

Learning to Wag the Dog: Russian Realities and the War in Ukraine

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*This paper argues that modern political scientists' approaches to the Russo-Ukrainian war fail to acknowledge the domestic political environment of Putin's Russia. Although the Russian government seems to be a one-man entity, the governments' realities, this paper argues, are much more complex. Domestic power players, specifically the United Russia party, hold a growing amount of leverage as Putin ages, drawing him to increasingly play into their hand. Mainstream realist and neorealist approaches, with a focus on foreign stressors rather than domestic realities, neglect internal pressures and overly rely on "Putinologies", leading to the view of Russian governmental decision-making being power in the hands of one man instead of being guided by the Russian people, their government, and Putin. Less prominent approaches, including constructivism and domesticism, most closely align with this work's approach. The paper rests on the conclusion that Russian domestic politics, specifically those involving the United Russia party, are a far more relevant factor in the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine than NATO expansionism after examination of secondary sources, including international government documentation, academic reports, and local and worldwide reporting. The paper further projects a power shift away from Putin and towards United Russia in the coming years through systems of leveraging personal and political power while isolating the growing nationalist Russian voter base.*

## **Introduction**

In the past two decades, Russian military aggression has become a surprisingly common phenomenon. An array of actions of varying levels of severity, ranging from Alaskan flybys<sup>1</sup> to the 2008 invasion of Georgia<sup>2</sup>, have been interpreted by many to signal a larger attempt by the Federation to assert military superiority over a conflict-averse globe. This pattern drastically escalated with their highly-publicized renewal of conflict in Ukraine in early 2022, seen as an extension of the Crimean annexation of 2014. However, unlike the targeted nature of the events in Crimea, this round of conflict has been characterized by scattered attacks far from the originally declared targets of Donetsk and Luhansk, mass civilian casualties, and widespread economic instability.

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<sup>1</sup>Burke, Minyvonne. "Russian Surveillance Aircraft Spotted within Alaskan Air Defense Identification Zone." NBCNews.com, NBCUniversal News Group, 10 Aug. 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/russian-surveillance-aircraft-spotted-alaskan-air-defense-identificati-rcna42379>.

<sup>2</sup>"5-Day Long Russo-Georgian War Begins." History.com, A&E Television Networks, 3 Aug. 2020, <https://history.com/this-day-in-history/5-day-long-russo-georgian-war-begins>.

Watching the coverage of the 2022 invasion as it happened, I found myself struggling to reconcile the realities I saw on the news with the academic explanations I read on paper. Arguments about demonstrations of international power, sanity (or insanity) of the Russian leader, and the inevitable discussion of NATO expansion crowded the field, but I saw myself as drawn towards an explanation that used national realities to explain international actions, a hallmark of the domesticist school of thought. So, I pose a question: What factors in the domestic political atmosphere would be leading the Russian government and its' leader to invade Ukraine, and what is the purpose of the move? After examining the sources elaborated upon in this paper, I will come to the conclusion that the United Russia Party is using a complex system of financial leveraging to encourage Putin to prompt the violence in Ukraine.

This paper reviews a multitude of different sources- academic reports, government documents, local and international reporting, and general academic literature on Russian politics to reach this conclusion. Upon completion and retrospection, it will be evident for readers that Putin's longstanding practice of distributing his assets to his confidants (also known as his "inner circle") has provided billions in leverage against him to a Party that is learning to think about the long-term.

In section one, entitled "Global Context, Local Issues", I examine Ukrainian history to explore local identity and gain a better view of the full picture of Ukrainian statehood. "Political Theories and the War in Ukraine" approaches the academic arguments about the Russian motives for invasion, covering realist, neorealist, Putinologist, and constructivist frameworks. The body of the argument of the paper, noted as Sections I through IV, outline the components of United Russia's journey to "wag the dog". Section I illustrates the importance of the Russian voter in maintaining the nation's illusion of democracy, and how this interacts with Russian party politics. Section II approaches Russian domestic politics from United Russia's perspective,

and illustrates the party's points of leverage against Putin. Section III crosses back into Ukraine, and realizes the necessity of the acquisition of Ukrainian territory for the absorption of nationalist-aligned voters for United Russia. Finally, Section IV examines a range of impact levels dependent upon success or failure in the war upon Putin's longevity in office and ability to maintain his existing power levels.

### **Global Context, Local Issues**

To view Ukrainian history as a uniquely Russian affair is a fundamentally incorrect assumption. The people who we now consider to be "ethnic Ukrainians"<sup>3</sup> have lived there for nearly thirty-four thousand years<sup>4</sup>, with the Russian Empire and USSR's occupation (and subsequent relinquishing) of Crimea taking up only a small fraction of that time. The Ukrainian people's history, to many, is one marked by conquest, becoming part of the Byzantine, Ottoman, and Russian Empires at one point or another<sup>5</sup>. From 1443 until 1783, Crimea in particular was actually a Khanate, a remnant of the once-great Mongol "Golden Horde"<sup>6</sup> before its' annexation by the Russian Tsar after his overwhelming victory at the Battle of Kozludzha<sup>7</sup>.

After the khanate fell, Ukrainian land remained part of the Russian empire, and its' successor USSR government until Khrushchev's 1954 goodwill "gifting" of the last of Russia's Crimean land back to Ukraine to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the merging of the two

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<sup>3</sup>Batchinsky, Julian. "Memorandum to the Government of the United States on the Recognition of the Ukrainian People's Republic." The Project Gutenberg EBook of Memorandum to the Government of the United States on the Recognition of the Ukrainian People's Republic., by Julian Batchinsky, Friends of Ukraine/ Ukrainian Mission , 1920, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/33551/33551-h/33551-h.htm>.

<sup>4</sup>[The Oldest Anatomically Modern Humans from Far Southeast Europe: Direct Dating, Culture and Behavior](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0020834) Prat S, Péan SC, Crépin L, Drucker DG, Puaud SJ, et al. (2011) The Oldest Anatomically Modern Humans from Far Southeast Europe: Direct Dating, Culture and Behavior. PLOS ONE 6(6): e20834. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0020834>

<sup>5</sup>"A Brief History of Crimea." Voice Of America News, A Brief History of Crimea, 27 Feb. 2014, <https://www.voanews.com/a/the-history-of-crimea---in-brief-/1860431.html>.

<sup>6</sup>Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopedia. "Golden Horde". Encyclopedia Britannica, 5 May. 2014, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Golden-Horde>. Accessed 12 June 2022.

<sup>7</sup>Kramer, Mark. "Why Did Russia Give Away Crimea Sixty Years Ago?" Wilson Center, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/why-did-russia-give-away-crimea-sixty-years-ago>.

nations<sup>8</sup>. Just over twenty years prior to that, in 1931, the Soviet government committed genocide through willing and complacent starvation of the Ukrainian people during what is now called the Holodomor<sup>9</sup>. During the Holodomor, Russian authorities turned Ukrainian peasants against one another by creating locally enforced grain collection systems, leading to the death by starvation of an estimated 3.5 million people: seven times the estimated amount of Ukrainians who died in the Holocaust of WWII<sup>10</sup>. Thirteen years later, in 1944, the Soviets once again committed a targeted genocide in Ukraine, this time of the Crimean Tatars, “evicting” 190,000, with more than sixteen thousand later dying of starvation and two hundred dying during transport alone<sup>11</sup>.

Fast forward to 1991, and the Soviet Union, successor state of the Russian Empire, falls. Ukraine declares its independence, and in 1994, they hold elections for President, and a constitution soon follows<sup>12</sup>. In that same year, the new nation signs a nonproliferation treaty in exchange for a security assurance from the United States, Russia, and the United Kingdom<sup>13</sup>. The government reorganization allowed for the further growth of democratic institutions in the former Soviet sphere of influence, and its importance should not be understated.

In 2014, the relatively stable nation was thrown into chaos with the Euromaidan revolts after the culmination of EU entry talks, corruption fatigue, and frustration with speech regulations collided, leading to the ousting of President Yanukovich<sup>14</sup>, followed in quick

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<sup>8</sup>D'Anieri, Paul J. *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilized Divorce to Uncivil War*. Cambridge University Press, 2019.  
<sup>9</sup>Portnikov, Vitaly. “The Holodomor of 1932-33 Was Preceded by 5,000 Peasant Uprisings - Vladimir Vyatrovych.” *Radio Svoboda*, Radio Liberty, 26 Nov. 2016, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/28140083.html>. Accessed 12 June 2022.

<sup>10</sup>Chen, C. Peter. “Ukraine in World War II.” WW2DB, 2010, <https://ww2db.com/country/ukraine>.

<sup>11</sup>Cloud, Marcus. “The Deportation of the Crimean Tatars in 1944: Why Did Stalin.” *Law and Lawyer Journals*, 22 Mar. 2020, <https://www.ilawjournals.com/the-deportation-of-the-crimean-tatars-in-1944-why-did-stalin/>.

<sup>12</sup>“Ukraine Profile - Timeline.” *BBC News*, BBC, 5 Mar. 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18010123>.

<sup>13</sup>Schadlow, Nadia. “The Denuclearization of Ukraine: Consolidating Ukrainian Security.” *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, vol. 20, 1996, pp. 271–87. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41036694>. Accessed 15 Jun. 2022.

