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Cold Peace:
Non-governmental Organizations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization:
Contributing Forces in the 2014 Ukrainian Crisis

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Abstract

Russian President Vladimir Putin's aggressions in the Ukraine demonstrate that diplomatic relations between United States (US) and Russia are again frozen. As with the Cold War, geopolitics lies at the core of this break in diplomacy. By analyzing the time period prior to and following the EuroMaidan protests, this study finds that democratization, Western-funded non-governmental organizations, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's eastward expansion were contributory factors in the creation of the 2014 Ukrainian Crisis. From a theoretical perspective, this study uses realism and institutionalism to explain the causes of conflict. In the current multi-polar system, this research maintains that geopolitics and security alliances are common drivers of instability in Eastern Europe.

Keywords

Introduction

Is the period of relative peace between major powers reaching its conclusion? If so, the 2014 Ukrainian Crisis may potentially provide answers to this question. Previous research has established great interstate wars are produced by an amalgamation of underlying conditions (Vasquez 1996:175). Unresolved territorial conflicts, security alliances, and multi-polarity are three causative conditions habitually linked to the hegemonic wars of the early 20th century (Vasquez 1996:175). While these three conditions were generally present during the 2014 Ukrainian Crisis, this incident did not escalate into large-scale interstate war; nevertheless, this should not minimize this conflict's importance, as it relates to international relations. One only needs to consider the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis to remember the extremely fine line that divides war and peace. Similar to the Cuban Missile Crisis, the 2104 Ukrainian Crisis was a seminal moment in international relations.

During the 2014 Ukrainian Crisis, the Russian government, operating under the guise of protecting Russian affiliated minorities and the threat of imminent North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) expansion, effectively exploited long-standing territorial claims, which Russian President Vladimir Putin ultimately used to destabilize the democratizing state of Ukraine (Walker 2015:43-45). Similar to Georgia, Russia's adversary during the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, Ukraine was not supported by any credible security alliance, which previous authors have suggested would have limited or prevented Russian aggressions in the state (Oğuz 2015; The Gum in GUAM 2006:5). While it would be difficult or impossible to verify the validity of a non-occurrence, such as Ukraine's inclusion into NATO, the Russian government fully understood that Ukraine's NATO aspirations were not achievable, in the long-term, and certainly was not a possibility in November of 2013. This research will show the risk to Russia was not security-related but, instead, centered on geopolitics. Russia was not willing to risk sharing or losing access to the Crimean port of Sevastopol, with or to the United States (US) or its allies. From Putin's perspective, the loss of Sevastopol would only further diminish Russia's standing in the region, where it had traditionally dominated as a regional power; as a result, the potential loss of this territory represented a breaking point for a resurgent Russia (MacKinnon 2007:82; Dunn and Bobick 2014:407; Kuzio 2005:513).

There were four proximate causes of the 2014 Ukrainian Crisis: 1) the EuroMaidan protests; 2) President Viktor Yanukovych's removal from office; 3) Russia's military occupation and backing of separatist regions; and 4) the Russian government's annexation of Crimea (Wolff 1103:2015). As in most conflicts, the underlying conditions that created this crisis are less obvious than its proximate causes. Yet, these underlying conditions are generalizable and more useful than proximate causes in the study of international conflict. Despite the potential enduring implications for the US and its close allies, hereinafter known as the US Alliance, as well as the Russian Federation, this research argues that the underlying contributory factors of the Ukrainian Crisis remain generally unexplored by scholarship. Thus, the objective of the following research is to begin to fill this void by identifying and exploring the causative conditions of the 2014 Ukrainian Crisis. The primary underlying contributing factors of the 2014 Ukrainian Crisis were: 1) Western-backed non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in the Ukraine; and 2) NATO's eastward expansion triggering Russia's territoriality.

Literature Review

The literature that prompted this study covers concepts and theoretical approaches that are relevant to an examination of the 2014 Ukrainian Crisis. While the existing scholarship is voluminous, the literature review further showed a need for this study's particular focus. As pertains to the 2014 Ukrainian Crisis, the current literature does not fully address the simultaneous contributing interactions of NGOs and NATO as antecedent variables to the 2014 Ukrainian Crisis. Because this research proceeds on the basis of realism and institutionalism, it is necessary to briefly examine these two theoretical approaches; attention is then paid to the concept of democratization.

