ties to Washington, which have been well-documented in the literature. He had long been an advocate for Georgia's integration into NATO, and his tenure in Georgia is marked by corruption and actions against the state that led to the 2008 war with Russia "under orders of external forces", for which he was later imprisoned by the Georgian authorities.¹⁴⁷ In 2015, Saakashvili personally exposed his new connections when he disclosed on his Facebook page that he received an annual payment of \$198,000 from the Washington-based think tank New International Leadership Institute.¹⁴⁸

Therefore, the appointment was a clear sign by Russia as a signal of Washington's influence in Ukraine after the coup which dramatically changed the course of Ukrainian modern history. These events, the unconstitutional ousting of Yanukovich, without respecting the constitutional procedures for impeachment, and the swift recognition of the new government by Western powers, add layers of complexity to the narrative, and yet again portray to Russia how power comes before the law. Opinion polls at the time revealed a country deeply divided, with about half of the population opposing the Maidan protests and the other half supporting them. This dividing line contests the depiction of the movement as a joined national revolt and raises significant doubt about the validity and democratic characteristics of the new regime that emerged from these events. More specifically, the nonchalant revelation of the Right Sector's leader about the militaristic nature of their group in front of the whole world did not raise political protest from the West. Therefore, Russia's perspective that the hasty procedure, the neglect of constitutional norms, and armed right-wing militias, contribute to the case that what transpired between the 21st of November 2013 to the 28th of February 2014 was not a widespread revolution, but a calculated coup d'etat that was financially and politically influenced by the West. In my

¹⁴⁵ BURKOVSKY, Petro, and Olexiy Haran. "Before and After the Euromaidan: Ukraine Between the European Choice and the Russian Factor." *Ukraine after the Euromaidan: challenges and hopes*. Berna, Peter Lang (2015): 77

¹⁴⁶ Diesen, Glenn. "Ukraine and the Civilizational Choice of the Shared Neighbourhood." In *Russophobia: Propaganda in International Politics*, Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2022, 216-17

¹⁴⁷ Teslova, Elena. "Georgian Ruling Party Accuses Former President Saakashvili of Unleashing 2008 War." Anadolu Ajansı, August 13, 2024. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/georgian-ruling-party-accuses-former-president-saakashvili-of-unleashing-2008-war/3302841>.

¹⁴⁸ Saakashvili, Mikheil. "Dlja Togo Kogo Eto Interesuet, Moja Amerikanskaja Zarplata Sostavila Počti \$ 200 Tys Pered Naznaceniem v Odessu i k Ėtomu Dolzny Byli Dobavit'sja Dohody Ot Lekcij i Publicnyh Vystuplenij. ." Facebook, June 24, 2015. <https://shorturl.at/5TkEw>

opinion, from Russia's perspective, it is almost impossible for Russian leadership to view the Maidan revolution from any other angle than the one discussed in this chapter.



Figure 11: John Kerry with Turchynov and Yatsenyuk, recognizing the new government and promising \$1 billion in US aid, March 2014, Source: <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/opinion-la/la-ol-ukraine-us-aid-package-bad-idea-20140304-story.html>

2.5 “Fuck the EU! – Exactly”

Perhaps the most important primary source for academics studying the Maidan revolution and the causes of the Russo-Ukrainian war is the leaked call between Nuland and Pyatt. The bugged phone call was released on the 4th of February 2014 on YouTube, titled “Puppets of Maidan”, and instantly gained worldwide attention.¹⁴⁹ Nuland and Pyatt were discussing the power structure of Ukraine after Yanukovich, i.e. who should lead Ukraine after the revolution. Nuland endorsed banker Arseniy Yatsenyuk, referring to him by his nickname: “I think Yats is the guy who’s got the economic experience, the governing experience. He’s the... what he needs is Klitsch and Tyahnybok on the outside.” Much like Nuland stated, Yatsenyuk became the Prime Minister after the coup. Expressing dissatisfaction with the EU’s unwillingness to perhaps invest themselves as much as the US is, she bluntly stated, “...I think, to help glue this thing and to have the UN help glue it and, you know, Fuck the EU! - Exactly”.