<sup>14</sup>Ilkiv, Taras. “A Ukrainian Journalist Explains 10 Things the West Needs to Know about the Situation in Kiev.” *Business Insider*, Business Insider, 23 Jan. 2014, <https://www.businessinsider.com/understanding-euromaidan-2014-1>.

succession by Russia's infamous 2014 annexation of Crimea, made possible by the interim government's weakness after Yanukovich's deposition<sup>15</sup>. In response to the Euromaidan revolt, in recent years, economic policies have targeted reducing the sky-high national debt, moved towards proportional representation, and worked to modernize the courts, although it is still a far cry from a perfect government<sup>16</sup>.

In 2022, the Russian Federation, spearheaded by Mr. Putin, launched a full invasion of Ukraine on the premise of "denazifying" the nation, a claim with questionable veracity for multiple reasons, including the lack of Nazi policies implemented in Ukraine and the fact that the nation is led by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, a Jewish man<sup>17</sup>. The war is still ongoing at the time of writing this paper, so the outcome of the invasion is unknown, but it is nevertheless an uphill battle towards victory for Ukraine. Fatalities are high on both sides, and the Ukrainian military is clearly overpowered and outmanned by the Russian forces<sup>18</sup>.

### **Political Theories and the War in Ukraine**

The predominant theory guiding foreign policy discussions around Russian expansion is the realist approach. Spearheaded by the University of Chicago's Professor John Mearsheimer, the realists of Russian politics argue that the Russian expansion into Ukrainian territory is a reactionary move for the defense of Russian interests against ever-looming NATO expansion<sup>19</sup>. As a realist himself, Mearsheimer creates the foundation of his argument on the assumption that

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<sup>15</sup>"The Crisis in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine/The-crisis-in-Crimea-and-eastern-Ukraine>.

<sup>16</sup>Dabrowski, M., M. Domínguez-Jiménez and G. Zachmann (2020) 'Six years after Ukraine's Euromaidan: reforms and challenges ahead', *Policy Contribution* 2020/14, Bruegel

<sup>17</sup>Farley, Robert. "The Facts on 'De-Nazifying' Ukraine." *FactCheck.org*, 31 Mar. 2022, <https://www.factcheck.org/2022/03/the-facts-on-de-nazifying-ukraine/>.

<sup>18</sup>Statista Research Department. "Ukraine Civilian War Casualties 2022." *Statista*, 16 June 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1293492/ukraine-war-casualties/>.

<sup>19</sup>John Mearsheimer on Why the West is Principally Responsible for the Ukrainian Crisis: Russia and Ukraine. (2022, Mar 11). *The Economist* (Online), Retrieved from <http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/john-mearsheimer-on-why-west-is-principally/docview/2638097881/se-2?accountid=10141>

international actions are influenced centrally by international affairs, with a clear line between the domestic and international political spheres<sup>20</sup>. Similarly, neorealists advance the same argument but with a unique twist in that they view international relations as a competition. However, they use the framework of expanding polarity to identify states accumulating regional power through soft- and hard-power asset creation<sup>21</sup>. In this paper, I will use a near-opposite approach, and will furthermore argue that this is not an appropriate framework to use in this scenario. Without oversight, international relations, for a realist, is a catfight for power between nations. The realist argument functions on the assumption that international relations are inherently anarchic, and this is, to an extent, true. However, I will argue that in the chaotic nature of intra-state navigation, the need for domestic balance is a constant priority and a prerequisite for any move to expand a nation's power.

Yet another school of thought, constructivism, “[focuses] on sociality, emphasizing the social dimensions of international relations: norms, rules, and language,”<sup>22</sup> to argue that domestic social and cultural contexts can explain international actions to a limited but notable extent. In Russian eyes, Ukrainian history *is* Russian history because of their shared origin in the Kievan Rus<sup>23</sup>. For a constructivist, the shared history of the Russian and Ukrainian identity collides to create a Russian motive for invasion on the basis of cultural and historical protectionism.

Although less prominent, liberalist scholars still hold a notable position in discussions of recent Russian foreign policy by dividing the war in Ukraine into two parties: the “bad” Russia

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<sup>20</sup>Korab-Karpowicz, W. Julian, "Political Realism in International Relations", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/realism-intl-relations/>

<sup>21</sup>Zverev, A. (2015). *Competing Approaches: Neorealism Versus Constructivism on the Ukrainian Crisis*. Center for German and European Studies. Retrieved July 12, 2022, from [https://zdes.spbu.ru/images/working\\_papers/wp\\_2015/WP2\\_Zverev\\_Competing-approaches.pdf](https://zdes.spbu.ru/images/working_papers/wp_2015/WP2_Zverev_Competing-approaches.pdf)

<sup>22</sup>Tandilashvili, Dana. *Classical Realist and Norm-Based Constructivist Analysis of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine and Annexation of Crimea*. 2015, <https://cpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/wp.towson.edu/dist/b/55/files/2016/06/SPRING16FALL15ISSUEpt2-1jhiif4.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup>“The Long History of Russia's Efforts to Subjugate Ukraine.” *CBS News*, CBS Interactive, 27 Feb. 2022, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/russian-history-of-subjugating-ukraine/>.

and the “good” Ukraine, to emphasize the importance of democratic ideals<sup>24</sup>. Recent history reflects a growing trend of Russian political movements frequently starting on the local level, rather than in the upper echelons of their government<sup>25</sup>. The Russian framework is constructed on the façade of the nation actually being a democracy (despite its recent categorization as a personalized autocracy<sup>26</sup>), meaning that there is an inherent disconnect between citizens and the people in power. Liberalist thought highlights these facts to see Russia as a key example of the failure to successfully complete the construction of a fully liberal and democratic government, allowing the Duma and Federation council to wander further to extreme ends of the political spectrum to please the few instead of the many<sup>27</sup>.

Another highly-criticized approach in the field is that of “Putinology”, which frames the Russian Government as a man instead of a monolith<sup>28</sup>. Highly publicized theories about Russian politics often revolve around hypothesizing about Putin’s health, with countless discussions of his having or not having an array of health issues, ranging from Aspergers<sup>29</sup> to Parkinsons<sup>30</sup> to some sort of leukemia<sup>31</sup>. Followers of this school believe that “Putin, [as] an ex-KGB man, is the product and surely a perfect expression of... pernicious [Russian] culture,”<sup>32</sup> drawing upon the

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<sup>24</sup>Fukuyama, Francis. “Francis Fukuyama: Putin's War on the Liberal Order.” *Financial Times*, 4 Mar. 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/d0331b51-5d0e-4132-9f97-c3f41c7d75b3>.

<sup>25</sup>Akhiezer, A. (1994). Russian liberalism in the face of crisis. *Russian Politics and Law*, 32(5), 80-94.

<sup>26</sup>Frye, Timothy. *Weak Strongman: The Limits of Power in Putin's Russia*. Princeton University Press, 2022.

<sup>27</sup>Krastev, Ivan, and Stephen Holmes. “How Liberalism Became 'the God That Failed' in Eastern Europe.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 24 Oct. 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/24/western-liberalism-failed-post-communist-eastern-europe?ref=alian.info>

<sup>28</sup>Monaghan, Andrew. “Chapter 1.” *The New Politics of Russia: Interpreting Change*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2016.

<sup>29</sup>Lee, U-Jin. “Does Vladimir Putin Have Asperger's Syndrome?” *CBS News*, CBS Interactive, 5 Feb. 2015, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/does-vladimir-putin-have-aspergers-syndrome/>.

<sup>30</sup>“Putin's Worsening Health Set to Be a Determining Factor in Russia's Policy over the next Four Years.” Robert Lansing Institute, 30 Sept. 2021, <https://lansinginstitute.org/2021/09/29/putins-worsening-health-set-to-be-a-determining-factor-in-russias-policy-over-the-next-four-years/>.

<sup>31</sup>Prater, Erin. “Coup to Remove Cancer-Stricken Putin Underway in Russia, Ukrainian Intelligence Chief Says.” *Fortune*, Fortune, 16 May 2022, <https://fortune.com/2022/05/14/does-putin-have-cancer-coup-underway-blood-cancer-ukraine-war/>.

<sup>32</sup>Gedmin, Jeffrey. “Beyond Crimea: What Vladimir Putin Really Wants.” *World Affairs*, vol. 177, no. 2, July/August 2014, pp. 8-16. HeinOnline.



idea that Putin guides the government indiscriminately with his own framework of pre-set Soviet-inspired guidelines. The war in Ukraine, for a Putinologist, is Putin's calculated move in the global chessboard<sup>33</sup> to further pursue his old and well established dream of Soviet restoration<sup>34</sup>. Ukraine may be the first step in a larger plan for at least partial European domination<sup>35</sup> in line with modern Eurasianist theory in a yet greater puzzle of the Russian nationalist revival for minds of this lens. These theories have not only not had a noticeable impact on the workings of internal Russian politics, but have instead served to deflect conversations of Russian political vitality and longevity into tabloid fodder. Discussions of Russia are now seemingly divided into three separate sections: the man, the government, and the nation.

In discussions of the invasion of Ukraine, many scholars and world leaders refer to the invasion as a "mistake"<sup>36</sup> and "misperception"<sup>37</sup> of western solidarity, Ukrainian resilience, and Russian military strength<sup>38</sup>. Building on Nobel Prize-winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman's work in the self-perception of the illusion of skill<sup>39</sup>, these scholars argue that the war in Ukraine was an error fueled by Putin's ego or the general reluctance of the Russian government to stop him<sup>40</sup>, combined with the general reluctance of his intelligence network to provide him

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<sup>33</sup>Motyl, Alexander J. "Putin's Zugzwang: The Russia-Ukraine Standoff." *World Affairs*, vol. 177, no. 2, July/August 2014, pp. 58-65. HeinOnline.