Realism is "based on the core assumption that anarchy is the defining characteristic of the international system" (Lebow 1994:250). This suggests that central actors within the anarchic international system are primarily concerned with increasing power at the expense of other actors (Brecher & Harvey 2009:25). For the realist, the preeminent actor is the state. There are several competing explanations or "variants" of realism, which makes it difficult to falsify (Lebow 1994:250). As relations between states in the "developed, democratic states of Asia, North America, Oceania, and Western Europe" has continued to evolve during the 21st century, "anarchy [in the international system] have been largely overcome by a complex web of institutions that govern interstate relations and provide mechanisms for resolving disputes" (Lebow 1994:250).

Scholars developed the theory of institutionalism in an effort to explain growing cooperation between states. In the same manner as states, institutions were generally created to increase security, maximize relative gains, or promote human rights (Brecher & Harvey 2009:139). The primary difference between realism and institutionalism centers around how these camps traditionally view the international system and states. Realists perceive the international system as a zero-sum game, whereas institutionalists view it from a variable-sum perspective (Brecher & Harvey 2009: 139-140). Variable-sum is best defined as the potential to "have mutual gains of power not offset by equivalent losses somewhere else (positive-sum), and mutual losses of power not offset by equivalent gains somewhere else (negative-sum)" (Read 2012:6). Despite these differences, "[i]nstitutional theory accepts three basic realist assumptions: (1) states are the primary actors in world politics; (2) they can be analyzed as if they were rational; and (3) they are not altruistic but, rather, are broadly [self-preserving]" (Brecher & Harvey 2009:154).

Democratization is the process undertaken by states to become more democratic. In the most simple terms, "[d]emocracy is a form of government in which the people rule" (Sorenson 2007:3). However, most states, including the most developed, do not allow for direct rule; therefore, "the people" usually select representatives to rule. One key element of democracy is the "government's responsiveness to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals" (Sorenson 2007:13). Sorenson (2007:13) cites the following, as three overriding conditions a democratic government system should meet:

1)   Meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organized groups (especially political parties) for all effective positions of government power, at regular intervals and excluding the use of force;

2)   A highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies, at least through regular and fair elections, such that no major (adult) social group is excluded;

3)   A level of civil and political liberties – freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to form and join organizations – sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation.

Terminology, Theories, and Concepts

Terminology

1)   Western-backed or the West – any of the advanced developing nations, which practice democracy;

2)   Semi-authoritarian – any government combining elements of democracy and authoritarianism;

3)   US Alliance – democratic states, including NATO allies, which currently align with the US;

4)   Territoriality – actions, by state, to control regions not legally under its jurisdiction (Mote and Trout 2003:21);

5)   Standing – a notional concept, referring to a state's prestige, honor, or ranking in comparison to other states.

Theories

The objective is not to test the feasibility of using competing theoretical approaches, or to explain how the chosen theories could explain or have predicted the 2014 Ukrainian Crisis. Nevertheless, it is necessary to describe how theories provide this study with the proper lens to explore the 2014 Ukrainian Crisis.

During this examination of the 2014 Ukrainian Crisis, realism and institutionalism, two competing theories, were both key in understanding the contributing causes of the Ukrainian conflict. Within international relations, there is a tendency to minimize the inherent human element and complexities, which are inseparable in social sciences; consequently, authors will choose to subscribe to one "grand theory" and avoid applying simultaneously competing theories to interstate conflict (Dougherty & Pfaltzgraff, Jr. 2001:17). This study of the 2014 Ukrainian Crisis will break away from this theoretical practice. The following qualitative discussion will examine the Ukrainian Crisis by synthesizing realism and institutionalism to produce a multi-layered explanation for the 2014 conflict, which occurred between the Ukraine and the Russian Federation.

