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WORKING PAPER

**45**

**ROBERT G. PATMAN**

**HISTORICAL ANALOGIES, GLOBALIZATION, AND AMERICA'S GREAT POWER  
RIVALRY IN THE UKRAINE**

**Project on:  
Globalization and the  
National Security State**

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**Historical Analogies, Globalization, and America's Great Power Rivalry in  
the Ukraine**

Robert G. Patman

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McGill University  
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**Robert G Patman** is HOD of Politics at the University of Otago. He previously served as the Founding Director of the multidisciplinary Master of International Studies programme (2000 and 2013); directed or co-directed the annual University of Otago Foreign Policy School on six occasions since 1997; and served as an editor for the scholarly journal *International Studies Perspectives* (2010 - 14). His research interests encompass US foreign policy, international relations, global security, great powers and the Horn of Africa. Robert is the author or editor of 11 books. Recent publications include a volume called *Strategic Shortfall: The 'Somalia Syndrome' and the March to 9/11* (Praeger, 2010) and three co-edited books titled *The Bush Leadership, the Power of Ideas, and the War on Terror* (Ashgate, 2012); *China and the International System: Becoming a World Power* (Routledge, 2013); and *Science Diplomacy: New Day or False Dawn?* (World Scientific Publishers, 2014). He is a Fulbright Senior Scholar, an Honorary Professor of the NZ Defence Command and Staff College, Trentham, and provides regular contributions to the national and international media on global issues and events.

## Abstract

**Trying to learn from history is both necessary and difficult. It is necessary because the past is the only data we have to deal with new events and challenges.<sup>1</sup> But it is very difficult to apply lessons of history to contemporary situations because the entire process depends on the effective use of reasoning by analogy. And such reasoning can be flawed. This has been highlighted by the recent experience of renewed rivalry between the U.S. and Russia over the Ukraine. Historical analogies have been invoked to highlight the “weakness” or ineptitude of President Obama’s policy towards the Ukraine crisis between 2013 and 2015. In this Working Paper, historical analogies put forward by traditional realists and a prominent exponent of offensive structural realism are considered in relation to the Ukraine conflict. The central argument that emerges is that these ‘lessons of history’ have a tendency to be selective or inaccurate, and that, on balance, it is the Putin regime in Moscow that is paying the most substantial price in economic, diplomatic and geo-political terms for its intervention in the Ukraine**

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Garfinkle, “How to Learn Lessons from History—And How Not To” *Footnotes*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, May 2001, Vol. 7, No. 1: <http://www.fpri.org/footnotes/071.200105.garfinkle.lessons.html>

## Historical Analogies, Globalization, and America's Great Power Rivalry in the Ukraine

Trying to learn from history is both necessary and difficult. It is necessary because the past is the only data we have to deal with new events and challenges.<sup>2</sup> But it is very difficult to apply lessons of history to contemporary situations because the entire process depends on the effective use of reasoning by analogy. And such reasoning can be flawed. This has been highlighted by the recent experience of renewed rivalry between the U.S. and Russia over the Ukraine. Historical analogies have been invoked to highlight the “weakness” or ineptitude of President Obama’s policy towards the Ukraine crisis between 2013 and 2015. In this Working Paper, historical analogies put forward by traditional realists and a prominent exponent of offensive structural realism are considered in relation to the Ukraine conflict. The central argument that emerges is that these ‘lessons of history’ have a tendency to be selective or inaccurate, and that, on balance, it is the Putin regime in Moscow that is paying the most substantial price in economic, diplomatic and geo-political terms for its intervention in the Ukraine.

### The Difficult Necessity of Learning from History

Because foreign policy leadership is an art rather than a science, it is a human skill that can be enhanced through learning. As individuals, we often experience events that are similar, but not identical, to events experienced in the past. If a new event is sufficiently similar to a previous one, we can retrieve our memory of that previous event and apply what we recall about it in the new situation. The method is first inductive-sifting historical evidence to produce general lessons-and then deductive-applying these lessons to other, newer circumstances taken to be more or less analogous.<sup>3</sup> This kind of knowledge transfer provides a high degree of cognitive economy.<sup>4</sup> Thus, for political or foreign policy leaders, the process of drawing comparisons between historical events and current or future developments is both natural and essential, especially during an international crisis. According to Yuen Foong Khong, ‘statesmen have consistently turned to the past in dealing with the present’.<sup>5</sup>

But it is very hard to identify useful general lessons from historical data and apply them to unfolding contemporary situations. The entire process depends on the effective use of reasoning by historical analogy. The term signifies ‘an inference that if two or more events separated in time agree in one respect, then they may also agree in another’.<sup>6</sup> Given that the shape of the current situation can only be discerned retrospectively, deciding which lessons to apply to the present—and not to apply—depends on intuitive judgment, not science.<sup>7</sup>

Certain historical analogies have proved particularly popular with decision-makers. Of these, the Munich analogy and the Korean analogy are perhaps most notable. The Munich analogy was popular with Tony Blair and George W. Bush in their reasoning on Iraq.<sup>8</sup> President Bush, as well as Colin Powell and Donald Rumsfeld, repeatedly invoked the “lessons of history,” asking the world to

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<sup>2</sup> Adam Garfinkle, “How to Learn Lessons from History—And How Not To” *Footnotes*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, May 2001, Vol. 7, No. 1: <http://www.fpri.org/footnotes/071.200105.garfinkle.lessons.html>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> John D. Steinbruner, *The Cybernetic Theory of Decision: New Dimensions of Political Analysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974).

<sup>5</sup> Khong, Yuen Foong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 3

<sup>6</sup> Khong, 1992, 6-7

<sup>7</sup> Adam Garfinkle, “How to Learn Lessons from History—And How Not To”

<sup>8</sup> Kornprobst, Markus, “Comparing Apples and Oranges? Leading and Misleading Uses of Historical Analogies,” *Millennium Journal of International Studies*, vol.36, no.1 (2007), 29

“connect the dots” and see that it was the Iraqi-President who was in fact the latter-day Hitler, and that a failure to stop him before he started a major war with his purported weapons of mass destruction would lead to global disaster’.<sup>9</sup> The Korean analogy was also an important component in shaping President Johnson’s view with regards to Vietnam. According to US Secretary of State Dean Rusk ‘by applying enough effort and enough time we [America] should be able to prevail in Vietnam as we had in Korea’.<sup>10</sup>

However, invoking history is not necessarily the same as learning from it. In practice, many political decision-makers seem only to learn selectively from the past, and often in a politically motivated fashion. Saddam Hussein was not found in possession of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. And the Vietnam War proved a costly and protracted war, which ultimately failed to save South Vietnam. According to Khong, ‘decision-makers invoke inappropriate analogues that not only fail to illuminate the new situation but also mislead by emphasising superficial and irrelevant parallels.’<sup>11</sup> They do so because they ‘tend to access analogies on the basis of surface similarities...that may lead to simplistic and mistaken interpretations’.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, decision-makers and other actors may use historical analogies to politically justify or advocate policy rather than learn from the past. In this vein, Arthur Schlesinger once observed that ‘the historian can never be sure – the statesman himself cannot be sure – to what extent the invocation of history is no more than a means of dignifying a conclusion already reached on other grounds’.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, the process of reasoning by analogy, whether by specialist advisers or political leaders, is prone to at least four types of basic error.<sup>14</sup> First, there are individual-specific errors that, for example, include a poor level of historical knowledge or idiosyncratic personality traits such as overconfidence or intolerance of dissenting opinions. Second, culture-specific sources of error that include culturally conditioned attitudes toward history, culturally specific perceptions, culturally specific inference patterns, or culturally-shaped approaches to problem-solving. Third, generic human nature constraints include the ubiquitous limits on cognitive capacities that make misperceptions and misjudgments almost inevitable, at least some of the time, or biases or errors motivated by deep-seated psychological needs. Here the “evoked set” looms large. This is a term derived from cognitive psychology that describes the tendency of human beings to see what we expect to see and to ignore what we do not expect to see in a particular context.<sup>15</sup> Fourth, context-specific sources of error would include time pressures, a passive media, institutional pressures, limits on information, and the political desire to remain popular.