<sup>34</sup>NBCUniversal News Group. (2005, April 25). *Putin: Soviet collapse a 'genuine tragedy'*. NBCNews.com. Retrieved July 11, 2022, from <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna7632057>

<sup>35</sup>Trofimov, Y. (2022, Jun 24). How Far Do Putin's Imperial Ambitions Go? The Russian president and his inner circle speak openly about retaking the vast lands that Moscow once controlled. As the war continues in Ukraine, Russia's neighbors are taking the threats seriously. *Wall Street Journal (Online)* <http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login>

<sup>36</sup>Ellyatt, Holly. "Putin's Invasion of Ukraine Is Seen as His Biggest Ever Mistake - and It Will Harm Russia for Years to Come." *CNBC*, CNBC, 24 Mar. 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/03/24/putins-invasion-of-ukraine-is-his-biggest-mistake-and-weakens-russia.html>.

<sup>37</sup>Kormych, Borys. "Putin's Miscalculations." *Wilson Center*, 9 Mar. 2022, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/putins-miscalculations>.

<sup>38</sup> Kormych, *ibid*.

<sup>39</sup>Kahneman, Daniel. "The Illusion of Validity." *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, New York, New York, 2011, pp. 209–217.

<sup>40</sup>"Imposing Additional Costs on Russia for Its Continued War Against Ukraine - United States Department of State." U.S. Department of State, U.S. Department of State, 2 Aug. 2022, <https://www.state.gov/imposing-additional-costs-on-russia-for-its-continued-war-against-ukraine/>.

intelligence that he would dislike and the common idea among Russian troops that they were to be welcomed in Ukraine as liberators instead of invaders<sup>41</sup>. Everyone makes errors, and these scholars are willing to bet that Putin is one of those people.

After a careful examination of scholarly evidence I will offer another possible explanation for the war in Ukraine that aligns more closely with the domestic approach scholarly camp. International politics are inherently complex, so domestic analysts often conclude that it is essential to understand the internal contexts before applying any theory or analytical strategies for understanding or prediction<sup>42</sup>. Within this pre-established framework, I will provide evidence that examines specifically party power dynamics and their relevance in short and long-term moves by Putin and the Russian government.

The dominant realist application in this debate is severely limited by the constraints of the realities of entering NATO. In order to become a permanent member of the treaty alliance, a nation usually must fulfill several criteria that Ukraine was far from meeting. This includes having military strength to benefit other member nations, “a commitment to the peaceful resolution of conflicts”, and a “functioning democratic political system”, all of which Ukraine fell notably short of, as the nation was notoriously corrupt and had to bar all men of age from leaving the country in order to properly support the military post-invasion<sup>43</sup>. Furthermore, for entry into NATO it was common for member nations to require the fair treatment of minority populations, meaning that any pretext of “denazification”<sup>44</sup>, with or without a base, on Putin’s

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<sup>41</sup> Belton, C., & Miller, G. (2022, August 19). Russia's spies Misread Ukraine and Mised Kremlin as War Loomed. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved August 22, 2022, from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interactive/2022/russia-fsb-intelligence-ukraine-war/?itid=sf\\_world\\_ukraine-russia\\_dont-miss](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interactive/2022/russia-fsb-intelligence-ukraine-war/?itid=sf_world_ukraine-russia_dont-miss)

<sup>42</sup> Clunan, Anne L. “Historical Aspirations and the Domestic Politics of Russia’s Pursuit of International Status.” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 47, no. 3/4, 2014, pp. 281–90. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48610402>. Accessed 15 Jul. 2022.

<sup>43</sup> NATO, *Ibid*.

<sup>44</sup> Farley, *ibid*.

side for a warrant of invasion means that the Russian government acknowledged the distance Ukraine had to go in order to even be eligible for NATO membership.

The current analytical frameworks (presented above) each have their own merits and drawbacks, as with theories in any academic field of study. Furthermore, true expertise on Russia and its politics is surprisingly hard to find, making the field even more difficult for new entry and general advancement. Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, there has been a marked decline in experts of Russian politics<sup>45</sup>, as the amount of Soviet-era experts dwindles with time, and those who would be interested in the field feel deterred by the end of the advent of the more “theoretically interesting” Soviet government, making the most accessible literature out-of-date, discussing the politics of the Soviet Union instead of life and politics after its fall.

This paper will approach the existing academic discussion of Russian politics during the invasion of Ukraine with a new understanding of Russia as a political Three-Body Problem<sup>46</sup>, composed of the man (Putin), the government, and the people. Each entity works with its own agenda, submitting to or challenging the other parties when it is necessary for survival and continuing on its path regardless of smaller outcomes. As with the astrophysical implications of a “Three-Body Problem”<sup>47</sup>, experts are notoriously poor at finding an ultimate trajectory of the three entities<sup>48</sup>, but can use individual elements in the gravitation (no pun intended) of one entity to examine the movements of another in a single instance.

In separating these three elements of government stakeholders, I believe that the field will be able to advance its understanding of the interactions between Russian political players.

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<sup>45</sup>Gerber, Theodore P. The State of Russian Studies in the United States, Association For Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies, July 2015, <https://www.aseees.org/sites/default/files/downloads/FINAL-ASEEES-assessment-report.pdf>. Page 4

<sup>46</sup>Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopedia. "three-body problem". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 3 Mar. 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/science/three-body-problem>. Accessed 14 June 2022.

<sup>47</sup>Musielak, Zdzislaw & Quarles, Billy. (2014). The three-body problem. *Reports on Progress in Physics*. 77. 065901. 10.1088/0034-4885/77/6/065901.

<sup>48</sup>Monaghan, Ibid.

Before international power, I will argue, domestic stability and the *longevity* of power (especially in an autocratic situation, as in Russia) takes priority. This paper specifically will examine the influence Party One (Mr. Putin) has on Party Two (the Russian Federation's governing bodies) and the movements of Party Three (the Russian Public), and vice versa, by focusing on Mr. Putin's navigation of multiple elements of the Russian domestic political system through the invasion of Ukraine.

With this approach, I will argue that Mr. Putin is waging a war in Ukraine in order to solidify his party's longevity in power and redirect negative public opinion towards the government as an entity, rather than towards him as an individual. The invasion of Ukraine provides a dual solution for Mr. Putin to actually advance the United Russia Party's place in Russian domestic politics by buoying public approval in the best-case scenario and distributing disapproval in the worst.

### **Theory & Methodology**

Within the outlined Three-Body approach, this paper will work in an integrated constructive-domestic sphere to outline the interplay between the "three Russias" in benefitting United Russia's long-term power play. Classical studies of diversionary war theory have indicated that waging war against a powerful foe against whom victory is still likely boosts electoral outcomes in favor of the one navigating the government<sup>49</sup>, which I will theorize is being applied here for party-level politics instead of just for the executive. I will further argue that Mr. Putin's war in Ukraine was waged to solidify the United Russia party's lifespan in power and redirect negative public opinion towards the government as an entity, rather than towards him as an individual. The "rally-round-the-flag" phenomenon was documented in Russia in recent years

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<sup>49</sup>Chiozza, Giacomo, and H E Goemans. "International Conflict and the Tenure of Leaders: Is War Still Ex Post Inefficient?" Rochester University, American Journal of Political Science, 2004, [https://www.rochester.edu/college/faculty/hgoemans/Publications/AJPS\\_13.pdf](https://www.rochester.edu/college/faculty/hgoemans/Publications/AJPS_13.pdf).

after the nation deployed troops to Ukraine<sup>50</sup>, and I will argue that Putin is aiming for a best-case scenario rally boost of his public approval in line with classic diversionary war theory<sup>51</sup>, in the still-larger context of the power dynamics inside of his inner circle. In the analysis section I will engage in a review of evidence from the 2014 Crimean invasion, Russian political culture and domestic political responses to it, Ukrainian political records (as necessary), and local and international newspapers, international government records, as well as primary sources from the Russian government and its affiliates.

## Analysis

### Section I: The Politics of Repression

Establishing the basis of Russian political actions is impossible without having a full grasp of the nuances of Russian voting politics. The dominant political party, United Russia, has maintained a solid grip on power in near lockstep with Putin's own rise in a seemingly symbiotic relationship. Although Putin has no declared party affiliation, he has spoken at the United Russia Party Congress<sup>52</sup> while addressing them as "the nation[ 's ] largest and leading political party" and outlining the need for anti-corruption measures and incentivizing technological advancements<sup>53</sup>, clearly illustrating his recognizance of the extent of their political control.

There is a clear reason for their close relationship. As the major political party in the Russian parliament, Putin relies upon them to pass any legislation to fulfill the year's policy

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<sup>50</sup>Yudina, A. (2019, April 11). *The Rally 'Round The Flag Effect In Russia: How An International Crisis Turns Regime Opponents Into Regime Supporters*. University of North Carolina Digital Repository. Retrieved July 12, 2022, from [https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/concern/file\\_sets/j3860774n?locale=en](https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/concern/file_sets/j3860774n?locale=en)

<sup>51</sup>Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, and Alastair Smith. "Domestic Explanations of International Relations." *Annual Reviews, Annual Review of Political Science*, 11 Apr. 2012, <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/epdf/10.1146/annurev-polisci-070209-174835>.