Realism aided this study's understanding of Russian behavior, particularly its decision to annex Ukrainian territory, whereas institutionalism provided a complementary-perspective to understand the behavior of Western-backed NGOs and NATO. While realism views the state as

the preeminent actor within the international system and is typically dismissive of the influences of institutions, such as NGOs, realists do view "institutionalized multilateral alliances", such as NATO, as credible actors, albeit as outliers, within the international system (Krebs 1999:345; Mearsheimer 1995:7).

It is interesting that institutionalists subscribe to the belief that institutions, such as NGOs and NATO, "push states away from war and promote peace" (Mearsheimer 1995:7) and rarely consider alternative outcomes. The events of the Ukrainian Crisis suggest that institutionalism is capable of fostering instability, particularly if these institutions seek to import new ideals, which challenge the political elite or regional power. Referencing Newton's third law of motion, if institutions can push states away from war, then certainly institutions have the potential to pull states into conflict (Cross 2006).

Concepts

While the United Nations (UN) advocates democracy and democratization, as a process that results "in a more open more participatory, less authoritarian society" (Boutros-Ghali 1996:1), the process of transitioning from an authoritarian to semi-authoritarian government is an uncertain prospect for authoritarian regimes, as this development usually threatens their control of the government and military (Carothers 2006:55-57). Nevertheless, authoritarian regimes will often attempt to incorporate democratic principles, in an effort to gain entry into international institutions, such as European Union and NATO, which expect and at times require transitioning states' governments to commit to the process of democratizing prior to gaining access to or membership in Western institutions (Donno 2013). In effort to maintain control while reaping the benefits of "institutional inclusion", authoritarian regimes will often attempt an untenable balancing act by seeking to restrict the spread of Western democratic principles while granting just enough electoral freedoms to be considered legitimate (Carothers 2006:55-57). Furthering this instability, are politicized NGOs, which are able to increase the political pressure in authoritarian states through funding, technical expertise, and by training these democratic agents how to mobilize their constituents (Grodsky 2012:1686). These institutions are legitimized by preeminent global institutions, such as the UN, which commonly views NGOs as "trustee" entities functioning on the behalf of disenfranchised citizens (Grodsky 2012:1686).

The Issue of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's Expansion

The Russian government's concern over NATO's continued enlargement began prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, shortly after the end of the Cold War. During this period, Russia believed the US gave assurances that it would not expand NATO eastward (Sarotte 2014:90). In early 1990, "U.S. officials working closely with West German leaders hinted to [Soviets] during negotiations that NATO expansion was unlikely" (Sarotte 2014: paras. 3-4). While NATO's future expansion resulted in a favorable short-term position for the US, the "advantage" also carried less favorable long-term consequences for the US Alliance (Sarotte 2014: paras. 23-25). James Baker, US Secretary of State from 1989 to 1992, recognized this fact and in his memoirs wrote: "Almost every achievement contains within its success the seeds of a future problem" (Sarotte 2014: para. 25).

In the current era of peace between the major powers, NATO's credibility and mission are questioned, and European states, including NATO member France, simply do not "view Russia as a threat" (Antonenko and Giegerich 2009:14). Some scholars have even argued that "NATO needs Russia more than Russia needs NATO" (Antonenko and Giegerich 2009:14). This has led some critics of the security alliance to conclude that NATO should work towards a partnership with Russia, arguing that without "Russian cooperation, there can be no security" in Europe (MccGwire 1998:1301). Others have emphatically stated that NATO is not an imminent threat to Russia, as membership is not a security guarantee because of a lack of solidarity (Brown 2014:203). Meanwhile, proponents of NATO expansion have argued that American military inaction in Syria, Georgia, and the Ukraine has adversely affected the security alliance's deterrence capabilities, which has consequently emboldened the Russian government (Brown 2014:208-209). R. Nicholas Burns, former American ambassador to NATO, once penned that "Putin respects one thing" and that is "power" (Brown 2014:207). If NATO no longer projects power and its members are internally divided, then it is reasonable to assume that Russia's concerns are not security-related and lie elsewhere.

