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# CONNECTIONS

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## Blending New-generation Warfare and Soft Power: Hybrid Dimensions of Russia-Bulgaria Relations

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**Abstract:** In order to effectively counter hybrid warfare, it is necessary to understand it. However, certain aspects of hybrid warfare are often confused with traditional soft power. This article aims to highlight the differences between the two by analyzing the relationship between Bulgaria and Russia. The latter enjoys considerable opportunities to exercise soft power, but often must accompany them with hybrid means. Yet, labeling everything as hybrid warfare becomes detrimental to the topic itself. Moreover, it runs the risk of ascribing greater power to the Kremlin which may not truly be the case. The aim of the authors is to expose the threats, opportunities, and limits of Russian influence in Bulgaria and the possible outcomes.

**Keywords:** Russia, Bulgaria, hybrid threats, hybrid warfare, soft power.

### Introduction

Following Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 the popularity of the term 'hybrid warfare' increased significantly. Albeit many scholars and strategists have addressed this topic since the 90s, it has also become part of the lexicon of journalists, politicians, and the general public. In 2015 Janis Berzins correctly noted that "the word hybrid is catchy since it may represent a mix of anything."<sup>1</sup> This often leads to mistaking soft power, or even mere interaction be-

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<sup>1</sup> Jānis Bērziņš, "A New Generation of Warfare," *Per Concordiam* 6, no. 3 (2015): 24, accessed March 13, 2018, [http://www.marshallcenter.org/mcpublicweb/MCDocs/files/College/F\\_Publications/perConcordiam/pC\\_V6N3\\_en.pdf](http://www.marshallcenter.org/mcpublicweb/MCDocs/files/College/F_Publications/perConcordiam/pC_V6N3_en.pdf).

tween states, for forms of hybrid warfare. The crux is that the term has come to serve as a general description of all non-conventional conflicts.

Nevertheless, research and debate regarding hybrid warfare are vital, as Russia's version—the *new generation warfare*—caught almost the entire world off-guard in 2014. Moreover, in many ways, the United States, NATO, and the European Union are still struggling to find an adequate defense or counter-measures against it. This is especially troubling, as non-linear warfare is nothing new. Even in recent years we have seen examples of hybrid warfare conducted by Hezbollah against Israel, Turkey against the Kurds, and even Russia against Georgia in 2008. Moreover, in Bulgaria's case the majority of risks for its national security emanate from outside its borders.<sup>2</sup>

This article focuses on the relations between Russia and Bulgaria. This case is particularly interesting as the countries share many ties – historic, cultural, linguistic, and economic, among many others. Thus, it is evident that the Kremlin has many opportunities to exercise influence in Bulgaria and even shape public perception and mold the political landscape. The authors will try to enhance the understanding of hybrid warfare and its ambit by analyzing the relations between a resurging power and a country that is both an EU and NATO member. To do so, the article first looks at what is *de facto* hybrid warfare, both from a historical and military perspective. Second, the authors analyze Russia's new generation warfare. Finally, the paper considers the concrete examples of Russia's hybrid warfare against Bulgaria.

## Hybrid Warfare

Due to the popularity of the term, its definitions have grown exponentially in recent years. However, it is vital to have a working definition, as the way policy and decision-makers perceive it, determines their response. The authors offer two possible ways of analyzing this 'new' form of warfare – from a historical and a military/operational perspective.

Warfare *sui generis* is a socio-historical phenomenon and, as Daniel-Cornel Ștefănescu notes, is “a violent manifestation of conflicting political relations between large groups of people (classes, nations, states, coalitions of states), organized military groups”<sup>3</sup> that pursue a specific goal – territorial, religious, political, economic, or other. Thus, it should be of no surprise that throughout his-

<sup>2</sup> Ivo Zahariev, “Building up Capabilities for Assessment of Crisis and Conflict Regions in Response of Hybrid Threats and Conflicts,” *Bulgarian Military Thought*, April 11, 2018, accessed September 15, 2018, <https://bvm.bg/en/2018/04/11/%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B6%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B5-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D1%81%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%81%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%BE%D1%86%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D0%BD/>.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel-Cornel Ștefănescu, “Is hybrid Warfare a New Manner of Conducting Warfare,” *Review of the Air Force Academy* 14, no. 2 (2016): 155-160, quote on p. 155, <https://doi.org/10.19062/1842-9238.2016.14.2.20>.