## **Globalization, America’s Experience in a Post-Cold War Security Environment, and Obama’s Refashioning of US National Security Policy**

International politics has often been viewed in terms of an unmitigated struggle for power among nation-states. In particular, scholars like Paul Kennedy attribute almost constant and cyclical Great Power conflict to the supreme value that states attach to superior relative power. In fact, state-

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<sup>9</sup> Conolly-Smith, Peter, “Connecting the Dots”: Munich, Iraq, and the Lessons of History,” *The History Teacher*, vol.43, no.1 (2009), 32

<sup>10</sup> Khong, 1992, 111

<sup>11</sup> Khong, 1992, 12

<sup>12</sup> Khong, 1992, 14

<sup>13</sup> Schlesinger, Arthur, “Review of “Lessons” of the Past, By Ernest May,” *The Journal of American History*, 61 (September 1974), 443

<sup>14</sup> There is evidence to believe that analysts may be prone to distinctive kinds of errors under certain circumstances; Philip E. Tetlock, *Expert Political Judgment: How Good Is It? How Can We Know?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>15</sup> Adam Garfinkle, “How to Learn Lessons from History—And How Not To”

centred explanations for the end of the Cold War has somewhat masked the significant role that globalization played in shaping these events.<sup>16</sup> It should be stressed that the process of globalization began almost a decade before the end of the Cold War. In the early 1980s, the US and a number of other capitalist states underwent scientific revolutions in micro-electronic and communications technology.<sup>17</sup>

While the interpretation given to the Cold War's demise would frame any understanding (or misunderstanding) of the post-Cold War world, three distinctive features were immediately apparent. First, there were no longer military conflicts of a system threatening kind. After 1989, the prospect of global nuclear war had virtually disappeared. Second, the US emerged from the Cold War as the world's only superpower with no real geopolitical or ideological competitors in sight. Third, the post-Cold War world was and continues to be subject to 'thickening' globalization. The latter could be broadly defined as the intensification of technologically driven links between societies, institutions, cultures, and individuals on a worldwide basis.

According to McGraw and Held, the process of globalization has two interrelated dimensions. On the one hand, the concept of globalization represents a set of processes, which generate linkages and interconnections beyond the scope of delineated physical and human borders and therefore contributes to the de-territorialisation of social interaction.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, globalization also involves a reinvigoration "in the levels of interaction, interconnectedness and interdependence between the states and societies, which constitute the modern world community".<sup>19</sup> Overall, globalization implies 'a shift in geography' whereby borders have become increasingly porous<sup>20</sup> and where distances, either physically or representationally, have been dramatically reduced in the time taken to cross them. As a consequence, the world is perceived as a smaller place as issues of the environment, economics, politics and security intersect more deeply at more points than previously was the case.<sup>21</sup>

But diplomats and scholars have been divided on the significance of globalization for the evolution of the post-Cold War order. Three rival perspectives were evident. For some observers like

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<sup>16</sup> According to President Bush (Senior) the collapse of Soviet communism meant that America had 'won the Cold War' (President George Bush, State of the Union Address, *United States Department of State Dispatch*, Vol. 3, No. 1, February 1992, p. 73). That view was widely held in the US and the outcome was considered, in no small way, to be a triumph for the American model of national security that had evolved since 1947 (Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), pp. 548-9). This view was contested by observers who argued that it was developments in the Soviet Union that ended the Cold War. Here opinion was divided between analysts who believed Mikhail Gorbachev's policies and personality was crucial (Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 317) and those who claimed the cumulative degeneration of the Marxist-Leninist political system forced Moscow to opt out of Cold War competition with the US (Elizabeth Teague 'Current Developments in the Soviet Empire,' a lecture given at the 11<sup>th</sup> International Summer School, Institute of Security Studies, Christian-Albrechts University, Kiel, Germany, 28 July-16 August 1991). Rather less attention was given to the argument that the advent of globalization in the 1980s facilitated the convergence of both external pressures from the Reagan administration on the Soviet Union and long-term domestic pressures with the USSR to create a decisive impetus for change (Robert G. Patman, 'Reagan, Gorbachev and the Emergence of 'New Political Thinking'' *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 1999, pp.578-579).

<sup>17</sup> Ghita Ionescu, *Leadership in an Interdependent World: the Statemanship of Adenauer, De Gaulle, Thatcher, Reagan and Gorbachev* (Harlow: Longman, 1991), pp. 11-12

<sup>18</sup> David Held and Anthony McGrew, "Globalisation and the Liberal Democratic State," *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 28, No. 2, April 1993, p. 292; Christopher W. Hughes, "Reflections on Globalisation, Security and 9/11" *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 2002, p. 424

<sup>19</sup> David Held and Anthony McGrew, "Globalisation and the Liberal Democratic State," *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 28, No. 2, April 1993, p. 292

<sup>20</sup> Jan Scholte, 'The Globalization of World Politics' in John Baylis and Steve Smith (eds), *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 14

<sup>21</sup> Ian Clark, *Globalization and Fragmentation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 15



Kenichi Ohmae and Francis Fukuyama<sup>22</sup> – often referred to as the hyperglobalizers – it was anticipated that globalization would eventually lead to the demise of the sovereign state and reconstitute a world order based on Westphalian norms. In contrast, the skeptics or realists, which included the likes of Paul Hirst, Grahame Thompson and John Mearsheimer<sup>23</sup> within their ranks, contended that the impact of globalization on the system of states was much exaggerated. On this view, the state is not the victim of this process, but its main architect. To realists, globalization reflects the dominant influence of the major powers led by the US in the international system and is largely synonymous with Americanisation.<sup>24</sup> Finally, transformationalists like Anthony Giddens, David Held and Anthony McGrew, and Michael Mann<sup>25</sup> have rejected the tendency to juxtapose state sovereignty and globalization and maintain that the state is neither automatically diminished by globalization nor unaffected by it. Rather, globalization is reconstituting or transforming the power, functions and authority of the nation-state and ushering in a post-Westphalian world in which there is recognition of the growing interconnectedness between states and societies.<sup>26</sup>

In the post-Cold War era, the American approach to international security could be located along a spectrum between the views of the realists and transformationalists. Three distinct phases can be identified in what was a time of uneasy co-existence between American national security policy and a radically reshaped global security environment prior to the advent of the Obama administration in 2009.