EuroMaidan, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and Russian Territoriality

The EuroMaidan protests and Yanukovych's ouster were a breaking point for the Russian government and indicated that the Ukrainian government could possibly be pulled into a Western orbit (Mearsheimer 2014: 77-82). Putin's actions empirically demonstrated how adversely the Russian government perceived the EuroMaidan protests. He became convinced that these democratic protests would eventually result in the Ukraine pulling closer to the US Alliance and away from Russia. Consequently, Russia sought to tighten its hold on strategic territories within the democratizing state, which were primarily located in Ukraine's breakaway regions (Oğuz 2014:7; Mankoff 2014:60). To justify these actions, Putin would assert that pro-Russian citizens in separatist regions "constitute[d] a category of people that, under Russian law, can and should be protected by the Russian state" (Dunn and Bobick 2014:407). Putin would also state that Russia was following international norms and compared Russian's intervention in the Ukraine to NATO's humanitarian interventions in Kosovo (Dunn and Bobick 2014:407). Forever the strategist, Putin keenly recognized that the ouster of Yanukovych possibly meant that Russia risked losing its dominance over the Crimean seaport of Sevastopol and its monopoly over Ukraine's vast energy resources (MacKinnon 2007:82; Dunn and Bobick 2014:407; Kuzio 2005:513).

Despite being roughly the size of Delaware, the Crimean territory is substantially important to the Russian state (Varettoni 2011:88). Crimea allows the Russian Navy access to the coveted port of Sevastopol (Varettoni 2011:90). A 2010 deal between the Russian government and the Yanukovych administration to extend the lease arrangement for Russia's Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol underscores the importance of Crimea to Russia (Varettoni 2011:87). Additionally, in exchange for an estimated thirty percent discount on natural gas imports from Russia, worth up to $40 billion over ten years, the Ukraine, in 2010, extended Russia's lease until 2042 (Varettoni 2011:87), which only further increased the importance of Sevastopol.

The Russian government historically maintained control over the Crimean media to control public opinion in the region, despite attempts by the Ukraine to mitigate these influences (Varettoni 2011:91). Whenever the Ukraine considered moving out Russia's sphere of influence, Russia would ensure "Crimea [came] alive with anti-NATO protests" (Varettoni 2011:93). Russia's annexation of Crimea illustrated the true strategic importance of the Sevastopol port (Mankoff 2004: 61-67-68).

Moscow's Use of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to Justify Territorialism

Putin has openly expressed regret over the collapse of the Soviet Empire and resentment vis-à-vis NATO's eastward expansion (MacKinnon 2007:83; Wolff 2015:1103). Russia has frequently complained that the US had agreed that NATO would not expand eastward during the fall of the Berlin Wall (Sarotte 2010:120). Putin confessed on a Russian television interview in spring 2014 that "fear of Ukrainian entry into NATO had partly motivated his decision to annex Crimea" (Wolff 2014:1103). Putin claimed that, "Not doing anything about Crimea meant that Ukraine would be drawn into NATO in the future"; its ships would dock in Sevastopol, ''the city of Russia's naval glory" (Brown 2014:204). The US has long been aware of the potential dangers of NATO's eastward expansion:

> In May 1995, a group of retired senior Foreign Service, State Department, and Department of Defense officials wrote privately to the [US] Secretary of State expressing concern about [an expansionist] policy that [risked] endangering the long-term viability of NATO, [and] significantly exacerbating the instability that now exists in the zone that lies between Germany and Russia. [The policy would convince] most Russians that the U.S. and the West [were] attempting to isolate, encircle, and subordinate them, rather than integrating them into a new European system of collective security (MccGwire 2008:1283).