tory, military strategists have strived to develop tactics to compel the enemy to do their bidding. The earliest definition of what is currently described as hybrid warfare, can probably be identified in the writing of the Chinese general, Sun Tzu. The ancient military strategist wrote about attacking the orthodox with the unorthodox<sup>4</sup> as way to surprise the enemy, and emphasized that the supreme art of war is to subdue your enemy without fighting.<sup>5</sup> However, to get a more concrete definition, one can turn to Peter Mansoor, a military historian, who describes it as a “conflict involving a combination of conventional military forces and irregulars (guerrillas, insurgents, and terrorists), which could include both state and non-state actors, aimed at achieving a common political purpose.”<sup>6</sup> This indicates, first, that since ancient times military strategists have considered ways to militarize various means and, second, that what we now refer to as “hybrid” is nothing particularly new. Moreover, using insurgents and guerilla fighters is also not only a 21<sup>st</sup> century strategy. Such fighters have been used throughout history and have caused much trouble for many superior armies – from the US’s wars in Vietnam to Iraq and Afghanistan. History is full of such examples, formidable armies like Hitler’s Wermacht and Napoleon’s Grand Armee also “struggled to combat irregular fighters who understood and exploited the local human and geographical terrain and targeted vulnerable logistic bases and lines of communication.”<sup>7</sup>

At the turn of the century, the definition expanded to incorporate non-state actors and cyberwarfare. Thus, elaborations on hybrid warfare were focused on blending conventional and irregular methods in conflict, or in other words: “Threats that incorporate a full range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder, conducted by both sides and a variety of non-state actors.”<sup>8</sup> It is *de facto* this blending of conventional and irregular means of waging war that distinguishes hybrid warfare from conventional historical forms. As Prof. James Wither emphasizes, in the past, “conventional and irregular operations tended to take place concurrently but separately, rather than being integrated.”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, historically, irregular fighters were secondary to the conventional military campaign, where-

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<sup>4</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, accessed April 27, 2018, <http://classics.mit.edu/Tzu/artwar.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Tzu, *The Art of War*.

<sup>6</sup> Peter R. Mansoor, “Hybrid War in History,” in *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present*, ed. Williamson Murray and Peter R. Mansoor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 2.

<sup>7</sup> James K. Wither, “Making Sense of Hybrid Warfare,” *Connections* 15, no. 2 (2016): 73-87.

<sup>8</sup> Frank G. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars* (Arlington, VA: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, December 2007), 8.

<sup>9</sup> Wither, “Making Sense of Hybrid Warfare.”

as now they have come to take place concurrently and in an integrated manner.

Furthermore, a significant aspect of contemporary conflicts are the developments in information warfare. This particular issue came into the spotlight during the events that unfolded in Crimea in 2014 and afterwards. Moscow employed methods that blended conventional and irregular combat, economic coercion, sponsorship of political protests, and the now notorious disinformation campaign. This led the then NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen to define hybrid warfare as a “combination of military action, covert operations and an aggressive program of disinformation.”<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, while from a historical perspective hybrid warfare is nothing new, this definition emphasizes the non-military means and the importance of information warfare. This *de facto* shows the horizontal growth of warfare: employing all possible means, including conventional interaction between states, to blur the lines not only between war and peace, but between competition and subversion.

The Prussian General Carl Philip von Clausewitz once famously described war as “the continuation of politics by other means.”<sup>11</sup> However, politics and warfare are not divided by a single ‘step.’ Hybrid warfare aims to incorporate the entire spectrum between the two – if the means to achieving the political goal has a “Clausewitzian” method of achieving it, i.e. to give the unconventional a conventional military aim, the hybrid aspect is added. This itself places greater emphasis on the non-conventional means to conduct such operations.<sup>12</sup>

## Not Only Russia

While this paper focuses on Russia, it must be emphasized that Kremlin is neither the creator of hybrid warfare, nor the sole actor practicing it. With its supremacy after the end of the Cold War, the West has forced other state and non-state actors to develop strategies and tactics than can act as a countermeasure. As they seek to exploit vulnerabilities, they are asymmetric and can therefore shift into non-military fields, further expanding the grey area between war and peace.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Mark Landler and Michael R. Gordon, “NATO Chief Warns of Duplicity by Putin on Ukraine,” *The New York Times*, July 8, 2014, accessed March 16, 2018, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/09/world/europe/nato-chief-warns-of-duplicity-by-putin-on-ukraine.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, accessed April 16, 2018, <https://www.clausewitz.com/readings/OnWar1873/BK1ch01.html#a>.