### *1. The 'New World Order' Phase 1990-93*

During this phase, US policy was almost transformationalist in orientation. The crushing military victory of the US-led international coalition over Saddam Hussein's Iraq in the Persian Gulf War of 1990-91 seemed to affirm, in the words of President Bush (senior), 'a new world order' based on Western values of liberal democracy, market capitalism and international co-operation centred on US power and UN authority. But, and this point deserves some emphasis, President Bush's early post-Cold War vision seemed to be based on an reasonably inclusive conception of US hegemony that envisaged an expanded leadership role, albeit one through either partnership with multilateral institutions or in coalitions that enjoyed a wide measure of international support. Initially, the "assertive multilateralism" of the Clinton administration seemed to share many of the core assumptions underpinning the post-Cold War strategy of the Bush (senior) administration.

### *2. The Somalia Syndrome and the Return of the US National Security State*

The American-led victory in the Persian Gulf was, as Michael Mandelbaum pointed out, less the harbinger of the post-Cold War future than the last gasp of a morally and politically clearer age when inter-state war was the dominant form of conflict in the international system (Mandelbaum 1994: 3). In many ways, the disastrous US-UN humanitarian intervention in Somalia in 1992-1993 was a defining moment for US post-Cold War security policy and the beginning of a road that

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<sup>22</sup> Kenichi Ohmae, *The Borderless World* (London: Fontana, 1990); Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992)

<sup>23</sup> Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson, *Globalisation in Question* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1999); John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001)

<sup>24</sup> Sean Kay, "Globalization, Power, and Security" *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (2004), p. 11

<sup>25</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); David Held and Anthony McGrew, "The End of the Old Order? Globalization and the Prospects for World Order" *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 5, December 1998, pp 219 – 245; Michael Mann, "Has Globalization ended the Rise and Rise of the Nation-State?" *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 1997, pp. 472-96

<sup>26</sup> David Held and Anthony McGrew, "The End of the Old Order? Globalization and the Prospects for World Order" *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 5, December 1998, pp. 220-221

ultimately led to 9/11. The catalyst was a savage battle in Mogadishu on October 3 1993 between US forces and armed supporters of warlord General Aideed, which killed 18 US servicemen and more than 1,000 Somalis.

The loss of American lives in Mogadishu was a deeply shocking event for Washington, and, like Vietnam, Somalia generated a new foreign policy disposition or syndrome. The Somalia Syndrome encapsulated a deep scepticism of multilateral intervention in civil conflict situations and led to Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) 25 in May 1994, which said the US would only participate in UN peace operations if they were in the national interest. Convinced that most failed or failing states were not vital to American national security interests, the Clinton administration had retreated towards a selective engagement strategy that highlighted a more traditional state centric approach to international security.

After Somalia, there was a fixation in Washington of not “crossing the Mogadishu line” and allowing involvement in civil conflicts slide into situations that risked US deaths. This thinking shackled President Clinton’s decision-making in relation to the political crisis in Haiti in 1993, brutal genocides in Rwanda and Bosnia in the mid-1990s, continuing civil war in Somalia after 1994, and, to a lesser degree, constrained NATO’s intervention in Kosovo at the end of 1990s.

However, for the al Qaeda leadership the central lesson of Somalia was that “the Americans will leave if they are attacked.” Between 1993 and 2000, American personnel or allies were on the receiving end of violent attacks from al Qaeda or its associates in places such as New York, Addis Ababa, Riyadh, Khobar, Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, and Aden. Meanwhile, Osama bin Laden repeatedly and publicly declared war against America during this period.

Thus, the Somalia Syndrome marked the emergence of a dangerous gap between America’s state-centred security outlook and the transformed security environment of the post-Cold War characterised by the rise of new transnational challengers like al Qaeda. To be sure, the second Clinton administration did come to recognize the looming al Qaeda danger, particularly after the bombing attacks on US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, but its increasingly desperate efforts to deal with bin Laden were largely covert in nature.

### *3. 9/11 and Bush’s Enlarged National Security State*

The administration of George W. Bush rejected warnings about the al-Qaeda threat as a strategic sideshow and upheld the traditional view that global security was determined by the military capabilities of sovereign states. While the Bush administration administration claimed that 9/11 changed its strategic thinking, there was little evidence this was actually the case. By asserting 9/11 had suddenly changed the world, the Bush administration conveniently obscured the origins of the attacks and felt free to declare an all-out war on what was called global terrorism. The assumption that it was possible to wage war with terrorism led to almost exclusive military focus by the Bush administration in the conflict with al-Qaeda.

Beginning with President Bush’s State of the Union in January 2002 in which Iraq, Iran and North Korea were labelled the “Axis of Evil”, the Bush administration emphasized the ideas of US global primacy and pre-emptive war. In Iraq and elsewhere, the Bush team after 9/11 had few qualms about privileging America’s national security interests over concerns such as human rights and the rule of law. Allegations concerning US violation of human rights in Afghanistan, the almost indefinite detention of terrorist suspects at Guantanamo Bay, and shocking reports of abuse at the US-run Abu

Ghraib prison in Iraq provided propaganda windfalls for al-Qaeda and seriously damaged America's international image.

The expanded role of the Pentagon was underpinned by a burgeoning military budget. And much of the more than \$3 trillion spent on the war on terror was financed through borrowing. A combination of lower tax revenues and massive military spending not only undermined economic growth in the US but also contributed to conditions that precipitated the global financial crisis in 2008. America's rapid international decline during the Bush years seemed to bear all the hallmarks of what Paul Kennedy termed military overstretch and accentuated the impact of the continuing rise to power of China in the global system.

*“Leading from Behind” : Obama’s Refashioning of America’s Global Role*

Barack Obama had campaigned against George W. Bush's ideas and approach to national security, and his election victory in November 2008 brought a foreign policy learning approach that sought, in Paul Kennedy's terms, to reduce the continuing costs of decline incurred during the Bush era – the worst financial crisis since the 1930s and two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan – and accommodate the reality that the world had long ceased to be unipolar in nature. Compared with previous post-Cold War presidents, Obama went much further in acknowledging the enduring realities of globalization and positioning his foreign policy outlook in the camp of the transformationalists. According to Obama, the “simple truth” of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that “the boundaries between people are overwhelmed by our connections”<sup>27</sup>, and that “America cannot meet the threats of this century alone, and the world cannot meet them without America.”<sup>28</sup>

By all indications, the Obama team had substantially redefined America's national security interests to accommodate the lessons of the George W. Bush era. In Ambassador Rice's words, “if ever there were a time for effective multilateral cooperation in pursuit of U.S. interests and a shared future of greater peace and prosperity, it is now”<sup>29</sup>. A revised definition of national security also served to re-cast the notion of US global primacy. To be sure, the Obama Administration was saying that current global security challenges could not be met without U.S. leadership. But while U.S. leadership, in the words of Susan Rice, “is necessary, it's rarely sufficient”<sup>30</sup>. In specific terms, the Obama administration largely jettisoned the ‘war on terror’ rhetoric, withdrew all US combat troops from Iraq, attempted a more even-handed stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, escalated the ideological battle against Islamic terrorism, intensified the war against al-Qaeda and the Taliban in their strongholds of Afghanistan and Pakistan, pledged to reinvigorate diplomacy, ruled out US military intervention in the Syrian civil war, and sought, where possible, to negotiate directly with longstanding adversaries like Iran, North Korea, Cuba or Venezuela.