This statement highlighted that the US was ready to continue unilaterally, regardless of European hesitations. The US State Department’s spokesperson, Jen Psaki, established the legitimacy of the leaked recording on YouTube, stating that Nuland made an apology to the EU officials for her comments in the leaked recording.¹⁵⁰ However, the content and tone of the conversation carried Washington’s dismissive attitude towards European economic and security concerns, which, from Kremlin’s point of view, only reinforced their argument about the US’s intentions.

¹⁴⁹ Re Post. “Marionetki Maidana.” YouTube, February 4, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSxaa-67yGM>.

¹⁵⁰ “US Official Apologises to EU Counterparts for Undiplomatic Language.” The Guardian, February 6, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/06/us-ukraine-russia-eu-victoria-nuland>.

The phone call was interpreted in Russia not purely as an affront to the EU but as clear evidence of the US's direct interference in Ukraine's political trajectory. Hence, aligning with Russia's narrative of Western encroachment, thereby heightening perceptions of existential threat. Today, Nuland's telephone conversation and her strong attitude against Russia earned her the name "Russia hawk" in the US and is very much present in the Russian political discourse in showing how the US "groomed" the next Ukrainian leaders.¹⁵¹

Viewed through Russia's perspective, the Maidan events are hard to interpret as anything other than a defensive reaction aimed at preserving its sphere of influence against Western encroachment into Ukraine. This leaked conversation further underscores these security concerns, highlighting the extent of US involvement and seeming control over Ukraine's political trajectory, thereby intensifying Russia's perception of a direct threat to its strategic interests. In other words, if the US showed that it could install political leaders, it could for sure bring Ukraine into NATO, undermine the Russian-speaking population, or put any kind of missiles on Russia's border.

CHAPTER III: THE BEAR STRIKES BACK

Russia's response to the Maidan Revolution has been vastly examined. Most of the explanations focus on geopolitical factors, notably from Mearsheimer and Gotz who, like this thesis, argue that the primary problem is the strategic issues with NATO's expansion into Ukraine.¹⁵² However, some academics, such as Shevtsova and Mendras look at domestic factors of keeping Putin in power by creating an external enemy.¹⁵³ Furthermore, there are also ideational ones, such as Putin's and Yanukovich's authoritarianism, Putin's goal of restoring Russia's greatness, propaganda fight against the Nazis, and overreaction to perceived threats.¹⁵⁴

The ousting of Yanukovich was a Western-backed coup, at least that is how the Kremlin saw it, which not only diminished Russian influence in Ukraine but also set an alarming precedent for regime change in Russia or its near abroad; as Putin commented in Security Council of Russia on Maidan and colour revolutions in 2014 that: "We should do everything necessary so that

¹⁵¹ Lavrov, Sergey. "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's News Conference Following the High-Level Week of the 77th Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, September 24, 2022." The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, December 25, 2022. https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/.

¹⁵² Mearsheimer, John J. "Why the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault: the liberal delusions that provoked Putin." *Foreign Aff.* 93 (2014): 77.; Götz, Elias. "It's geopolitics, stupid: explaining Russia's Ukraine policy." *Global Affairs* 1, no. 1 (2015): 3-10.

¹⁵³ Mendras, Marie. "The rising cost of Russia's authoritarian foreign policy." In *Russia's foreign policy: Ideas, domestic politics and external relations*, London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, (2015): 80-96.; Lilia, Shevtsova. "The Russian Factor." *Journal of Democracy* 25, no. 3 (2014): 74-82.

¹⁵⁴ Forsberg, Tuomas. "Status conflicts between Russia and the West: Perceptions and emotional biases." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47, no. 3-4 (2014): 323-331.; Larson, Deborah Welch, and Alexei Shevchenko. "Russia says no: Power, status, and emotions in foreign policy." *Communist and post-communist studies* 47, no. 3-4 (2014): 269-279.

nothing similar ever happens in Russia".¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, Russia never hid its strategic objectives of establishing the line of NATO's expansion as such. In 2008 Putin demonstrated through hard power politics in Georgia that Russia is ready to go to war for these lines. Therefore, again violating international law like in Georgia, Russia annexed Crimea and supported separatist militia in the regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, and elsewhere. These acts highlighted Russia's commitment to use force to counter its existential threats, displaying a remarkable moment in post-Cold War history; the return of proxy-like warfare between two great powers on one's border.