<sup>12</sup> See also Ivo Zahariiev, “Assessment of Crisis and Conflict Regions in Response of Hybrid Threats and Conflicts,” *International Journal of Advanced Research*, <http://www.journalijar.com/articles-in-process/> (to be published).

<sup>13</sup> Wither, “Making Sense of Hybrid Warfare.”



Additionally, many of the characteristics of 'hybrid warfare' are also part of the "fourth generation warfare," a contesting theory from the 1990s.<sup>14</sup> A key concept of this was the importance of utilizing developing information technology, which made it possible to erode a state's will to engage in conflict by targeting decision-makers and the public via the internet. In this manner, it became possible to expand the definition warfare to include "cultural, social, legal, psychological and more dimensions where military power is less relevant."<sup>15</sup>

It is also to be noted that both 'fourth generation' and 'hybrid' warfare are very similar to the Chinese concept of 'unrestricted warfare.'<sup>16</sup> This argues for the need to utilize both military and non-military means to strike back. This, of course, means that unrestricted warfare incorporates computer hacking, financial warfare, terrorism, media disinformation, and even urban warfare. The authors argue that as a result of globalization, the nature of war itself has changed, moving beyond the military realm, where more means can be incorporated in a Clausewitzian manner. However, as Qiao Liang has eloquently stated: "the first rule of unrestricted warfare is that there are no rules with nothing forbidden."<sup>17</sup>

Turkey is also striving to exercise, and to no small extent successfully, greater influence in the Balkans. This is predominantly done by strengthening its role among ethnic Turkish and Muslim minorities throughout the region. In Bulgaria, particularly, both groups were mobilized during the last parliamentary elections to support pro-Turkish parties in the country, namely the Movement for Rights and Freedoms and the newly formed DOST.

However, prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the most cited example of hybrid warfare was the campaign carried out by Hezbollah in 2006. Considered a hybrid organization itself,<sup>18</sup> Hezbollah managed to surprise Israel with its sophisticated blend of guerilla and military tactics and weaponry and communication systems matching the capabilities of developed states.<sup>19</sup> Particular attention should be paid to the fact that, at strategic level, Hezbollah utilized the internet and media very efficiently for information and propaganda purposes. It was evident from the onset of the conflict that Hezbollah was able to influence people's opinion regarding the situation more effectively.

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<sup>14</sup> Tim Benbow, "Talking 'Bout Our Generation? Assessing the Concept of Fourth-Generation Warfare," *Comparative Strategy* 27, no. 2 (2008): 148–163.

<sup>15</sup> Wither, "Making Sense of Hybrid Warfare."

<sup>16</sup> This concept was introduced in 1999 by Qiao Ling and Wang Xiangsui, Colonels from the People's Liberation Army.

<sup>17</sup> Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare* (Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, 1999), 2, accessed March 17, 2018, <https://www.oodaloo.com/documents/unrestricted.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> Eitan Azani, "The Hybrid Terrorist Organization: Hezbollah as a Case Study," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 36, no. 11 (2013), 899-916.

<sup>19</sup> Wither, "Making Sense of Hybrid Warfare."

Thus, non-linear or hybrid means of waging war are not limited to a specific state, and they are also not limited to state actors. However, as stated earlier, this paper focuses on Russia's understanding and conduct of such type of operations.

## New Generation Warfare

It must be stressed that the term 'hybrid warfare' is a Western concept, whereas Russia refers to 'new generation warfare.' It is vital to highlight two key issues in this context. First, the Russian concept was introduced to understand Western 'influence' in the world. While the Chinese concept of 'unrestricted warfare' was aimed at identifying ways to counter the West's overwhelming hard and soft power through asymmetric means, the Russians, on the other hand, are convinced that since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the West has been waging a war against Russia. The tools used have been liberalism, international institutions, non-governmental organizations, and strategic communication.<sup>20</sup>