More generally, it is possible to identify a number of core themes and strategic convictions that arguably do point to the existence of a distinctive ‘Obama Doctrine’. Central among these are the renewed emphasis on soft power and diplomacy; the tilt towards multilateralism; the desire to lighten the US' global military footprint combined with a willingness to employ force in the defence

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<sup>27</sup> Obama, Barack “Remarks by the President to the Ghanaian Parliament”, Accra, July 11, available at <http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2009/July/20090711110050abretnuh0.1079783.html> (2 December 2010).

<sup>28</sup> Obama, Barack, “Remarks of President Barack Obama – Address to Joint Session of Congress, February 24, 2009: [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Remarks-of-President-Barack-Obama-Address-to-Joint-Session-of-Congress](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-of-President-Barack-Obama-Address-to-Joint-Session-of-Congress)

<sup>29</sup> Susan Rice, US Ambassador to the UN, ‘United Nations is Vital to U.S. Efforts to Craft Better, Safer World’, New York University for Global Affairs, 12 August 2009, <http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2009/August/20090813164826eafas0.287945.html&distid=ucs> [5 March 2011].

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

of certain US national interests; a re-framing of US exceptionalism in terms of the resilience and power of the American democratic and economic example; the ‘pivot’ towards Asia; and the belief in the necessity of flexibility and adaptability in foreign policy formation.

## **Case Study: The Obama Administration and the Ukraine Crisis, 2013-15**

### *Overview of Ukraine Crisis*

The beginnings of the current crisis in relations between the Ukraine and its large Russian neighbor began in November 2013 when the then pro-Russian Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich rejected a trade association deal with the EU and chose instead to take a \$15 billion loan from Russia.<sup>31</sup>

This move angered many Ukrainians who believed that Russian interference had stymied the EU agreement and sparked large-scale street protests in Kiev, which the Yanukovich government attempted to put down violently. In the confrontation that ensued, Russia backed the Yanukovich leadership, while the US and the EU supported the anti-government protesters.<sup>32</sup>

By February 2014, anti-governments protests toppled the government and Yanukovich fled to Russia. Denouncing the “coup”<sup>33</sup> against a democratically elected government in Kiev as illegitimate<sup>34</sup>, President Putin took steps to protect what he saw as key Russian interests. Before the end of February, armed men seized regional parliament and government buildings in Crimea, a peninsula in southern Ukraine whose population is mostly ethnic Russian. In March 2014, Russia troops annexed Crimea. Since then, fighting between Ukraine’s military and pro-Russia separatists has continued to rage in eastern Ukraine with the separatists seizing substantial areas of territory.

The US and the EU responded with economic sanctions. The first rounds of measures, applied in March and April 2014, targeted Russian officials as well as business people seen to have close ties with President Putin’s inner circle.<sup>35</sup>

In July 2014, a civilian passenger plane, Malaysian Airlines MH17, was shot down over eastern Ukraine, killing 298 people. While the Russian-backed rebels denied responsibility for shooting down the plane, the already strained relationship between the West and Russia was brought to its lowest point since the Cold War. Since then, the US and the EU has steadily expanded its sanctions programme against Putin’s Russia, and targeted major businesses and parts of the country’s financial, energy and military industries.<sup>36</sup>

After the signing of the Minsk Protocol between the Ukrainian government and the Russian

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<sup>31</sup> Ashley Fantz, “6 Questions – and Answers – about the Crisis in Ukraine” *CNN News*, 29 August 2014: <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/08/28/world/europe/ukraine-russia-questions/index.html>

<sup>32</sup> Max Fisher, “Everything You Need to Know about the Ukraine Crisis”, *Vox*, 3 September 2014: <http://www.vox.com/cards/ukraine-everything-you-need-to-know/what-is-the-ukraine-crisis>

<sup>33</sup> Rajan Menon, “A Ten-Point Plan for Ukraine”, *The National Interest*, 12 March 2014: <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/ten-point-plan-ukraine-10037>

<sup>34</sup> Mary Dejevsky, “Vladimir Putin’s world view: Russian President opens up on Syria, Ukraine and the West” *Independent*, 22 October 2015: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/vladimir-putins-world-view-russian-president-opens-up-on-syria-ukraine-and-the-west-a6704986.html>

<sup>35</sup> Priyanka Boghani, “What’s Been the Effect of Western Sanctions on Russia?”, *Frontline*, *PBS*, 13 January 2015: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/foreign-affairs-defense/putins-way/whats-been-the-effect-of-western-sanctions-on-russia/>

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*

Federation and the pro-Russian rebels on 5 September 2014, hopes briefly rose that hostilities could be ended.<sup>37</sup> The Protocol, signed under the auspices of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), was intended to implement an immediate ceasefire in the Donbass region of the Ukraine. But repeated violations of the agreement followed, culminating in the escalation of significant fighting in Donetsk and Mariupol in January 2015.

Altogether, nearly 8,000 people have been killed, according to the UN human rights office (OHCHR) since the conflict in eastern Ukraine began in mid-April 2014<sup>38</sup> and Russia has paid a huge economic price for supporting the rebels. The value of the rouble has almost halved against the US dollar, inflation has increased dramatically, and the country faces economic recession and zero growth in 2016.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, Russian-backed rebel forces have encountered increasingly stiff resistance from a Ukrainian government army that has been reorganized and strengthened after Petro Poroshenko was elected President in May 2014.<sup>40</sup>

These developments gradually seem to have had an impact on the situation of the ground in strife-torn eastern Ukraine. Hostilities diminished, and the leaders of Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany pushed ahead with efforts to negotiate a 12-point peace plan at a summit in Minsk, Belarus.<sup>41</sup> On 12 February, it was announced that the peace plan included an OSCE-observed unconditional ceasefire from 15 February, withdrawal of heavy weapons from the front line, release of prisoners of war, and constitutional reform in the Ukraine.<sup>42</sup> German Chancellor Angela Merkel viewed the plan as a better alternative to Washington arming the Ukrainian government, a development which Merkel said would only worsen the crisis.<sup>43</sup>

For six months after the Minsk II agreement, the ceasefire in eastern Ukraine largely failed to take effect. Significant numbers of Ukrainian soldiers died while Russian-backed forces maintained a low-level barrage of sniping and shelling along the front lines. But in early September 2015, the guns fell silent – just the Kremlin began to escalate its involvement in Syria. During the next six weeks, international monitors reported progress in implementing measures such as the withdrawal of heavy weapons from front line positions.<sup>44</sup>

However, in mid-November, Russian-backed rebels resumed firing at Ukrainian government positions again in the eastern region of the country, and 9 Ukrainian soldiers were reported to have