3.1 Poking the Bear in Maidan

Before the mass protests began, on November 22nd Putin accused the EU of forcing Ukraine to sign the AA, promoting "the holding of mass protests". As the result of the police violence on November 30 - December 1, President Putin characterized the events in Ukraine as more of a "pogrom" than a genuine revolution, declaring that they had little to do with Ukraine's relationship with the EU.¹⁵⁶ This coincides with the statement given by the Israeli embassy in Kyiv after attacks on Jews by the right-wing militia "Israel highly appraises the Ukrainian government's fight against anti-Semitism and hopes that it will strongly condemn and prevent such attacks."¹⁵⁷ Putin accused the unrest to "outside actors" that are trying to overthrow Ukraine's legitimate government.¹⁵⁸

On December 5, Lavrov confirmed these sentiments in the OSCE meeting, warning other nations not to interfere in Ukraine's internal affairs.¹⁵⁹ On December 10, the State Duma adopted a resolution condemning violent protests, the seizure of governmental agencies, and administrative buildings, and the destruction of historical monuments, warning that such actions could destabilize the country and lead to serious economic and political consequences. Furthermore, it criticized the "interference of foreign officials in the affairs of sovereign Ukraine" and attacked the destructive contribution of "some Western politicians who address oppositionist meetings and make explicit calls for revolution against the decisions passed by the legitimately elected authorities".¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ Vladimir Putin. "O Strategii Protivodeystviya Ekstremizmu v Rossiyskoy Federatsii Do 2025 Goda i Merakh Po Yeye Realizatsii." Sovet Bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii, November 20, 2014. <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/council/session/2060/>.

¹⁵⁶ RIA Novosti. "Putin: Akcii v Kieve Podotovleni Izvne, Eto Ne Revolucya, a Pogrom." RIA Novosti, December 3, 2013. <https://ria.ru/20131202/981344124.html>.

¹⁵⁷ Interfax-Ukraine. "Israeli Embassy Urges Ukraine Government to Prevent Attacks on Jews in Kyiv." Interfax, January 20, 2014. <https://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/186691.html>.

¹⁵⁸ BBC. "Ukraine PM Mykola Azarov Warns of Coup in Making." BBC News, December 2, 2013. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25192792>.

¹⁵⁹ Euronews. "Uneasy OSCE Meeting Held amid Kyiv Protests." Euronews, December 5, 2013. <https://web.archive.org/web/20131211133357/http://www.euronews.com/2013/12/05/uneasy-osce-meeting-held-amid-kyiv-protests/>.

¹⁶⁰ The State Duma, N 3342-6 GD "ON THE STATEMENT OF THE STATE DUMA OF THE FEDERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION "ON THE SITUATION IN UKRAINE", 10.12.2013, 3 <https://duma.consultant.ru/documents/3605412?items=1&page=3>

The same day, war was foreshadowed by Medvedev who alerted that Ukraine was encountering a "tectonic split" that was threatening Ukraine's existence as a state.¹⁶¹ On December 14, Lavrov gave an interview where he stated that the "Western partners seem to have lost their sense of reality", over Ukraine and called protestors provocateurs that are responsible for orchestrating the unrest. Lavrov further suggested that the West's approach was driven by an ideological agenda, aspiring to take Ukraine from Russia through artificial means and blackmail.¹⁶² He also attacked European officials for their involvement in the demonstrations, calling it "simply indecent."¹⁶³ By February 3rd, Russia got involved with the opposition, urging them to engage in dialogue with the authorities to find a constitutional resolution to the crisis.¹⁶⁴