International politics and rhetoric aside, the significance of NATO's eastward expansion has been exaggerated, given the lack of solidarity within NATO. Since the end of the Cold War, the NATO alliance has disagreed over its own enlargement and its view of Russia as a potential adversary (Antonenko and Giegerich 2009:14; Yost 2010:521; Wolff 2014:1119). Moreover, while Putin frames NATO as a threat to Russia, it is unlikely that the Russian government's truly believes NATO expansion is an immediate threat to Russian security (Surovell 2012:162). Surovell (2012:165) take notes of "President Putin's 'previously unimaginable' post-9/11 concessions to U.S. Alliance including Russia's consent to the second wave of NATO expansion". In contrast to the Yeltsin era, NATO expansion does not pose a threat to Russia's security (Surovell 2012:165). Publicly, Putin, a former KGB agent, proclaims that NATO is a threat, when the Russian's leaders purpose is to regain dominance and control over former Soviet territories (Dunn and Bobick 2014:407; MacKinnon 2007:28).

In truth, Putin desires to reclaim Russia's standing, which suffered from the disintegration of the Soviet empire, while bolstering its strategic position in the region (Antonenko and Giegerich 2009:14; Dunn and Bobick 2014:405-406). A democratic Ukraine would undermine these efforts and significantly restrain Russian interference in its self-designated sphere of influence (Antonenko and Giegerich 2009:14; Dunn and Bobick 2014:405-

406). Putin has proclaimed in an open letter prior to his 2000 election that "Yes, Russia has ceased to be an empire, but it has not lost its potential as a great power…she must be reckoned with. To offend us would cost anyone dearly" (MacKinnon 2007:17). The latter part of this statement is important to examine, as it indicates that Putin is posturing the Russian state as the aggressor and not as a victimized state; it also shows that reclaiming Russia's lost global standing and honor is a top priority. For Russia, perhaps more than any other major power, honor frames its relations with other states (Tsygankov 2012:8). Putin's words show that NATO's expansion was not the primary or secondary threat to the Russian government. Primarily, due to its geographic location and embattled national history, geopolitics will continue to direct Russia's foreign policies, as the Russian government still considers the former Soviet territories within its sphere of influence.

The Russian government existentially had little to fear as it relates to NATO expansion; in the near or long-term, the most plausible threat centered on the notion that the new Ukrainian government would eventually grant the US Alliance access to strategic territories traditionally dominated by Russia. This development would have negatively affected Russia's perceived honor, as well as undermined Putin's goal of elevating his government's standing within the region and around the globe. Putin's actions during the Ukrainian Crisis prove that the Ukraine was different from Estonia, a NATO member, and Georgia, a state that aspires to NATO membership. The general difference, in these states and the Ukraine, centers on the Crimean Peninsula, where Sevastopol is located. Putin strategically recognized that EuroMaidan provided Russia an opening to take back Crimea, sixty years after the republic had been transferred to the Ukraine by Soviet reformist leader Nikita Khrushchev (Varettoni 2011:89).

Due to a lack of solidarity amongst NATO members, the Russian government was likely confident that NATO would not act quickly on the behalf of any non-NATO member state. Moreover, by maintaining that he was acting on behalf of Russian speakers in Crimea, Putin elevated his administration's standing in the view of Russians and Ukrainians (Tir 2010:413-415; Dunn and Bobick 2014:406-407); furthermore, these protective actions work to enhance Putin's bid to remain in power for the foreseeable future (What is Happening 2015:37). Additionally, annexation of Crimea and the Sevastopol port allow Russia to forgo its agreement with the Ukrainian government to discount Ukrainian oil in return for continued leasing of the Crimean port.

Destabilizing Institutions: Non-governmental Organizations – Agents of Democratization

Beginning in the mid-1990s, Western-funded NGOs in the Ukraine began to allow liberal activities, which would eventually cultivate the democratic institutions that would give rise to the 2014 Ukrainian Crisis (Shulman and Bloom 2012). Following Ukraine's independence, Western-funded NGOs began to gradually grow under President Leonid Kuchma, who tolerated Western ideas and developmental funding to flow through the state while at the same time permitting Russia to continue its dominance of Ukraine's political and economic institutions (MacKinnon 2007:159). Kuchma's duplicitous foreign policy aimed to reap the benefits of "playing [the US Alliance] and Russia against each other (MacKinnon 2007:81). While Kuchma was elected for a second term in 1999, his presidency soon collapsed amidst "scandal and controversy" (Sakwa 2014:51). In late 2000, Kuchma was implicated in the murder of investigative opposition

journalist Heorhiy Gongadze (Kuzio 2005:491). The murder of Gongadze provoked the first wave of popular mobilization in the Ukraine against Kuchma (Sakwa 2014:51). His implication in the murder of Gongadze politically crippled Kuchma and further restricted the Ukrainian leader from obstructing the establishment of democratic principles in the Ukraine (MacKinnon 2007:174). Kuchma, like many semi-authoritarians, attempted to maintain a political balance by allowing just enough political freedoms to be considered legitimate, all the while maintaining enough power to suppress any serious threat (Carothers 2006: para. 12).