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<sup>37</sup> Lizzie Dearden, “Ukraine Crisis: Government and Pro-Russian Rebels Sign Ceasefire Agreement” *The Independent*, 5 September 2014: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/ukraine-crisis-government-and-prorussian-rebels-sign-ceasefire-agreement-reports-say-9714665.html>

<sup>38</sup> “Ukraine conflict toll nears 8,000: UN”, Deutsche Welle, 8 September 2015: <http://www.dw.com/en/ukraine-conflict-death-toll-nears-8000-un/a-18701777>

<sup>39</sup> Samuel Oakford, “Russia’s Economy is a Mess – and its Problems Aren’t Going Away” *Vice News*, 1 September 2015: <https://news.vice.com/article/russias-economy-is-a-mess-and-its-problems-arent-going-away>

<sup>40</sup> Oren Dorell, “Fighting eases in east Ukraine as Russia backs off support for separatists” *USA Today*, 16 September 2015: <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2015/09/16/fighting-eases-east-ukraine-russia-backs-off-support-separatists/72321252/>

<sup>41</sup> Patrick Donahue “Merkel’s Ukraine Resolve Tested as Putin Holds Refugee Key” *Bloomberg Business*, 23 October 2015:

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-10-23/merkel-s-ukraine-resolve-tested-as-putin-holds-refugee-key>

<sup>42</sup> Andrey Ostroukh, Gregory L. White and Julian E. Barnes, “Ukraine Peace Talks Yield Cease-Fire Deal” *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 February 2015:

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-peace-talks-yield-cease-fire-deal-1423731958>

<sup>43</sup> “Ukraine Crisis: ‘Last Chance’ for Peace says Hollande” *BBC News*, 7 February 2015: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31185027>

<sup>44</sup> Editorial Board “Russia opens fire on Ukraine again as the West stands by” *The Washington Post*, 19 November 2015: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/russia-opens-fire-on-ukraine/2015/11/19/2aac4f8a-8efc-11e5-baf4-bdf37355da0c\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/russia-opens-fire-on-ukraine/2015/11/19/2aac4f8a-8efc-11e5-baf4-bdf37355da0c_story.html)

died shortly after the resumption of fighting.<sup>45</sup>

## **The Obama Doctrine and the Ukraine Crisis**

Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, there has generally been strong support in Washington for Ukraine's sovereignty. In January 1994, the Clinton administration signed a tripartite agreement (involving the Ukraine, Russia and the U.S.) in which Washington formally pledged to uphold and protect Ukraine's independence in exchange for Kiev giving up its nuclear arsenal. This commitment was re-affirmed under the terms of the United States-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership signed in December, 2008. Meanwhile, President George W. Bush said he "strongly supported" Ukraine's efforts to join NATO.<sup>46</sup>

However, the context of the US-Ukraine relationship changed significantly during the first term of Barack Obama's administration. Having advocated a non-aligned position for the Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich was elected President of the country in February 2010. Within four months, the Ukrainian parliament voted to exclude the goal of "integration in Euro-Atlantic security and NATO membership" from the national security strategy of the country.<sup>47</sup>

The approach of the Obama administration to handling the Ukraine crisis has broadly sought to strike a balance between restraint and dangerous escalation.

### *Soft Power, Diplomacy, and International Engagement*

US Secretary of State John F. Kerry characterised Russia's incursion into the Ukraine in 2014 as "a 19th century act in the 21<sup>st</sup> century" while US President Barack Obama described it as a move that put Moscow "on the wrong side of history". The Obama administration characterised the Russian annexation of Crimea as a clear breach of international law, and said Moscow was "responsible for the violence in eastern Ukraine...The separatists are trained by Russia, they are armed by Russia, they are funded by Russia." That is, "Russia has repeatedly violated the territory and sovereignty of Ukraine."<sup>48</sup> But the Obama administration made it plain that it ruled out military action to solve the Ukraine problem. Instead, it pledged "to mobilize the international community to apply pressure of Russia" and Vice-President Joe Biden stated "as long as Russia continues on this dark path, they will face increasing political and economic isolation."<sup>49</sup>

### *Multilateralism*

The Obama administration worked with allies and partners to impose diplomatic and economic costs on Moscow for its actions in the Ukraine.

On the diplomatic front, the US and the EU showed their displeasure by excluding Russia from the Group of Eight (G8), an annual conference of the world's leading industrialized, democratic nations. President Putin was also cold-shouldered by other leaders attending the G.20 meeting at Brisbane in

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<sup>45</sup> Oksana Grytsenko, "Nine soldiers killed in last three days as fighting intensifies" *KyivPost*, 16 November 2015: <http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/nine-soldiers-killed-in-last-three-days-as-fighting-intensifies-402179.html>

<sup>46</sup> Luke Harding, "Bush backs Ukraine and Georgia for NATO membership" *The Guardian*, 1 April 2008: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/apr/01/nato.georgia>

<sup>47</sup> Valentina Pop, "Ukraine drops Nato membership bid" *EUObserver*, 4 June 2010: <https://euobserver.com/news/30212>

<sup>48</sup> "Ukraine crisis: Obama rules out military action" *CBC News*, August 28, 2014: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/ukraine-crisis-obama-rules-out-military-action-1.2749066>

<sup>49</sup> Vice-President Joe Biden cited in Mark Landler, "With Russia, as With China, Unnerved U.S. Allies Seek Reassurances" *New York Times*, March 19, 2014: [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/20/world/europe/another-set-of-wary-allies-seeks-us-reassurance.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/20/world/europe/another-set-of-wary-allies-seeks-us-reassurance.html?_r=0)

November 2014,<sup>50</sup> a humiliating experience that led to the Russian leader making an early departure from the meeting. At the same time, the NATO-Russia Council in April 2014 suspended all civilian and military co-operation in response to Russia's involvement in eastern Ukraine.<sup>51</sup> In addition, the US and EU quickly introduced a round of economic sanctions to punish Moscow and deter it from escalating its role in the Ukraine conflict. The first wave targeted initially targeted Putin and his inner political circle. These sanctions included asset freezes and travel bans.

### *Military Restraint and Burden Sharing*

As noted, the Obama administration has to date resisted any military intervention in the Ukraine crisis. As President Obama stated on 20 March 2014, "we are not going to be getting into a military excursion in Ukraine".<sup>52</sup> The Ukraine is not a member of NATO so Washington took the view that the Ukrainian military was largely on its own. In February 2015, Obama confirmed that his administration was not ready to provide lethal weaponry to Ukraine – and in so doing he remained committed to "diplomacy as long as it has a chance".<sup>53</sup> It is recognised that direct U.S. involvement in the Ukraine conflict would present a serious risk of escalation and given Russia's strong presence in the region – Russia has one of the world's largest armies and thousands of nuclear warheads – could provoke a greater Russian military response and perhaps increase, therefore, the possibility of a direct American-Russian confrontation.