<sup>52</sup>"United Russia Congress: Putin Distances Himself from Ruling Party." *Warsaw Institute*, 18 Dec. 2019, <https://warsawinstitute.org/united-russia-congress-putin-distances-ruling-party/>.

<sup>53</sup>"United Russia Party Congress Address Transcript." *President of Russia*, Kremlin, 23 Nov. 2019, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62105>.

agenda, something he has had no problem with in the past. In return, Putin ensures that those who adhere to his instructions are re-elected with a clear margin of victory through suspiciously inconspicuous margins, bolstered by their own strategies of voter intimidation through employer manipulation or outright voter bribery<sup>54</sup>. Russian voters do still matter- the politicians still need thousands of signatures on their nomination forms, and too much “heavy-handed fraud”<sup>55</sup> would inevitably lead to some sort of civilian revolt. The more Putin is able to maintain the illusion of democracy, the more support his government will be able to garner among the people, a necessary prerequisite for internal stability<sup>56</sup>.

The partnership’s illusion has been a well-oiled machine practically since the party’s formal incorporation in 2001<sup>57</sup>. Through a massive and elaborate system of puppet opposition, Putin has crafted for United Russia the illusion of public choice between over a dozen parties across the political spectrum. The leaders of these parties, of course, are coincidentally jailed for fraud<sup>58</sup> or corruption<sup>59</sup> or hospitalized at key moments in the electoral process, leaving United Russia the clear choice after the a juicy fiction of election drama for the voters’ tracking pleasure<sup>60</sup>. Even the Putin-Medvedev-Putin leadership tradeoff from 2008 to 2012 has been seen largely as a portion of a larger illusion of choice for Russian voters<sup>61</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup>Sokolov, Mikhail, and Michael Scollon. “Vote Now, Get Bonus Later: Putin Accused of Bribing Electorate to Save Ruling Party.” RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, Vote Now, Get Bonus Later: Putin Accused Of Bribing Electorate To Save Ruling Party, 15 Sept. 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/putin-bribing-voters-russia/31428165.html>.

<sup>55</sup>Frye, Timothy. *Weak Strongman: The Limits of Power in Putin's Russia*, PRINCETON UNIV PRESS, S.I., 2022, pp. 66–84.

<sup>56</sup>Taylor, Brian. “Leashes and Clubs.” *The Code of Putinism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2018, pp. 48–49.

<sup>57</sup>Gel'man, Vladimir. “United Russia: Ruling Party or Emperor’s New Clothes?” *PONARS- Program on New Approaches to Research and Security in Eurasia*, European University at St Petersburg, Oct. 2002, [https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy\\_files/files/media/csis/pubs/pm\\_0255.pdf](https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/media/csis/pubs/pm_0255.pdf).

<sup>58</sup>Krainova, Natalya. “Yaroslavl Mayor Who Quit United Russia Arrested on Bribery Charges.” *The Moscow Times*, The Moscow Times, 3 July 2013, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/07/03/yaroslavl-mayor-who-quit-united-russia-arrested-on-bribery-charges-a25519>.

<sup>59</sup>Smith, Karen. “Alexey Navalny Transferred to Maximum-Security Prison.” CNN, Cable News Network, 15 June 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/06/14/europe/alexey-navalny-prison-transfer-intl/index.html>.

<sup>60</sup>Rosenberg, Steve. “Russia Election: Opposition Crushed Ahead of Managed Polls.” *BBC News*, British Broadcasting Corporation, 13 Sept. 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-58504603>.

<sup>61</sup>“US Embassy Cables: 'Tandem Politics' of Medvedev and Putin.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 1 Dec. 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/178955>.

Classified U.S Embassy Cable, leaked 2010.

Because of the carefully-crafted longevity of Putin's stint in the upper echelons of Russian politics, United Russia has basically molded itself in his image, specifically dictating that they will follow "Putin's Plan" in their 2007 platform<sup>62</sup> and following up on that pledge every year since then. In the status quo, United Russia has the ability to maintain a firm grip on power through the systems of voter manipulation outlined above, but their true approval rating is less than stellar, hovering around the 30% margin for much of 2020<sup>63</sup>. However, United Russia's party leadership know well that the system of reliance was not built to last, and surely cannot be sustained past the expiry of Putin's final stint in office, whenever that may land.

In coming years, the Party will need to siphon power away from the leader and towards themselves and/or his successor in order to maintain the existing stability and their level of power and influence throughout the Federation government. The question, then, is *how* they will do so without facing immediate ejection from Russian politics as a whole as dictated in the Party's own Charter<sup>64</sup>. Individual action against Putin is made impossible by the Party's founding document, in addition to the overwhelmingly frigid atmosphere of Russian politics in general, which has been molded to revere Putin and fear his disdain<sup>65</sup>.

Thus, in order to maintain this power, the Party has started to lay the groundwork for a firmer domestic grip and an off-balance Putin for the ideal leadership transfer while minimizing internal instability. As outlined in the following section of this paper, Putin has (knowingly or inadvertently) given the Party ample leverage to force his hand on select policy issues, meaning

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<sup>62</sup>Akela, Jay Chandra. "The Party System In Post-Soviet Russia: A CASE STUDY OF THE PARTY UNITED RUSSIA." *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2017, pp. 34–49. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48531461>. Accessed 20 Jul. 2022.

<sup>63</sup>"If You Are Going to Take Part in the Election in the State Duma This Sunday, for Which Party Are You Most Likely to Vote?" Statista, Statista Research Department, <https://www-statista-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/statistics/1092732/russia-political-party-ratings/>.

<sup>64</sup>"United Russia Party Charter", Section 4.3.2, *Устав Партии "Единая Россия"*, United Russia Party, 19 June 2021, <https://er.ru/party/rule>.

<sup>65</sup>Coleman, Julie. "Spy Chief Humiliated by Putin on Russian TV for Stammering Releases New Video Echoing Putin's War Rhetoric." *Business Insider*, Business Insider, 25 Feb. 2022, <https://www.businessinsider.com/spy-chief-putin-humiliated-releases-video-echoing-putins-war-rhetoric-2022-2>.

that they can sway him towards making key decisions (such as the invasion of Ukraine) that may otherwise be seen as grave “miscalculation[s]”<sup>66</sup>. Putin remains the primary decision maker in Russian politics, and certainly one of, if not the “most powerful m[en]” in the world<sup>67</sup> for now, but the clear self-destructiveness of his actions in the invasion of Ukraine likely show evidence of coercion by the Party to gradually undermine his power by disrupting the earlier-outlined voter balancing act inherent in the status quo of Russian domestic politics.

With Putin, the United Russia Party knows that their power is secure. But, they also know that not even an autocrat can live forever. For the party to create and maintain a sense of political longevity without fracturing or showing signs of disorganization in the years following Putin’s departure from the Presidency, it is essential to create a retirement plan for the end of an era, and prepare the Russian political universe for a quick and smooth change of orbit. United Russia was basically founded to follow Putin and his “plan”<sup>68</sup>, and must start thinking about how to navigate Russian politics without their leader and trump card. The war in Ukraine provides two outcomes of notable probability in which Putin’s hand is forced in phasing in a retirement plan to the benefit of United Russia:

- 1.) Russia wins the war; party approval skyrockets above their current plurality and they no longer need to rely upon the crutch of voter manipulation. They can safely sail through the 2024 elections without or with minimal reliance upon Putin’s help.
- 2.) Russia loses the war; public approval plummets. United Russia finds a way to divert the disapproval unto Putin since he acts as the face of Russian politics on fronts both

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<sup>66</sup>Kupchan, Charles A. “Why Putin's War with Ukraine Is a Miscalculation.” Council on Foreign Relations, Council on Foreign Relations, 24 Feb. 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/why-putins-war-ukraine-miscalculation>.

<sup>67</sup>Zakaria, Fareed. “Why Putin Is World's Most Powerful Man.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 22 Mar. 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/03/13/opinions/putin-most-powerful-man-world-zakaria/index.html>.

<sup>68</sup>Akela, *ibid*.



domestic and international. They then pressure him into implementing a more concrete retirement plan than his existing claims of it simply being undecided.

As this paper will explore later, the invasion of Ukraine is a crucial point for United Russia's absorption of the conservative Russian nationalist voter base in both scenarios, meaning that the war in Ukraine, regardless of its outcome, works to benefit United Russia. As he ages and the amount of leverage he gives United Russia grows, a United Russia power-play scenario becomes more and more likely. The opening of a Ukrainian front helps United Russia begin the transition towards both isolating the nationalist voter base and beginning to pressure Putin for a transition of power.

## **Section II: A Different Kind of Party Power**

The current high-level domestic political context is primed for this type of transition by Putin's distribution of financial leverage points across United Russia. Since Putin's reelection in 2018, the United Russia Party members have found themselves at an increasingly perilous crossroads; the leader is aging and showing no signs of choosing a successor, despite his (likely feigned) indecision regarding a potential run in 2024<sup>69</sup>, at the end of which he would be nearly eighty. The party's structure requires that, on face, they must be deferential to Putin's wishes as both President and de-facto party leader, despite his lack of official party post<sup>70</sup>. With no end to Putin's term(s) in sight (his term limit was recently extended for a dozen years until 2036<sup>71</sup>), one would think that United Russia would be silently following such a political behemoth. Yet, there is still reason to believe that the opposite may be beginning to occur.