During this period, unscheduled meetings were held between Putin and Yanukovich, including one in Sochi on December 6, allegedly to discuss cooperative agreements in space, aircraft construction, and engineering. However, later it was revealed that these were interstate consultations, that ended with Putin's attempt to stabilize Ukraine's economy by offering a bailout, thus helping Yanukovich to stay in power. Consequently, on December 17th, in Moscow, the two leaders signed the Ukrainian-Russian action plan, which comprised (aforementioned) a \$15 billion Russian lifeline to Ukraine and a substantial reduction in gas prices, making Ukraine's economy stay alive.¹⁶⁵ Putin's spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, emphasized that this deal came without terms and denied any intent of interfering in Ukraine's affairs while blaming other countries for doing the opposite.¹⁶⁶

Russia's state media and some politicians were portraying the protests as a Western-backed coup, focusing on right-wing militias, thus attempting to discredit hundreds of thousands of protestors. For example, Sergey Glazyev, a senior adviser to Putin, later appealed that the US was devoting \$20 million a week to Ukrainian opposition groups, arguing that these funds were allocated to supplying arms and that in the face of a coup attempt, Ukrainian authorities will have no choice but to use force to prevent the country from descending into chaos.¹⁶⁷ Therefore, Russia's response to the Maidan protests mirrored its strategic concerns and its attempts to maintain influence over Ukraine. By leveraging economic aid, intense diplomatic pressure, and media campaigns, Russia aimed to counter Western influence and support the drowning Yanukovich and his government.

¹⁶¹ BBC. "Ukraine Court Frees Protesters Held after Kyiv Clashes." BBC News, December 13, 2013. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25367770>.

¹⁶² En.tengrinews.kz, Tengri News. "West Has 'lost Sense of Reality' over Ukraine: Russia." Tengrinews.kz, December 14, 2013. https://en.tengrinews.kz/politics_sub/west-has-lost-sense-of-reality-over-ukraine-russia-24729/.

¹⁶³ BBC. "Russia's Sergei Lavrov: Ukraine Getting 'out of Control.'" BBC News, January 21, 2014. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25823091>.

¹⁶⁴ BBC. "Russia Warns Ukraine Opposition as Protests Continue." BBC News, February 3, 2014. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26019790>.

¹⁶⁵ Coyle, James J., and James J. Coyle. "Ukraine." *Russia's Border Wars and Frozen Conflicts* (2018): 48-9

¹⁶⁶ Interfax-Ukraine "Putin's spokesman: Ukraine's accession to Customs Union was not discussed at Tuesday meeting", 17.12.2013

<https://web.archive.org/web/20140125151650/http://en.interfax.com.ua/news/economic/182488.html>

¹⁶⁷ BBC. "Ukraine Crisis: Putin Adviser Accuses Us of Meddling." BBC News, February 6, 2014. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26068994>.

3.2 Crimea: The Bear Takes a Bite

As turbulence in Kyiv deepened and the likelihood of President Yanukovich being toppled grew, Putin saw a looming risk to Russia's strategic interests, specifically the Sevastopol naval base under the Kharkiv pact. Some scholars portray this annexation as a forceful seizure of territory and against the will of the Crimean people.¹⁶⁸ In reality, this part of Ukraine never hid its close relations with Russia which is demonstrated by the fact that the majority were Russian speaking and supported Yanukovich (Figures 1 and 2). Upon seeing the unrest in Maidan on the 22nd of January 2014 the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the only region in Ukraine with its own constitution, proclaimed in its Supreme Council that “Based on the will of the Crimeans who elected us, we declare that we will not give Crimea to extremists and neo-Nazis who seek to seize power in Ukraine at the cost of dividing the country and the blood of its citizens!”. Citing “Euro-bureaucrats”, their “political love” with Ukrainian Neo-Nazis and will not to live in “Bandera’s Ukraine”, as the reason for the referendum.¹⁶⁹

The presence of 15,000 Russian troops, already stationed in Crimea, facilitated the takeover with the local paramilitaries on the 27th of February without the need for an outright invasion. Finally, on March 16, 2014, a referendum in Crimea resulted in 96.77% of voters supporting reunification with Russia, formalizing Crimea's status as part of the Russian Federation. Many academics, and the UN General Assembly, argue that the referendum was not legitimate because of the military presence of Russian soldiers, fraud, lack of international observers, and evidently a violation of Ukrainian territorial integrity.¹⁷⁰