However, the Obama team offered reassurances and additional military assistance to members of NATO that were alarmed that Putin's government might have territorial ambitions beyond the Ukraine. NATO states sensitive to this possibility included Poland and the Baltic countries, some of whom had substantial Russian populations. In the course of 2014, President Obama visited Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to emphasise that the alliance would protect some of its newest members from what he described as bullying from Moscow. In a visit to Tallinn, Obama observed: "You lost your independence once before. With NATO, you'll never lose it again...The defense of Tallinn and Riga and Vilnius is just as important as the defense of Berlin and Paris and London."<sup>54</sup>

### *Adaptability*

Following the shooting down of flight MH17 on 17 July 2014, a second wave of tough sanctions was introduced. These included economy wide measures that placed restrictions on lending to Russian state banks, imposed an arms embargo, imposed an export ban on oil technology and services and imposed an export ban on dual use goods that could be used for military purposes.<sup>55</sup> The burden of imposing the second wave of economic largely fell on the EU and Germany, in particular. The EU obtained a third of its oil and gas from Russia. Despite some domestic opposition, the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, worked closely with President Obama in implementing sanctions that targeted the Russian economy. Both Obama and Merkel agreed that Russia must face consequences for its actions in the Ukraine that helped to make the MH17 incident possible. While there is some disagreement as to whether these measures has affected Russian policy in the Ukraine, leading

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<sup>50</sup> "Ukraine crisis: Russia under pressure at G-20 summit" *BBC News*, 15 November 2015: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-30067612>

<sup>51</sup> "NATO's Relations with Russia" *The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation* (NATO), 11 November 2015: [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_50090.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50090.htm)

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> CS Monitor Feb 2015.

<sup>54</sup> President Obama cited in Kathleen Hennessey, "Obama reassures Baltic allies of NATO support amid Ukraine conflict" *Los Angeles Times*, September 3, 2014: <http://www.latimes.com/world/europe/la-fg-obama-ukraine-russia-20140903-story.html>

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Russian opposition activist Aleksey Navalny stated that “without these sanctions, the Russian army would already be in Odessa”.<sup>56</sup>

### *US Exceptionalism*

It's become clear that Obama believes his strategy in Ukraine has worked. He cast it as a central part of the emerging "Obama Doctrine" in a major foreign policy speech at West Point on 28 May 2014, arguing the U.S. was quick to mobilize international support to isolate Russia through sanctions.<sup>57</sup> For Obama, what makes America exceptional is a political model, which combines a free democratic system, dynamic market economy, social diversity, and ability to work with other states and international institutions in a globalizing world while upholding the rule of law.<sup>58</sup> Obama stated that America's ability to quickly gather international support for sanctions had "changed the balance" with respect to Russia and Ukraine.<sup>59</sup> Even before the Russian intervention in Ukraine, the Russian economy was struggling. In 2013, economic growth was a modest 1.8 per cent. Now, as a result of intensifying US and EU sanctions, Moscow had negative economic growth in 2014/2015, has lost more than \$150 billion in capital flight alone since the crisis began, and faces a looming economic crisis in 2016. According to Obama, Putin is operating from a “position of weakness” in relation to the Ukraine conflict and is surrounded by more and more countries that now want to move away from Russian influence.<sup>60</sup> In his 2015 State of the Union address, President Obama referred to the Ukraine crisis by saying “it is America that stands strong and united with our allies, while Russia is isolated, with its economy in tatters.”<sup>61</sup>

### **Historical Analogies and the Debate over US-Russian Rivalry in the Ukraine**

Some observers have utilized Cold War analogies and Cold War discourse to interpret and project Obama's policy in the Ukraine as one of ‘weakness’. Representatives of the Republican party, the CIA and the Pentagon have to a greater or less extent criticized the Obama administration for not recognizing that the Putin regime in Russia is America's number one geopolitical enemy. According to former Republican presidential contender, Senator John McCain:

"The fundamental problem is that this president doesn't understand Vladimir Putin ... He does not understand his ambitions. He does not understand that Vladimir Putin is an old KGB colonel bent on restoration of the Soviet empire. ... This president has never understood it... This president believes the cold war was over... Vladimir Putin doesn't believe the cold war is over”<sup>62</sup>

By recalling memories of the Cold War, McCain and other critics have tacitly contrasted Obama's ‘soft’ response to Putin's Ukraine policy with the containment policies that American presidents had previously deployed against apparently belligerent Soviet leaderships. Moreover, it is claimed, that Putin's muscular approach to the Ukraine was encouraged, at least in part, by the Obama

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> “Remarks by the President at the United States Military Academy Commencement Ceremony”, *US Military Academy – West Point*, New York, May 28, 2014: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/05/28/remarks-president-united-states-military-academy-commencement-ceremony>

<sup>58</sup> Robert G. Patman and Laura Southgate, “Globalization, the Obama Administration and the Refashioning of US Exceptionalism” *International Politics*, Vol. 53, No 1, January 2016 (forthcoming)

<sup>59</sup> “Remarks by the President at the United States Military Academy Commencement Ceremony”, *US Military Academy – West Point*, New York, May 28, 2014: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/05/28/remarks-president-united-states-military-academy-commencement-ceremony>.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid

<sup>61</sup> Transcript: President Obama's State of the Union Address, *NPR*, 20 January 2015: <http://www.npr.org/2015/01/20/378680818/transcript-president-obamas-state-of-the-union-address>

<sup>62</sup> Marshall Cohen, “John McCain: Mitt Romney and I were right about Russia” *CBS News*, 4 March 2014: <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/john-mccain-mitt-romney-and-i-were-right-about-russia/>



administration's reliance on diplomacy during the Syrian crisis after 2011.<sup>63</sup>

A number of other politicians and academics have described the Ukraine crisis in great power Cold War terms. Mikhail Gorbachev, the former Soviet leader, has warned that current tensions between the US and Russia have taken the world to the verge of a Cold War.<sup>64</sup> A number of senior American politicians have made similar comments. For example, Senator Dianne Feinstein, former Chairperson of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said in July 2014, after the shooting down of Malaysian Airlines MH17 in eastern Ukraine, that she believed US-Russia relations had again reached Cold War levels of tension.<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, a renowned American academic specialist on Russia, Robert Legvold, noted that the current crisis over Ukraine presented some disquieting parallels with the Cold War era. These include the readiness by the two sides to assume "that the core of the problem lies not only in the other side's behavior, but in the nature and character of its leadership"; "cutting off ties, refusing to engage, reaching for sticks and forgetting the carrots"; a shared "eagerness to see the threat in narrow national security terms"; and "a tendency to focus on tactical goals rather than the longer term future of U.S.-Russian relations."<sup>66</sup>

Furthermore, and not unrelated, a structural realism scholar, John Mearsheimer, noted that the "United States and its allies unknowingly provoked a major crisis over Ukraine". The Obama had failed to recognize that "Mr. Putin's behavior is motivated by the same geopolitical considerations that influence all great powers, including the United States."<sup>67</sup> According to Mearsheimer, the "taproot of the current crisis is NATO expansion and Washington's commitment to move Ukraine out of Moscow's orbit." Putin saw these moves "as a direct threat to Russia's core strategic interests."<sup>68</sup> The annexation of Crimea and Russian involvement in eastern Ukraine must be viewed in this light. And Washington, Mearsheimer argues, should understand Putin's concerns about the Ukraine. "After all, the United States is deeply committed to the Monroe Doctrine, which warns other great powers to stay out of the Western Hemisphere."<sup>69</sup> He adds that it would not be difficult to imagine "the outrage in Washington if China built an impressive military alliance and tried to include Canada and Mexico in it".<sup>70</sup> However, the Ukraine crisis could be resolved the Obama administration recognize Russia's security interests and accept "Ukraine as a sovereign buffer state between Russia and NATO."<sup>71</sup>