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<sup>69</sup>Soldatkin, V., Balmforth, T., Lyrchikova, A., & Tétrault-Farber, G. (2021, November 30). *Putin Says He Hasn't Decided on 2024 Run but Biden Right to Seek 2nd Term*. Reuters. Retrieved July 19, 2022, from <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-says-he-hasnt-decided-whether-run-again-president-2024-2021-11-30/>

<sup>70</sup>"United Russia- Party Faces." *Луца Пармуу*, United Russia, 2022, [https://er.ru/persons?q=%D0%92%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%B8%D1%80%2B%D0%9F%D1%83%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BD&\\_token=](https://er.ru/persons?q=%D0%92%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%B8%D1%80%2B%D0%9F%D1%83%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BD&_token=).

<sup>71</sup>Luhn, Alec. "Vladimir Putin, President Until 2036?" *Politico*, Politico Europe, 12 Mar. 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/vladimir-putin-president-until-2036/>.

The second stage of the invasion of Ukraine is currently composed of the attempt to annex Donetsk and Luhansk, while attacking strategic defense points throughout the nation through openings in the Black Sea, the previously annexed Crimean region, and the Belorussian and Russian borders<sup>72</sup> with missile use in major cities throughout Ukraine<sup>73</sup> (quite far, it should be noted, from Donetsk and Luhansk, the supposed strategic annexation goals<sup>74</sup>). It is a move, miscalculated or not, that requires incredible amounts of intent and resources for the Russian government to undertake, with military preparations preceding the actual invasion by approximately one year<sup>75</sup>. It is impossible for this kind of war to be a result of party lobbying alone; rather, it is the cumulation of internal political pressure and individual political aspirations.

For the United Russia Party, in the long run, any errors Putin makes in Ukraine work to benefit later organized internal pressure to replace the Russian President in 2024. With the party poised to replace him at the moment he announces his resignation, and his obligation as de-facto party leader to nominate his successor (as his predecessor, Boris Yeltsin, once did<sup>76</sup>), the only remaining piece for United Russia's puzzle is the matter of when they will be able to do so. The invasion of Ukraine, if it failed or led to long-lasting mass disapproval, would provide just the situation for a change in power in Russia's 2024 elections.

So, what sort of leverage can United Russia be holding over Putin to encourage such drastic measures? The answer: his money. Putin is known to have distributed likely around \$200

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<sup>72</sup>"Russian Military Forces: Interactive Map." Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, Rondeli Foundation, <https://www.gfsis.org.ge/maps/russian-military-forces>.

<sup>73</sup>Feng, Emily. "Russian Missiles Hit Western Ukraine." NPR, National Public Radio, 26 June 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/06/26/1107691298/russian-missiles-hit-western-ukraine>.

<sup>74</sup>See Figure 3.

<sup>75</sup>Daniel, Frank Jack. "Timeline: The Events Leading Up to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine." Edited by Silvia Aloisi, Reuters, Thomson Reuters Trust, 1 Mar. 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/events-leading-up-russias-invasion-ukraine-2022-02-28/>.

<sup>76</sup>Winston, David. "From Yeltsin to Putin." Hoover Institution, 1 Apr. 2000, <https://www.hoover.org/research/yeltsin-putin>.

billion USD<sup>77</sup> to members of his inner circle<sup>78</sup>, who then stash the cash in a network of offshore accounts, high-price luxury good purchases, massive real estate investments<sup>79</sup>, and shell companies<sup>80</sup>. Among Putin's inner circle<sup>81</sup>, two people were directly exposed in the Pandora Papers, a massive data leak regarding corruption and offshore accounting of global power players: Gennady Timchenko<sup>82</sup>, an oil magnate, and Sergey Chemezov<sup>83</sup>, the CEO of a massive military defense contracting firm. Both of these men have connections with United Russia—Timchenko's Charitable Foundation co-funded a United Russia-led event in 2019<sup>84</sup>, and Chemezov was on the United Russia Bureau of the Supreme Council as recently as 2020<sup>85</sup>.

Outside of the network revealed in the Panama Papers, there is an even larger mountain of evidence indicating the extent of Putin's use of "wallets" (confidantes who hold and use his money for him<sup>86</sup>), ranging from high-profile oligarchs to a former Olympic gymnast. In

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<sup>77</sup>Khan, Mahnoor. "Putin Claims He Makes \$140,000 and Has an 800-Square Foot Apartment. His Actual Net Worth Is an Unsolvably Mystery." *Fortune*, Fortune, 3 Mar. 2022, <https://fortune.com/2022/03/02/vladimir-putin-net-worth-2022/>.

<sup>78</sup>"Putin and the Proxies." *OCCRP*, Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, 24 Oct. 2017, <https://www.occrp.org/en/putinandtheproxies/#infographic>.

<sup>79</sup>Navalny, Alexei. "Putin's Palace: The Story of The World's Biggest Bribe." YouTube, YouTube, 4 Feb. 2021, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T\\_tFSWZXKN0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_tFSWZXKN0).

<sup>80</sup>"Pandora Papers Name Alleged Offshore Beneficiaries With Putin Links." *The Moscow Times*, The Moscow Times, 5 Oct. 2021, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/10/04/pandora-papers-name-alleged-offshore-beneficiaries-with-putin-links-a75203>.

<sup>81</sup>Burrows, Emma. "Vladimir Putin's Inner Circle: Who's Who, and How Are They Connected?" CNN, Cable News Network, 28 Mar. 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/03/28/europe/vladimir-putins-inner-circle/index.html>. List of "the people who make up his inner circle." [sic quote]

<sup>82</sup>"The Most Expansive Leak of Tax Haven Files in History Reveals the Secret Offshore Holdings of Some of the Most Powerful Political Figures in the World." Gennady Timchenko ICIJ Pandora Papers, International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, <https://projects.icij.org/investigations/pandora-papers/power-players/en/player/gennady-timchenko>

<sup>83</sup>"The Most Expansive Leak of Tax Haven Files in History Reveals the Secret Offshore Holdings of Some of the Most Powerful Political Figures in the World." ICIJ Pandora Papers - Family of Sergei Chemezov, International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, <https://projects.icij.org/investigations/pandora-papers/power-players/en/player/family-of-sergei-chemezov>.

<sup>84</sup>Карелова: Социальные Инновации Повышают Эффективность Проекта "Старшее Поколение", United Russia Party, 19 June 2019, [https://er.ru/activity/news/karelova-socialnye-innovacii-povyshayut-effektivnost-proekta-starshee-pokolenie\\_182398](https://er.ru/activity/news/karelova-socialnye-innovacii-povyshayut-effektivnost-proekta-starshee-pokolenie_182398).

<sup>85</sup>Council Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/398 of 13 March 2020 Implementing Regulation (EU) No. 269/2014 Concerning Restrictive Measures in Respect of Actions Undermining or Threatening the Territorial Integrity, Sovereignty and Independence of Ukraine, United Kingdom Legislative Annex, 2020, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2020/398/annex/adopted/data.xht?view=snippet&wrap=true>. see entry 118

<sup>86</sup>Brancaleone, Marie. "Centre D'Étude Des Crises Et Conflits Internationaux." *The Russian Elite in the Post-Putin Era*, Centre d'Étude Des Crises Et Conflits Internationaux, Mar. 2021, <http://cecrilouvain.be/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/The-Russian-Elite-in-the-post-Putin-era.pdf>.

particular, there is ample evidence of Putin’s organizing for Timchenko, as well as Petr Kolbin and Mikhail Shelomov<sup>87</sup>, to gift an apartment to one Alina Kabaeva and then purchase another from her<sup>88</sup>. Kabaeva, the head of the Russian National Media group and purportedly, one of Putin’s lovers<sup>89</sup>, is known as the “public face of [United Russia]”<sup>90</sup>, and was at one point an MP in the Party as well<sup>91</sup>.

There is a mountain of evidence linking the financial dealings between inner circle members to Putin himself<sup>92</sup>, so the matter at hand is not whether Putin is hiding his money, rather, the key is *what* he is doing with it and *who* knows what about it. The vast majority of the business dealings have two things in common: the use of Bank Rossiya as a proxy for holding cash for the “wallets”, and the utilization of an array of emails for shell company registration under the domain “LLCInvest.ru”<sup>93</sup>. Bank Rossiya is the ideal place for Putin’s proxy money to be held, because many members of the inner circle have been known voting shareholders (Including Timchenko, Svetlana Krivonogikh, Mikhail Shelomov, Dmitry Shamalov, and Yury Kovalchuk<sup>94</sup>) since 2010, with a total known 94.6% stake.

Putin’s use of high-profile United Russia members as “wallets” functions as a double-edged sword. On one hand, because he is able to manage and distribute his assets so thoroughly,

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<sup>87</sup>Brancaleone, *ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Мы Побывали в Гостях у Путина.” Дворец Для Путина, 2020, <https://palace.navalny.com/>. Land transfer form between Timchenko and Kabaeva

<sup>89</sup>Jackson, Thom Poole and Patrick. “Who Is Alina Kabaeva, Putin's Alleged Girlfriend?” BBC News, British Broadcasting Corporation, 13 May 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61353020>.

<sup>90</sup>Horowitz, Jason. “Vladimir Putin, Family Man.” The New York Times, The New York Times, 13 May 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/13/world/europe/putin-family-wealth-sanctions.html>.