Western officials accuse Russia of aggression, however, Western powers had, for example, supported and backed Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence on February 17, 2008, and in 2010, the International Court of Justice determined that this move did not violate international law or UNSC Resolution 1244. The borders of Serbia were redrawn not through peaceful negotiation but by force, as NATO launched a military intervention, which bombed the country for 75 days without UN Security Council approval, leaving its infrastructure in ruins. Therefore, this Pandora box was opened and often (conveniently) repeated by the Kremlin.¹⁷¹ Just as with the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, from Russia’s perspective, invoking international law or morality tends to be a tool for weaker states, emphasizing the pursuit of strategic objectives of great powers.

¹⁶⁸ O’Loughlin, John, and Gerard Toal. "The Crimea conundrum: legitimacy and public opinion after annexation." *Eurasian Geography and Economics* (2019).;

¹⁶⁹ State Council of the Republic of Crimea. “Krymski Parlament Na Vneocherednoii Sessi Prinyal Zayavleni ‘O Politichcheskoi Situacii.’” Gosudarstvennyy Sovet Respubliki Krym, January 22, 2014. http://crimea.gov.ru/news/22_01_2014_8.

¹⁷⁰ Fabry, Mikulas. "How to uphold the territorial integrity of Ukraine." *German Law Journal* 16, no. 3 (2015): 416-433.; Moskalenko, Oleksandr. "Exercise of the Right to Self-Determination: International Standards versus the Crimean Mess." In *The Case Of Crimea’s Annexation Under International Law*, (2015): 71-98.; Buliga, Ioana Alexandra. "The Legal Camouflage of the Illegal and Illegitimate Annexation of the Crimean Peninsula (2014)." *Europolity-Continuity and Change in European Governance* 16, no. 2 (2022): 69-93.

¹⁷¹ McGlynn, Jade. “Why Putin Keeps Talking about Kosovo.” *Foreign Policy*, March 3, 2022. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/03/putin-ukraine-russia-nato-kosovo/>.

For example, Sevastopol naval base offered Russia an important operational and defensive power, housing advanced war vessels armed with state-of-the-art supersonic cruise missiles, air defense systems, and the BSF's 11th Independent Coastal Missile-Artillery Brigade, which is armed with the K-300P missile defense system and Yakhont anti-ship missiles with an effective range of approximately 300km.¹⁷² Russia has also perhaps begun preparing for the invasion by constructing another naval base in Novorossiysk, East of Crimea.¹⁷³ The Novorossiysk base is a harbor for submarines stocked with missiles with a range of over 1,500km. This base gained even greater significance after Crimea's reintegration into Russia, especially in light of the incursions of NATO ships into the Black Sea that became more frequent.¹⁷⁴ This base was intended as a contingency to provide a strong military presence close to Georgia and if Russia was forced to support Sevastopol, a possibility that became more pressing if Ukraine were to align with the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy. In addition, Putin's strategic goals also extended to the Mediterranean, where Russia planned to bolster its authority by expanding the naval base at Tartus and the port of Latakia in Syria.¹⁷⁵

The Sevastopol fleet has a vital open to the Atlantic and Indian Oceans via the Black Sea and Mediterranean routes, making the Black Sea Fleet a cornerstone of not only regional but national security. Therefore, for Russia, the loss of its strategic foothold in Crimea (which they held ever since 1783) was unthinkable. More specifically, the Kharkiv agreement was the core of Russia's 2010 military doctrine, which identified NATO's expansion and its deployment on waters adjacent to Russia as a primary external threat.¹⁷⁶ The extension of the Sevastopol lease effectively barred Ukraine from joining NATO until 2042. Finally, according to the still most recent 2001 census, Crimea is home to approximately 2 million people, predominantly ethnic Russians (around 58% Russian, 24% Ukrainian, and 11% Tatar), it was unlikely for this Autonomous Republic to submit to a government which consisted of Svoboda and the Right Sector parties, especially after passing the law to prohibit the use of Russian as Ukraine's second official language.¹⁷⁷ Thus, abandoning this population and its geostrategic implications was not an option for the Kremlin, marking the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian war which spilled over Donbas.