In short, historical analogies have been invoked to explain the "weakness" or the folly of Obama's policy in the Ukraine and how it has been out-manuevered by the Putin leadership in Russia. But how valid are these claims? It could be argued these analogies seriously understate the very real

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<sup>63</sup> Kilic Kanat, "Syria, Ukraine and Historical Analogies" *Daily Sabah Columns*, 9 March 2014: <http://www.dailysabah.com/columns/kilic-bugra-kanat/2014/03/10/syria-ukraine-and-historical-analogies>

<sup>64</sup> Justin Huggler, "Crisis in Ukraine Could Trigger Nuclear War, Warns Gorbachev", *The Telegraph*, 11 January 2015: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/11338393/Crisis-in-Ukraine-could-trigger-nuclear-war-warns-Gorbachev.html>

<sup>65</sup> Philip Bump, "Feinstein: U.S.-Russian Relationship is at Cold War Levels" *The Washington Post*, 20 July 2014: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-politics/wp/2014/07/20/feinstein-u-s-russia-relationship-is-at-cold-war-levels/>

<sup>66</sup> Robert Legvold, "Why the New Cold War Matters" 15 January 2015, *CNN Money*: <http://money.cnn.com/2015/01/15/news/economy/davos-cold-war-opinion/>

<sup>67</sup> John J. Mearsheimer "Getting Ukraine Wrong" *The New York Times*, 13 March 2014: [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/14/opinion/getting-ukraine-wrong.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/14/opinion/getting-ukraine-wrong.html?_r=0)

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

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin." *Foreign Policy*, September/October 2014 Issue,

<sup>71</sup> John J. Mearsheimer "Getting Ukraine Wrong" *The New York Times*, 13 March 2014: [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/14/opinion/getting-ukraine-wrong.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/14/opinion/getting-ukraine-wrong.html?_r=0)

differences between the international system in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the Cold War era. At the level of state-to-state relations, the distance between the US and Russia, in terms of national economic and military power, has appreciably widened during the post-Cold War era. Today, US remains the world's top superpower while Russia is a heavily armed but economically challenged regional actor. At the same time, the relationship between sovereign states and their international environment continues to be reshaped by the forces of globalization. Today, the most powerful states are more vulnerable and more interdependent than great powers of the past. If the events of 9/11 or the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 demonstrated anything, it is extraordinary power alone does not guarantee security or diplomatic influence in the world. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, controlling territory or so-called areas of influence is no longer as important as in the past.<sup>72</sup> It is not that today's great powers like the US or China lack national power or global ambition. Rather, they find themselves operating in a global context where the costs of acting alone have risen sharply.

Of course, such costs may not be immediately apparent to leaders like Vladimir Putin or to critics of the Obama administration like John McCain.

Here we must distinguish between the perception of international events and their actual impact. Putin's assertive approach towards the Ukraine has been depicted as an act of strength and the White House's military restraint as a sign of weakness. But is that really correct? Having lost a close ally in the Ukraine in February 2013, Putin's actions in Crimea and eastern Ukraine can also be seen as a somewhat desperate effort to shore up Russia's interests in a country, which apparently saw its future in alignment with the EU. If a regional player like Russia insists on a high-risk venture in the Ukraine, then there is little the US can do prevent such an outcome. Talking tough will not work unless Washington is prepared to back up its words with the threat of force. But the Ukraine is not a core issue for US national security, and there is little evidence that many Americans would be prepared to support a war with Russia over its meddling in the internal affairs of a neighboring state. At the same, the Obama administration believes that one of key lessons of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 is that the importance of military power should not be exaggerated.

In addition, Mearsheimer's claim that the Obama administration had provoked the Ukraine crisis by failing to recognize Russian core strategic interests is contestable. Certainly, he is correct to highlight that Putin's rhetoric over NATO expansion is central to his justification for Russia's involvement in neighbouring Ukraine. But there are grounds to believe there is a gulf between declaratory and substantive Russian policy. For one thing, there is little evidence to support the assertion that the process of NATO enlargement in Eastern and Central Europe was driven exclusively by Washington. In fact, the real impetus for NATO enlargement came from the countries of the region, which were determined to prevent the reoccurrence of the historical pattern of Russian interference in their internal affairs after 1945. So the key issue is whether neighbouring states of Russia have the right in the post-Cold War era to choose to make their own security arrangements. It was an argument that the Clinton and the George W. Bush administrations felt compelled to accept. Mearsheimer clearly believes that NATO enlargement was wrong, and that the most stable arrangement would be for the Obama administration to accept that Russia has the right to have "buffer states" like the Ukraine along its border.

Interestingly, Putin's rhetorical opposition to NATO enlargement in East Europe intensified after he returned as President of Russia in 2012. This suggests that Putin's sensitivity to events in the Ukraine is linked to domestic politics in Russia. On 21 November 2013, the Ukrainian parliament failed to pass the bill that would have ordered the release of opposition leader Yuliya Tymoshenko, and President Viktor Yanukovich suddenly cancelled the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement. The

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<sup>72</sup> Robert G. Patman, "Putin will find it hard to do as he likes in Ukraine" *South China Morning Post*, 13 March 2014: <http://www.scmp.com/comment/article/1447090/putin-will-find-it-hard-do-he-likes-ukraine>

latter committed the Ukraine and the EU countries to co-operate and align economic policy, legislation and regulation across a broad range of areas including the exchange of information in area of justice, human rights, modernization of Ukraine's energy sector, and the establishment of a comprehensive free trade area between the parties. Yanukovich explained that the sudden cancellation of the Association Agreement was due, amongst other things, to Russian economic pressure.

So why did the Putin government so strongly oppose the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement? An examination of the Agreement's terms shows that given the close links between the Ukraine and Russia it had the potential to affect Putin's authoritarian regime. Article 20 pledged "to prevent and combat money laundering", organized crime, and corruption in the Ukraine.<sup>73</sup> According to Karen Dawisha, all of Putin's election 'victories' since 2000 have been characterized by considerable fraud, and that key associates in Putin's inner political circle have amassed huge fortunes through cronyism, corruption and some links to organized crime.<sup>74</sup> The Ukraine-EU Association Agreement not only had implications for criminal activities in the Ukraine that had possible Kremlin links, but also might trigger political demands for reform in Russia itself. While Putin had effectively suppressed the protests in over 100 Russian cities over his return as President in 2012, he remained sensitive to the possibility that the extension of the rule of law and greater protection of human rights in the Ukraine could have spillover effects for his authoritarian regime in Moscow. Thus, Putin had a strong motive to oppose the 2013 Ukraine-EU Association Agreement and then respond quickly to the overthrow of the corrupt Yanukovich regime by intervening in the Crimea and eastern Ukraine. The argument that the legal provisions of the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement played a key role in shaping Putin's intervention in the Ukraine seems to be supported by the fact that the largely Putin-controlled Russian parliament is now proposing to pass new secrecy laws that would hamper attempts at fighting cases of corruption that have links to Russia.<sup>75</sup>

Certainly, Putin's muscular actions in the Ukraine have been widely regarded as a rousing success at home in the short-term. Putin has presented himself as a Russian nationalist who is prepared to use military force to assert Russian interests and rights in 'near abroad' countries like Ukraine. He has seen his popularity in Russia soar and polls indicate his personal approval ratings remain very high, often above 80 per cent. Winning at home matters to Putin. His government's extensive crackdown on independent media organisations and journalists, the systematic harassment and arrest of political opponents, and the growing restrictions on unauthorised protests and demonstrations all point to Putin's utter determination to be Russia's 'strong man'.