Western-Supported Non-governmental Organizations and the Political Opposition

As the beneficiaries of influential Western NGOs, such as Freedom House, National Democratic Institute (NDI), National Endowment for Democracy, and International Republican Institute (IRI), Ukrainian NGOs were able to support opposition political blocs primarily in three ways: by providing financial support and political campaign training and by granting access to influential Western leaders (Shulman and Bloom 2012:454). In post-Soviet states, the US Alliance's support of regional NGOs has aimed at making these groups sufficiently active and independently capable of influencing the political apparatus of the targeted state (Lutsevych 2013:3). Western support has typically benefited opposition parties, even though "aid was never specifically earmarked for any particular group, frequently only opposition parties were invited, or incumbents", to include opposition factions, elected not to seek out assistance from these Western entities (Shulman and Bloom 2012:454). Following the Orange Revolution, foreign aid to Ukrainian NGOs decreased, as many US donors were satisfied with the election of pro-Western presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko.

Western-backed NGOs' training of opposition political parties was pivotal in the lead up to the 2004 Ukrainian election. Millions of dollars, from developed democracies, were allocated "to build political parties and strengthen civil society in Ukraine" (Shulman and Bloom 2012:454). "Our Ukraine", Yushchenko's political bloc, reported that his organization "benefited from years of close relationships with IRI, and NDI" (McFaul 2015:73). IRI conducted multiparty training programs for opposition leaders, while NDI provided trainers to the "Our Ukraine" bloc, as well as other parties (McFaul 2015:73). IRI was responsible for arranging for Yushchenko's trip to the US, where he was able influence such elite American political figures as President Bush, George W. Senator Richard Lugar, and former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, while dramatically improving the pro-Western candidate's image (McFaul 2015:74).

Non-governmental Organizations and Electoral Transparency

The training and technical expertise transferred between the US Alliance and Ukrainian NGOs played perhaps the most critical role in creating the conditions that led to the EuroMaidan Protests. As in most developing states, aspects of direct voter fraud are well known, but preventing these violations requires ensuring the "procedural guarantees of fair elections in the months before the polls even open" (Wallander 2005:94). Western support of local NGOs allowed these institutions to effectively train election monitors and create professional and balanced election commissions, as well as conduct credible opinion and exit polls well ahead of the election (Wallander 2005:94). During the 2004 Election, Ukrainian and international NGOs

were active in training non-partisan groups in how to effectively monitor polling stations and count voting results (Wallander 2005:94).

The Committee of Ukrainian Voters (CVU), the largest and most visible domestic NGO in the Ukraine, played a leading role in exposing fraud (McFaul 2007:75). The CVU fielded a network of approximately 10,000 monitors and undertook legal actions of the legitimacy of the disputed official results (McFaul 2007:75). Large-scale NGOs, such as the International Renaissance Foundation, funded by American billionaire philanthropist George Soros, "contributed major financial resources to the CVU" (Jasper 2014:25; McFaul 2007:75). Various other NGOs underwritten by the US exposed fraud to the public by dropping leaflets which reminded officials who worked for the Central Election Commission of the legal consequences of electoral fraud (McFaul 2007:75-76). Civil service entities, backed by Western organizations, "ultimately proved effective in preventing Yanukovych from illegally claiming victory in the second round of the election, much to Putin's surprise and disapproval" (Shulman and Bloom 2012:454). Almost a decade later, the 2013 massive protests against now President Yanukovych proved that Ukrainians could now independently mobilize in force.