<sup>91</sup>*For illustration, see Figure 3.*

<sup>92</sup>McIntire, M., & Forsythe, M. (2022, February 26). Putin Faces Sanctions, but his Assets Remain an Enigma. The New York Times. Retrieved July 22, 2022, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/26/world/europe/putin-sanctions-money-assets.html>

<sup>93</sup>Shmagun, O., Dmitriev, D., Patrucic, M., & Lozovsky, I. (2022, June 20). Mysterious Group of companies tied to Bank Rossiya unites billions of dollars in assets connected to Vladimir Putin. OCCRP- Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project. Retrieved July 22, 2022, from <https://www.occrp.org/en/asset-tracker/mysterious-group-of-companies-tied-to-bank-rossiya-unites-billions-of-dollars-in-assets-connected-to-vladimir-putin>

<sup>94</sup>Bank Rossiya discloses Timchenko stake. Interfax. (2010, March 16). Retrieved July 22, 2022, from <https://interfax.com/newsroom/top-stories/64588/>

it is incredibly difficult to estimate how much money he actually has or the true value of any of his assets due to the ambiguous nature of the situation. Asset distribution can act as a method of positive reinforcement on his behalf to reassure United Russia of his allegiance and trust. Giving United Russia members such a high-value responsibility is his own attempt at ensuring that he is the one holding the reins of United Russia; without him, they cannot sustain their own lifestyles, this would likely not prioritize his “retirement”.

However, doing so, he created several vulnerabilities that, I argue, are leading to his perhaps receiving unusually high amounts of political pressure relating to the Russian military campaign in Ukraine. Distributing his assets with such an extensive and inevitable paper trail is an oddly transparent act of (purposefully or inadvertently) pulling the curtain back to show the Russian people (who are, as illustrated earlier, still essential for understanding Russian politics despite their relative powerlessness in creating large-scale institutional changes) the extent of the corruption that is known for running deep in the Russian government<sup>95</sup>.

More than that, because his assets are so scattered, Putin has forced himself to rely on his inner circle members, including the above-listed United Russia politicians, to maintain and eventually return (in one form or another) his property. The asset transfers are purposefully extraordinarily clandestine<sup>96</sup>, so if they were to keep the money after finding a way to decentralize power in the Russian government, Putin would be unable to realistically reclaim the money and assets if his inner circle members were to keep the transfers. The political players to whom Putin has vested his trust (and cash) selectively have strong links to United Russia, and the closer they are to Putin, the tighter their connection seems to be with the party.

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<sup>95</sup>Massaro, Paul, and Amelie Rausing. “Russia's Weaponization of Corruption (and Western Complicity).” CSCE-Committee on Security and Cooperation in Europe, United States Federal Government, 6 June 2017, <https://www.csce.gov/international-impact/russia-s-weaponization-corruption-and-western-complicity?page=2>.

<sup>96</sup>Woodman, Spencer. “An Oligarch's Nephew, a Tattoo Artist and \$700 Million in Secret Transfers Traced to a Putin Ally.” *ICIJ- International Consortium of Investigative Journalists*, 19 Apr. 2022, <https://www.icij.org/investigations/pandora-papers/kerimov-putin-banks-secret-transfers-offshore/>.

As illustrated in Figure 3<sup>97</sup>, several members of the inner circle who are also members of United Russia (including Timchenko, Chemezov, and Kabaeva) directly handled Putin's funds; out of the total eighteen inner circle members who were examined, fifteen had direct or indirect ties to Putin's money that had been handled by a United Russia member. This is leverage for United Russia to pressure Putin into leading the Federation government into war with Ukraine, and then retirement. Ukraine's strategic value for Russian domestic politics cannot be understated, and Russian attack patterns demonstrate that both United Russia and Putin are focusing directly on the nationalist end of the war rather than on the human devastation or even military strategic value of the war.

Inner circle members trend towards acting as a pack rather than acting as individuals<sup>98</sup> to avoid being singled out and "purged"<sup>99</sup>- something that United Russia, as a party, excels at, with a remarkably low defection rate to indicate general political compliance<sup>100</sup>. If the political power players outlined above were to coordinate a move to pressure the military action in Ukraine for the benefit of United Russia (which will be elaborated upon in greater detail in Section III), Putin would be greatly incentivized to protect his own interests by following them, instead of the assumed vice versa pattern. Their actions show a tendency to be the ones to pull the trigger; they just need someone to load the gun<sup>101</sup>.

It is impossible to know exactly what occurs inside of the inner circle, as they are known for their secrecy and exclusivity<sup>102</sup>. Their meetings aren't documented, so analysis of their actions is inherently limited because of the lack of precise evidence of what exactly goes on.

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<sup>97</sup>See Figure 3, located in Appendix.

<sup>98</sup>Brancaleone, *ibid*.

<sup>99</sup>Snodgrass, Erin. "Putin's Suspected Purge of His Inner Circle Was Fueled by a Misinformation Bubble He Created." *Business Insider*, Business Insider, 18 Apr. 2022, <https://www.businessinsider.com/putin-purges-advisors-but-hes-responsible-for-misinformation-2022-4>.

<sup>100</sup>Chandra, *ibid*.

<sup>101</sup>Belton, C. (2020). *Putin's People*. "Part 2.6: 'The Inner Circle Made Him'". Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

<sup>102</sup>Chakraborty, Barnini. "Putin's Inner Circle Closes in Around Him." *Washington Examiner*, Washington Examiner, 25 Mar. 2022, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/putins-inner-circle-closes-in-around-him>.

However, it has been observed that despite what must be an extraordinarily tense time in Russian politics, the inner circle has largely stood firm and not abandoned Putin, meaning that they trust in whatever (or whoever's) political plan is rolling out<sup>103</sup>. For the inner circle, personal opinions about Ukraine and Ukrainians don't particularly matter. If the group leans towards the application of soft power towards Putin through the war, the best course of action (and the one with the most historical precedent) would be an organized action, with proper leverage, and external backing. The situation in Ukraine, and the potential leanings of United Russia, provide the perfect context for just that. War in Ukraine, for the inner circle, could be a proxy step to future solidifying individual political power within United Russia.

### **Section III: Ukraine as the Collateral of Russian Nationalism**

The political atmosphere in Russia that has fermented in the past decade provides an ideal context for the Russian move into Ukraine to provoke the already-bubbling nationalist fervor inside the Federation. The relatively young yet prominent Novorossiia movement, which advocates for at least partial reunification of former USSR territories, including Ukraine, Georgia/South Ossetia<sup>104</sup>, and Lithuania, has been informally acknowledged by the United Russia Party as ideal beneficiaries of party donations, sending miscellaneous “humanitarian cargo” and “gifts” at least seven times specifically to “Novorossiians” living in the Donbas or other conflict areas<sup>105</sup>, during the one-and-a-half year window of July 2014 (just four months after the Crimean annexation) to October 2015. United Russia has further allied themselves with the Novorossian school by maintaining the continuous membership of Duma Member Yevgeny

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<sup>103</sup>Powell, Alvin. “Ukraine Stands Firm, But So Does Putin's Inner Circle.” *Harvard Gazette*, Harvard Gazette, 28 Feb. 2022, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2022/02/ukraine-stands-firm-but-so-does-putins-inner-circle/>.

<sup>104</sup>O’Loughlin, John, et al. “The Rise and Fall of Novorossiia: Examining Support for a Separatist Geopolitical Imaginary in Southeast Ukraine.” *Institution of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado at Boulder, Journal of Post Soviet Affairs*, 2017, <https://ibs.colorado.edu/johno/pub/Novorossiia.pdf>.

<sup>105</sup>“United Russia Party Website- 'Novorossiia' Headline Search.” *Новости*, United Russia, <https://er.ru/activity/news?tags%5B0%5D=61059>.

Fyodorov<sup>106</sup>, who advocates for, among other things, a reversal of the national ban on state ideology<sup>107</sup> and the revoking of a 1991 proclamation declaring Lithuania's independence<sup>108</sup>, indicating the party's stance of strategic ambiguity towards the "Izborsky Club" nationalists, who argue specifically for the endorsement of state ideology<sup>109</sup> for expansionist ends. Even outside of examinations of individual politicians, Russian military movements into Ukrainian territory are frequently paired with unified paramilitary movements by far right groups to the same ends. Groups like the Russian National Unity Party, the National Bolshevik Party, and the Eurasian Movement/Eurasian Youth Union all have completed work in the former Soviet sphere in recent years to consolidate Russian nationalist power<sup>110</sup>. In 2015, the National Bolshevik Party alone self-reported after the Crimean annexation that they sent approximately 2,000 "volunteers" to Crimea and the Donbas<sup>111</sup>.

United Russia stands in a special position of benefit from the rise of nationalism in the Russian domestic political sphere for several different reasons. In the past decade, one of the most prominent civilian threats to the Putin regime was the nationalist protests against electoral fraud known colloquially as the "Snow Revolution"<sup>112</sup>. An academic survey of 1,200 Russians

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<sup>106</sup>"Fyodorov Evgeny Alekseevich." OpenSanctions, 16 Apr. 2022, <https://www.opensanctions.org/entities/Q4493964/>.

<sup>107</sup>Balmforth, Tom. "Meet Yevgeny Fyodorov, the Russian Lawmaker Who Wants More Western Sanctions." RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, Meet Yevgeny Fyodorov, The Russian Lawmaker Who Wants More Western Sanctions, 30 Jan. 2015, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-duma-deputy-sanctions-challenge-more-west-ukraine/26821487.html>.