What about Mearsheimer's claim that the Obama administration should become more realistic and accept the Ukraine as a Russian buffer state? According to Mearsheimer "the West has few options for inflicting pain on Russia, while Moscow has many cards to play against the Ukraine and the West."<sup>76</sup> But where is the evidence for this claim? Putin may have behaved at times in the Ukraine as if he is leading the old Soviet Union rather than a post-communist Russia, but his intervention in Ukraine has had the makings of an economic and geopolitical disaster. Russia has a big stake in an interconnected global economic order. After intensified US and EU sanctions and a sharp fall in the

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<sup>73</sup> "EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (English version, full text), *European Centre for a Modern Ukraine (ECFMU)*, 6 December 2012: <http://www.modernukraine.eu/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/EU-Ukraine-Association-Agreement-ENG.pdf>

<sup>74</sup> Karen Dawisha, *Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), pp. 243-250; pp. 313-350

<sup>75</sup> Kathrin Hille, "Russia considers stronger secrecy laws" *The Financial Times*, October 30, 2015: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/fc155bca-7f25-11e5-98fb-5a6d4728f74e.html#axzz3tL3xb13Z>

<sup>76</sup> John J. Mearsheimer "Getting Ukraine Wrong" *The New York Times*, 13 March 2014: [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/14/opinion/getting-ukraine-wrong.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/14/opinion/getting-ukraine-wrong.html?_r=0)

global market price of oil, Moscow experienced zero economic growth in 2014 and 2015, and faces grim economic prospects in 2016. Meanwhile, US and EU support for the elected government in Ukraine has massively expanded in the face of the Russian threat. And NATO is actively strengthening its presence in the region around Ukraine. It is ironic, given Putin's strong opposition to NATO, that the Kremlin's heavy-handed approach towards Ukraine has actually strengthened NATO's position in Central and East Europe and now raised the possibility that politicians in Kiev could in the future pursue NATO membership for Ukraine.

Furthermore, Putin's Ukraine stance has left Russia diplomatically exposed and virtually isolated.<sup>77</sup> Only Russia voted against, while China abstained. This was followed by a UN General Assembly vote in which 100 states supported a resolution calling Russia's annexation of Crimea illegal. And with Russia deepening its military involvement in eastern Ukraine, Moscow's global reputation will decline even further. Putin's regime has shrugged this off by saying many countries do not understand the Russian position while others such as the US and the EU are simply hostile and want to keep Russia weak. Moscow insists it has other diplomatic options, including a closer relationship with China, but Beijing has made it clear that it opposes any threat to the territorial integrity and independence of Ukraine.<sup>78</sup> So the Putin regime finds itself insisting it is right on Ukraine and much of the rest of the world has got it wrong.

## Conclusion

Obama's approach to the Ukraine has been to keep the crisis in a post-Cold War perspective, work closely with European allies, particularly Germany, employ significant but non-military instruments of national power in response to Russia's perceived aggression, and provide opportunities for Putin to back down or retreat. The approach could be described as transformationalist in orientation. It has been measured, relatively low-key and recognises that globalization provides avenues for constraining Russian belligerence short directly using US's unrivalled military power. However, Obama's Ukraine policy is not self-executing and remains very much a work in progress.<sup>79</sup> Diplomatic penalties and several rounds of sanctions have clearly hurt the Kremlin and the Russian economy, but they have definitely so far failed to force Putin to return the Crimea to Ukraine or end Russian involvement in eastern Ukraine. And the inability of the Obama administration to either deter Russian intervention or quickly reverse its consequences has led to the use of historical analogies to illustrate the alleged weakness and incompetence of the Obama administration's approach.

While the process of drawing comparisons between historical events and current developments is both natural and essential, especially in times of international crisis, the Ukraine case study confirms that reasoning by historical analogy is an uneven process and susceptible to error and misjudgment. In this working paper, we have examined two types of critical response to Obama's Ukraine policy that have been significantly shaped by the use of historical analogies. Both are located in a school of thought that is generally skeptical about the international impact of globalization. The first – involving traditional realists – contends that Putin's assertion of Russian power in the Ukraine requires a direct response in kind from the White House in what is seen as a new Cold War between Russia and the US. The second group – including offensive structural realists like John Mearsheimer

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<sup>77</sup> "Russia vetoes US-sponsored UN resolution declaring Crimea vote invalid" *RT*, 15 March 2014: <https://www.rt.com/news/un-resolution-crimea-referendum-118/>

<sup>78</sup> "China's stance on Ukraine crisis" *Xinhua News*, 19 December 2014: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-12/19/c\\_133866454.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-12/19/c_133866454.htm)

<sup>79</sup> Michael O'Hanlon, "Obama the Carpenter: The President's National Security Legacy" *The Brookings Institution*, 25 May 2015: <http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports2/2015/05/obama-carpenter-national-security-legacy-ohanlon>

– believe that the Obama administration has inadvertently provoked the Ukraine crisis by failing to recognise the core strategic great power interests of Russia in its own neighborhood. In light of the evidence presented here, both groups of skeptics seem to selectively use historical analogies that either exaggerate American weakness or posit a conception of world order that is left untouched by the advent of globalisation. Both of these groups are prone to a tendency to see what they expect to see in the Ukraine and ignoring inconvenient information that contradicts that expectation.

The Obama administration believes that history is on America's side. It is confident that a democratic superpower like the US has the built-in capacity to renew itself and adjust to the challenges and possibilities of a globalizing world. But while American exceptionalism has been reaffirmed during the Obama years, the emphasis has been on the force of the US political example rather than the example of US military force. This approach has manifested itself in the administration's handling of the Ukraine and this in turn been shaped by Obama's reading of history. In a speech at West Point in 2014, President Obama said that while "we have an interest in pursuing peace and freedom beyond our borders [that] is not to say that every problem has a military solution. Since World War II, some of our most costly mistakes came not from our restraint but from our willingness to rush into military adventures without thinking through the consequences, without building international support and legitimacy for our action, without levelling with the American people about the sacrifices required."<sup>80</sup> By most measures, the Obama administration's approach to the Ukraine crisis has not proven to be particularly costly for the international position of the US. In comparison, the Putin regime seems to be paying a much bigger economic, diplomatic and geopolitical price for its interventionary policy in the Ukraine.

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<sup>80</sup> "Remarks by the President at the United States Military Academy Commencement Ceremony", *US Military Academy – West Point*, New York, May 28, 2014: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/05/28/remarks-president-united-states-military-academy-commencement-ceremony>

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