The Development of Free Media

The emergence of free media was a long-term effort, which resulted from Western-funded NGOs' training of Ukrainian journalists and media members over the course of several years. In 1982, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) funded the startup of an NGO called Internews in the U.S (MacKinnon 2007:198-199). Over the next two decades, Internews trained "two thousand Ukrainian journalists in Western standards of reporting" (MacKinnon 2007:199). Throughout the Orange Revolution, "Western states, IOs, and NGOs distributed funds to Ukrainian NGOs and supported alternative media in the Orange Revolution" (Shulman and Bloom 2012:457). Western-funded NGOs were able to advance democracy through its support of opposition political parties, electoral transparency, voters' rights, and the cultivation of free media via the Orange Revolution. Yet, the Orange Revolution was not the watershed moment for the Ukraine's civil society; this distinction would belong to EuroMaidan.

In contrast to the heavily Western supported 2004 Orange Revolution, the EuroMaidan protests primarily relied on Ukrainian "private citizens rather than preexisting organizations or elites" (Way 2014:41). Four years prior to EuroMaidan, the Ukrainian civil society's campaign against corruption and semi-authoritarianism was at a standstill, as Yanukovych had made several pro-Russian overtures and policy decisions (Varettoni 2011: 42). In the following years, political observers of the Orange Revolution were likely discouraged to see Yanukovych reemerge as Prime Minister, and eventually as President in 2010. The EuroMaidan protests demonstrated that the seeds of democracy, sowed during the Orange Revolution, remained fertile. EuroMaidan was a defining moment for the Ukraine, and it was cultivated by Western-backed NGOs. Consequently, the democratization of the Ukraine provoked Russia to consolidate its geopolitical interests in the Ukrainian state. Russia was not willing to entertain the chance that the new government in the Ukraine would potentially open the Sevastopol port in Crimea and other Russian strongholds to the US Alliance.

Conclusions: NGOs and NATO – Contributors or Non-Factors?

This study's objective was to explore how Western-backed NGOs and NATO contributed to the 2014 Ukrainian Crisis. This examination found that NGOs were a primary contributing factor, while NATO was a non-contributing element, which Russia nevertheless exploited to achieve its long-term regional aspirations. Additionally, this paper's selection of realism and institutionalism proved to illuminate, as well as provide a framework to explain the behavior and motives of, Russia, NATO, and NGOs prior to and during the 2014 conflict. While these findings generally concurred with the hypothesis, that NATO's expansion was essentially a non-factor as it relates to the 2014 Ukrainian Crisis was slightly surprising. Furthermore, as NATO member states are unlikely to accept fractured states, such as the Ukraine, as full members of the security alliance, the second part of the hypothesis, as it pertains to NATO expansion, proved to be null. Consequently, Russia's decision to invade Ukraine carried minimal risk and maximum reward for Putin and the Russian government. The actual tangible concern of the Russian government was the prospect of losing control over the port of Sevastopol.

Western-funded NGOs made vast contributions to develop and promote democracy in the Ukraine. These institutions' "contributions", in the long-term, worked to destabilize the Ukrainian state and drive the Russian government into action against the new democracy. In effect, these events strengthened Putin's position in the region while weakening the prospect of further democratization in the Ukraine. In comparison, NGOs were far more influential, as contributors, than the unrealized threat of NATO's expansion. This exploration ultimately found that NGOs were significant contributors in the democratization of the Ukraine, which led to the political upheaval known as EuroMaidan; the prospect of NATO's eastward expansion, at best, served as a cover for the Russian government to seize strategic interests in Ukraine.

It is a substantial undertaking to explain the behavior of states and international institutions and condense it to several pages, as was done in this study. An aim of this paper was to fold these events into a digestible package. International actors operate on multiple levels and are influenced by multiple factors. This exploration recognizes that there are several residual questions regarding the underlying causes of the 2014 Ukrainian Conflict. Perhaps by opening the "doors" to this discussion, subsequent scholarship will take the opportunity to step through these newly opened "doorways" to form new hypotheses about international conflict in this era of cold peace.

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