<sup>108</sup>"Russian MP Suggests to Revoke Lithuania's Independence Recognition." Новая Газета. Европа, 8 June 2022, <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2022/06/08/russian-mp-suggests-to-revoke-lithuanias-independence-recognition-news>.

<sup>109</sup>Laurelle, Marlene. "The Izborsky Club, or the New Conservative Avant-Garde in Russia." George Washington University Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies Illiberalism Studies Program, 2020, <https://www.illiberalism.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Russian-Review-Izborskii-Klub.pdf>.

<sup>110</sup>Likhachev, Vyacheslav. "The Far Right in the Conflict Between Russia and Ukraine." Institut Francais Des Relations Internationales, July 2016, [https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/rmv95\\_uk\\_likhachev\\_far-right\\_radicals\\_final.pdf](https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/rmv95_uk_likhachev_far-right_radicals_final.pdf).

<sup>111</sup>Аверин, Александр. "Гражданская Война По Балканскому Типу." *Свободная Пресса*, 19 May 2015, <https://svpressa.ru/war21/article/122231/>.

<sup>112</sup>Bukharin, Irina. "Russians Protest Against Election Fraud (Snow Revolution), 2011-2012." Russians Protest against Election Fraud (Snow Revolution), 2011-2012, Global Nonviolent Action Database, 11 Jan. 2015, <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/russians-protest-against-election-fraud-snow-revolution-2011-2012>.



after the 2012 Elections indicated widespread and diverse support for the protests (with 47% agreeing with them). Supporters of the protests were furthermore “more likely to support authoritarian solutions to Russia’s problems, and were likely to hold strong ethno-nationalist views,”<sup>113</sup> indicating a growing need for Putin to adjust his policies to greater placate a nationalist voter base to maintain political stability.

United Russia is a self-declared conservative party<sup>114</sup>, with their policy advocacy led by a simplified form of right-wing ideology centered on the preservation of individual rights and property. The Party charter is oddly vague, outlining no stances on individual issues (instead saying that they value “well being”, “unity and sovereignty”, and “leadership”<sup>115</sup>, vague and generally agreeable terms), largely leaving policy declaration matters up to annually published updates in the form of a “People’s Program” infographic<sup>116</sup>, meaning that the party’s objectives are largely up for interpretation.

Ukraine holds a special political strategic value for both entities. Because both Ukraine and Russia share a previously-outlined history in the Kievan Rus<sup>117</sup>, along with the inherent nature of the living memory of the messy divorce of the Soviet Union, many Russian nationalists view Ukraine as rightfully Russian, especially the areas of Ukraine which are home to any notable amount of Russian-language heritage speakers<sup>118</sup>, including Kharkov, Nikolaev, and Odessa, all major cities of historical and cultural import<sup>119</sup>.

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<sup>113</sup>Chaisty, Paul, and Stephen Whitefield. “Putin's Nationalism Problem.” E-International Relations, 4 June 2016, <https://www.e-ir.info/2015/04/20/putins-nationalism-problem/>.

<sup>114</sup>Trenin, Dmitri. “Russia's Conservative Modernization: A Mission Impossible?” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, The Sais Review of International Affairs, 5 May 2010, <https://carnegiemoscow.org/2010/05/25/russia-s-conservative-modernization-mission-impossible-pub-41108>.

<sup>115</sup> “United Russia Party Charter”, *ibid*.

<sup>116</sup>“Народная Программа ‘Единой России.’” United Russia Party People's Program, United Russia, 2021, <https://er.ru/party/program>.

<sup>117</sup> See Figure 1

<sup>118</sup>Carter, Phillip M. “Long Before Shots Were Fired, a Linguistic Power Struggle Was Playing Out in Ukraine.” *The Conversation*, 17 July 2022, <https://theconversation.com/long-before-shots-were-fired-a-linguistic-power-struggle-was-playing-out-in-ukraine-178247>.

<sup>119</sup> Devyatkov, Andrey. “Rise of Militaristic Sentiment and Patriotic Discourses in Russia: An Analytic Review.” VISIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION: 45.

Shortly after the 2022 revival of military tensions, a Russian public opinion poll indicated that a majority of Russians do support the invasion<sup>120</sup>, possibly indicating an uptick in sentiment for the restoration of the Russian homeland. Over the past two decades, there has been a rise in political nostalgia for the Russia of old- military parades in the Red Square (à la USSR), the restoration of the bi-headed eagle from the Tsarist era as the national sign, and a new national holiday supporting the obscure Russian military defeat of the Poles in the 1600s<sup>121</sup>. The Russian people are being shown a mirror- one that tells them how great they are, how great they always have been, and how great they will become through the conduit of war.

Russian military attack patterns strongly support an argument of fostering domestic nationalism. By centering their attacks first on Crimea (in 2014), then in Donetsk and Luhansk, the Russian government signaled to their nationalist-minded voter base that the “old Russia” was a pre-evolutionary stage of the United one. The Crimean attack, in a Russian nationalist lens, was necessary for the confirmation of the restoration of “Soviet nostalgia”<sup>122</sup>. The attack centering on Luhansk and Donetsk would, in a similar vein, call back to the early USSR (when a town in Donetsk was infamously renamed “Stalino”<sup>123</sup>), and both fall under the Russian-defined idea of “Novorossiia”<sup>124</sup>. The focus on attacking Kyiv in the 2022 escalation despite its distance from either region asks the Russian nationalist audience to harken back to the days of the Kyivan Rus,

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<sup>120</sup>Parker, Claire. “58 Percent of Russians Support the Invasion of Ukraine, and 23 Percent Oppose It, New Poll Shows.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 9 Mar. 2022,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/08/russia-public-opinion-ukraine-invasion/>.

<sup>121</sup>Angela E. Stent, (2008), Restoration and Revolution in Putin's Foreign Policy, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 60:6, 1089-1106, DOI: 10.1080/09668130802161264

<sup>122</sup>“How Crimea's Annexation Plays to Russians' Soviet Nostalgia.” NPR, National Public Radio, 25 Mar. 2014, <https://www.npr.org/2014/03/25/294324006/how-crimeas-annexation-plays-to-russians-soviet-nostalgia>.

<sup>123</sup>“Donetsk.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, *Encyclopædia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Donetsk-Ukraine>.

<sup>124</sup>Sofia Cavandoli (2016) The unresolved dilemma of self-determination: Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk, *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 20:7, 875-892, DOI: 10.1080/13642987.2016.1192533

which was centered there<sup>125</sup> without leaving room for questioning any other logic behind their true motives.

Coverage of the Russian invasion is usually dominated (and for good reason) with headlines about the attacks on these three major areas. However, when examining the overall map of initial attacks and their continuations, the trend of focusing on historical hotspots of notable import to Russian, Ukrainian, and Kyivan Russian narratives continues. Chernobyl and Chernihiv were once crowns of the Republic of Novgorod (now largely Russian land), with Chernihiv actually being one of the largest European cities of the 13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>126</sup>. Neither of these spots today have any sort of extraordinary military strategic importance other than their importance to Russian history and proximity to the overall Russo-Ukrainian border- the land of Chernobyl is notoriously radioactive, and Chernihiv hosts a single military commissariat and military training school<sup>127</sup> for men required to report for mandatory enlistment- making the near-relentless attack on the city quite odd, especially given its 547-mile distance to central Luhansk.

With the Russian voting public moving farther towards a nationalist leaning, the absorption of these historic sites into Russian territory (or pseudo-Russian territory, as in the case of the proposed puppet states in Luhansk and Donetsk via passport extension and citizenship offers<sup>128</sup>) provides an ideal opportunity for United Russia to strengthen its grasp of Russian

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<sup>125</sup> Mark, Joshua J. "Kievan Rus." World History Encyclopedia, <https://www.worldhistory.org/#Organization>, 4 Aug. 2022, [https://www.worldhistory.org/Kievan\\_Rus/](https://www.worldhistory.org/Kievan_Rus/).

<sup>126</sup>"The History of Chernigrov." Chernihiv City Council, <https://translator.smartcat.com/demo-browser/f1069943-11a3-4cde-b2a9-726b8459e7ed>. Translated with Smartcat Website Translator.

<sup>127</sup>"Chernihiv Regional Military Commissariat." *Google Maps*, Google, <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Chernihiv+Regional+Military+Commissariat/@51.5005768,31.3121379,17z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m13!1m7!3m6!1s0x46d548f6221adebf:0x968a94610e36f9fa!2sChernihiv+Regional+Military+Commissariat!8m2!3d51.5004537!4d31.3141313!10e5!3m4!1s0x46d548f6221adebf:0x968a94610e36f9fa!8m2!3d51.5004537!4d31.3141313>.

<sup>128</sup>Underwood, Alice. "Citizenship Without Borders: Russian Passports for Ukrainian Citizens." *Wilson Center*, 3 May 2019, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/citizenship-without-borders-russian-passports-for-ukrainian-citizens>.

domestics. In each of the earlier-listed scenarios, the invasion would either derive power from Putin by strengthening national image, or giving them reason to focus the voter base more towards their policy by finding a nationalist-leaning replacement.

#### **Section IV: Putin's View From Here**

Within the scenarios, Putin still has the ability to stay in office, although his overall level of political sway may dwindle. A victory in Ukraine may direct nationalist voter allegiance to him instead of to the Party, although a loss could conversely suggest to that same voter base a weakness in fulfilling his own goals. He has a history of emphasizing nationalist talking points<sup>129</sup> to rally public support, meaning that he definitely has an advantage over United Russia in the voter base absorption. However, given the monolithic view of the two entities presented in a Three-Body View, it is unlikely that he would be able to become completely independent of the Party.