¹⁷² Mickiewicz, Piotr, and Daniel Kasprzycki. "Expanding the external ring of Russian defense policy in practice: 2015-2020." *Copernicus Journal of Political Studies* 1 (2021): 70-1

¹⁷³ Kollakowski, Tobias. "Interpreting Russian aims to control the Black Sea region through naval geostrategy (Part Two): 'Establishing full control over Southern Ukraine and the Donbas is one of the tasks of the Russian Army'." *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 36, no. 2 (2023): 121-2.

¹⁷⁴ Adzinbaia, Zviad. *NATO in the Black Sea: What to Expect Next?*. NATO Defense College, Research Division, 2017.

¹⁷⁵ Harner, Christopher. *Russian naval base Tartus*. Institute for the Study of War, 2012.

¹⁷⁶ "Text of Newly-Approved Russian Military Doctrine." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 5, 2010. https://carnegieendowment.org/files/2010russia_military_doctrine.pdf.

¹⁷⁷ State Statistics Committee of Ukraine. "About Number and Composition Population of AUTONOMOUS REPUBLIC OF CRIMEA by Data All-Ukrainian Population Census." All Ukrainian Population Census, 2003. <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/nationality/Crimea/>.

CONCLUSION

Hence, from Russia's perspective to what extent is the conflict in Ukraine (2014-present) influenced by the strategic objectives of "the West" and how justifiable are Russia's perceived security concerns? This research has demonstrated that it is nearly impossible for Russia not to view NATO countries, particularly the US, as actors seeking to undermine its status of great power. Western involvement in the Orange Revolution, and the events surrounding Maidan, have only amplified these concerns, providing a rational basis for Russia to be insecure about losing the influence it previously had in pre-Maidan Ukraine, particularly to its Western competitors.

Kuchma pursued a pragmatic foreign policy of balance between Russia and the West, allowing Russia to maintain its significant economic and political power in Ukraine, reflecting its strategic interests, particularly in Crimea. However, this approach was increasingly unfavourable for the West and to many Ukrainians, as they sought a democratic transition to European integration. Therefore, Ukraine was caught between a rock and a hard place: Russia did not want to give up its influence, while the West pushed for change. This boiling pot exploded twice in 2004 with the Orange Revolution and the Maidan protests in 2013.

The Orange Revolution did not pose an immediate security threat for Russia as the Party of Regions and Yanukovich were highly legitimate, and the prospect of Ukraine joining NATO appeared distant in 2004. However, by the end of Yushchenko's presidency, especially after the Bucharest summit, Russia's insecurities grew, despite the economic and political influence, as Yushchenko pushed Ukraine to join NATO. This apprehension was evident in Russia's economic and political support during Yanukovich's presidency. From the available cables sent from Kyiv, Yanukovich managed to convince Washington to be pragmatic, a position seen as more favourable to Washington, compared to Tymoshenko, who was viewed as aligned with Russian interests.

Yanukovich's attempt to balance East and West, and their voters in Ukraine, reminding of Kuchma's doctrine, led him to sign the Kharkiv Pact, and to refuse the EU AA, seeking short-term economic benefits. This sparked an outrage in Kyiv as it was perceived as shattering the hopes of European integration with an undisputable reality of the West's involvement acting as a catalyst for the revolution. Considering the vast amount of financing and political support to Yanukovich's opposition (including factions with right-wing and Russophobic tendencies), as shown by primary sources, it became only rational for Russia to view the protests as an existential threat to its security, especially in the Black Sea. The potential loss of Crimea, with the most Russian-speaking population and furthestmost important naval base for Russia in the Black Sea, was a major concern as it seemed likely that Sevastopol would be handed over to NATO forces, dealing a significant blow to Russia's military position in the region.

Rather than ensuring democratic transition and sovereignty through peaceful means, both the West and Russia failed to engage in a dialogue about preserving Ukraine's military neutrality, a course of action that, in hindsight, might have preserved peace. Instead, from Russia's viewpoint, the West's continued push for Ukraine's integration into NATO was perceived as a direct threat. This perspective assumes that Ukraine's right to form its own military alliances is secondary to

the geopolitical realities of great power politics, much like the US would not tolerate Soviet missiles in Cuba, just 170 km from its border, as *might make right*.