For any scale of manipulation to work, Putin must be aware of the precarious nature of his situation, and the direction he must lead the country in order to continue on his path with his family and his assets secure. It is impossible for a scheme such as this to work unless the man at the center knows what's at stake. Fortunately for him, there are several scenarios where this actually plays to benefit his longevity in power rather than to undermine it. Polls of Russian voters before and after the annexation of Crimea indicated that Putin is capable of greatly benefiting from wartime crises through the rally-round-the-flag effect. In 2013, 40% of polled voters said that they would vote for Putin in the upcoming election; by 2014, 68% of the voters said that he had their vote<sup>130</sup>, indicating that the war in Ukraine bolstered public opinion of him

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<sup>129</sup>Magnus Feldmann & Honorata Mazepus (2018) State-society relations and the sources of support for the Putin regime: bridging political culture and social contract theory, *East European Politics*, 34:1, 57-76, DOI: 10.1080/21599165.2017.1414697

<sup>130</sup>Alexseev, Mikhail A., and Henry E. Hale. "Rallying 'round the leader more than the flag: Changes in Russian nationalist public opinion 2013–14." *The New Russian Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000–2015* (2016): 192-220.

as the leader of Russia instead of diminishing their trust. Creating a second wave of the war in Ukraine could help him mimic the political events of 2014, and solidify his lead in the 2024 Russian elections at least partially free of his reliance on United Russia.

In any scenario where the war in Ukraine fails (whether through falling through on the plan to “liberate” Luhansk or Donetsk, or another self-determined criterion), it is entirely possible that Putin’s approval may not even receive any sort of devaluation. Through the earlier-explained Three-Body approach, I outlined how Putin, the Russian government, and the Russian people can be seen as three separate entities interacting to create the full Russian domestic political sphere. Through this same approach, it is possible to position the viewpoint of the Russian People to perceive Putin and the Russian government as a single entity.

In this lens, any actions that cause discontent on Putin’s part can also be seen as a reflection of poor governance by the Russian Federation administration as a whole. Thus, if the war in Ukraine fails to provide an adequate outcome, Putin will be well-positioned to argue that the failure is not his fault, rather it is the fault of the government as a single entity. From there, all he would have to do is create a wave of turnover of high-publicity officials directly connected to the conflict, and he would be able to argue that he has made the Russian government stronger than ever by identifying “weak spots” and “restor[ing]” a lost national strength<sup>131</sup>. This scenario would not solve for him the matter of inner circle members holding billions of dollars' worth of his assets, but it may allow for him to hold on to his position as President of the Russian Federation, at least for the time being.

### **Conclusion**

This paper is a unique addition to the field of International Relations (especially the study of Russian politics) because of the polar nature of the argument, and its presentation of another

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<sup>131</sup>Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich, et al. First Person: An Astonishingly Frank Self-Portrait by Russia's President. PublicAffairs, 2000. See: *"The Politician"* chapter.

approach to the war in Ukraine that deserves more attention than it currently receives. Through my analysis and arguments presented in the paper, I believe that Russian domestic politics are a factor in this war and should be explored more in depth. This paper is a constructive addition to the field on multiple fronts. It allows for the integration of constructivist ideas to the domesticist view in explaining complex phenomena in international affairs. Reality doesn't prescribe to one specific pattern, so its' analysis shouldn't either. Most political theories are likely at least partially correct in any given situation, so combining compatible approaches allows an analyst to mold the approach to the situation, instead of vice versa.

Previous analysis of Russian domestics often focused on viewing United Russia as an entity that can only follow Putin, but I have presented evidence in this paper's analysis of a potential power transition in the coming years. This paper has called attention to the possibility that the party will be shifting power away from Putin to maintain political stability, so I believe that future researchers will need to take this into account when conducting domestic examinations.

It is important to note that this paper has several confounds and limitations that must be addressed. I am new to the field, and have prior experience in International Relations, but not specifically in Russian political studies. Due to the lack of documentation of the inner circle, analysis of possible leveraging may have been hindered, and is largely hypothetical. This paper was written on a three-month time constraint, so analysis is incomplete, but may have room to be more in-depth.

Future research in the area should focus on measuring the extent of financial leveraging in Russian politics in quantitative instead of hypothetical terms. The ideal study would involve the use of more primary sources(interviews with politicians, conversational transcripts between United Russia politicians and Putin) to verify or contradict the hypothesis. This would be

especially useful in discussions of the “inner circle”, because direct evidence of leveraging or a lack of direct evidence of leveraging would be key to the proving or disproval of such a thesis.

## Appendix



Figure 1- *Map of Kievan Rus in the 11th Century*, courtesy of *Encyclopedia Britannica*<sup>132</sup>

<sup>132</sup>“Kievan Rus in the 11th Century.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Kyivan-Rus#/media/1/317574/3390>. Accessed 22 July 2022.





Figure 2- Reports of Russian Attacks on Ukraine, courtesy of NBC Miami<sup>133</sup>

<sup>133</sup>“Reports of Russian Attacks on Ukraine.” NBC Miami, 24 Feb. 2022, <https://www.nbcmiami.com/news/national-international/map-see-where-ukraine-has-been-attacked-so-far-after-russia-launches-invasion/2698893/>. Accessed 22 July 2022.

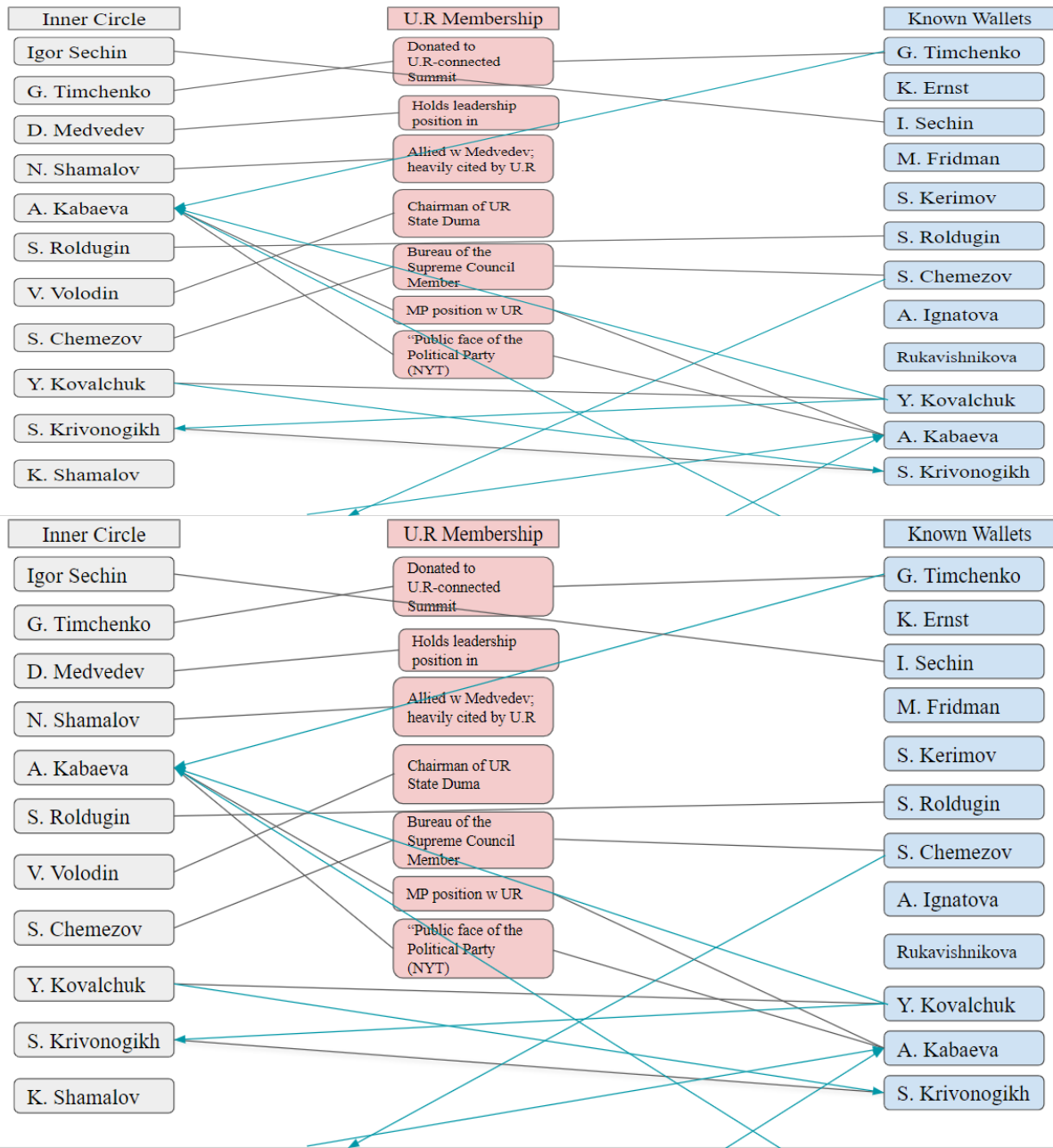


Figure 3- Full chart depicting Putin's known use of United Russia-aligned proxies for asset holding and gifting.

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