Many non-realist academics fail to consider Russia's position fully, this way avoiding perhaps the most important elements of realism discussed in this thesis: power politics, pursuit of security and self-preservation. Although some analysis has been done on the US's meddling in Maidan, it is often dismissed as just Russia's perceived coup and encroachment. This thesis has emphasized that Russia's actions were rational and pragmatic when viewed in the context of Maidan Revolution, highlighting Russia's deep insecurities about Ukraine. These insecurities, which have been repeatedly expressed since the Orange Revolution, intensified as the possibilities of Ukraine's membership to NATO grew closer.

Indubitably, more documents from Moscow and Washington especially during the events of Maidan with the focus on decision-making would provide a very insightful addition. Yet, this is the reason why Western and Ukrainian documents have been used, combined with existing historiography and Western primary sources to ensure the validity of how exactly Russia observed the events surrounding Maidan with post-Cold War antecedents. Further research that includes more Russian archives on their decision-making, is eagerly encouraged. Moreover, many matters require further research, such as the Russian preconceived position of US dominance over its allies in the case of the Russo-Ukrainian war and Ukraine as a split or even buffer state between great powers. The primary sources provided in this research, do not offer a clear answer to these factors. Valid reasons for Russian insecurity in determining the causes of this war might have been the main factor, but certainly, more research is necessary and encouraged.

Overall, this thesis has stressed how great powers are particularly insecure about their borders, especially when a challenging power is expanding onto them. The West might have unwillingly demonstrated to Russia that Ukraine is their strategic objective, nonetheless, the Russian response of annexing Crimea and starting the Russo-Ukrainian war was a rational provoked decision when viewed through the lens of the realist theoretical framework. Therefore, highlighting the importance of open-mindedness in considering different factors when discussing or advocating security issues.



Figure 12: Russian and Ukrainian soldiers together in Kyiv for 2010 Victory Day Parade, celebrating Victory over Fascism. Source: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/1069665>

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PLAGIARISM RULES AWARENESS STATEMENT

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Scientific integrity is the foundation of academic life. Utrecht University considers any form of scientific deception to be an extremely serious infraction. Utrecht University therefore expects every student to be aware of, and to abide by, the norms and values regarding scientific integrity.

The most important forms of deception that affect this integrity are fraud and plagiarism. Plagiarism is the copying of another person's work without proper acknowledgement, and it is a form of fraud. The following is a detailed explanation of what is considered to be fraud and plagiarism, with a few concrete examples. Please note that this is not a comprehensive list!

If fraud or plagiarism is detected, the study programme's Examination Committee may decide to impose sanctions. The most serious sanction that the committee can impose is to submit a request to the Executive Board of the University to expel the student from the study programme.

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Plagiarism is the copying of another person's documents, ideas or lines of thought and presenting it as one's own work. You must always accurately indicate from whom you obtained ideas and insights, and you must constantly be aware of the difference between citing, paraphrasing and plagiarising. Students and staff must be very careful in citing sources; this concerns not only printed sources, but also information obtained from the Internet.

The following issues will always be considered to be plagiarism:

- cutting and pasting text from digital sources, such as an encyclopaedia or digital periodicals, without quotation marks and footnotes;
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- including a translation of one of the sources named above without quotation marks or footnotes;
- paraphrasing (parts of) the texts listed above without proper references: paraphrasing must be marked as such, by expressly mentioning the original author in the text or in a footnote, so that you do not give the impression that it is your own idea;
- copying sound, video or test materials from others without references, and presenting it as one's own work;
- submitting work done previously by the student without reference to the original paper, and presenting it as original work done in the context of the course, without the express permission of the course lecturer;
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Ignorance of these rules is not an excuse. Each individual is responsible for their own behaviour. Utrecht University assumes that each student or staff member knows what fraud and plagiarism entail. For its part, Utrecht University works to ensure that students are informed of the principles of scientific practice, which are taught as early as possible in the curriculum, and that students are informed of the institution's criteria for fraud and plagiarism, so that every student knows which norms they must abide by.

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