Second, understanding Russia's 'hybrid warfare' often comes from the wrongly labelled "Gerasimov Doctrine." This so-called doctrine is in fact a short paper written by the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation, General Valery Gerasimov. The paper *de facto* delves into the first point – understanding the West's 'hybrid warfare.' It is clear that the Russian General argues the 'Colored Revolutions' and 'The Arab Spring' were a product of a 'new generation warfare.' Gerasimov thus proposes that "the focus of applied methods of conflict has altered in the direction of the broad use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other non-military measure – applied in coordination with the protest potential of the population."<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, from the Kremlin's point of view, they are merely catching up with what the Western powers and organizations have been doing for decades. They apparently regard their own disinformation campaigns and other operations as a counter-tool to the liberal democratic order. However, while the West seeks to promote democratic liberal values, Russia actively engages in activities it deems suitable – militarizing non-military means, blurring the lines between war and peace and between falsehood, truth, and reality. Perhaps it was Peter Pomerantsev who said it best: "The new Russia doesn't just deal with the petty disinformation, forgeries, lies, leaks, and cyber-sabotage usually associated with information warfare. It reinvents reality."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Mark Galeotti, "The 'Gerasimov Doctrine' and Russian Non-Linear War," *In Moscow's Shadows*, accessed May 1, 2018, <https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrine-and-russian-non-linear-war/>.

<sup>21</sup> Galeotti, "The 'Gerasimov Doctrine' and Russian Non-Linear War."

<sup>22</sup> Peter Pomerantsev, "How Russia Is Revolutionizing Information Warfare," *Defense One*, September 9, 2014, accessed March 7, 2018, <http://www.defenseone.com/threats/2014/09/how-russia-revolutionizing-information-warfare/93635>.

The most notable use of the ‘new generation warfare,’ of course, has been Russia’s 2014 campaign in Ukraine, where it demonstrated a sophisticated blend of strategic communication, disinformation, cyber-attacks, covert troops, and psychological warfare. While a similar blend was also present during Moscow’s endeavor in its 2008 invasion of Georgia, the campaign in Ukraine clearly shows Kremlin’s understanding of what the wars of the future will look like. As Jānis Bērziņš notes, the success of Russia in Ukraine can be measured by the mere fact that, within three weeks and with only minor skirmishes, the moral of the Ukrainian army was crushed, and its 190 military bases surrendered.<sup>23,24</sup>

Once the “little green men” were deployed to Eastern Ukraine, they proceeded to block Ukrainian troops in their own bases. Afterwards, Russians began the second phase of their operation which consisted in psychological warfare, bribery, intimidation, and propaganda to undermine any form of resistance. This allowed them to achieve their objective without firing a shot. This led to a clean military victory on the battlefield, based on sophisticated use of strategic communication and simultaneously blending political, psychological, and information strategies.<sup>25</sup> This type of waging war is perhaps best described by Jānis Bērziņš, who usefully illustrates the shift from ‘traditional’ to hybrid warfare as transition:

- from direct destruction to direct influence
- from direct annihilation of the opponent to its inner decay
- from a war with weapons and technology to a culture war
- from a war with conventional forces to specially prepared forces and commercial irregular groupings
- from the traditional battleground to information/psychological warfare and war of perceptions
- from direct clash to contactless war
- from a superficial and compartmented war to a total war, including the enemy’s internal side and base
- from war in the physical environment to a war in the human consciousness and in cyberspace

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<sup>23</sup> Jānis Bērziņš, “Russia’s New Generation Warfare in Ukraine: Implications for Latvian Defense Policy,” *Policy Paper* no. 2 (National Defence Academy of Latvia, April 2014).

<sup>24</sup> While Russia’s annexation of Crimea and support of separatists in Eastern Ukraine has faced many difficulties since, to the point of their success being questioned today, at the time they were very efficient on both the strategic and tactical level. Since 2014 the Ukrainian military has also been able to improve to the point of countering separatists supported by the Russian military. For further information on this see Mykola Bieliskov, “Ukraine’s Military Is Back,” *The National Interest*, February 27, 2018, accessed May 2, 2018, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/ukraines-military-back-24674>.

<sup>25</sup> Tim Ripley and Bruce Jones, “Analysis: How Russia Annexed Crimea,” *IHS Jane’s Defense Weekly* 51, no. 14 (April 2014): 5.

- from symmetric to asymmetric warfare by a combination of political, economic, information, technological, and ecological campaigns
- from war in a defined period of time to a state of permanent war as the natural condition in national life.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, it becomes clear why Russians place immense importance on information and psychological warfare – simply because they consider the mind to be the main battle space of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Not adding much to warfare from a historical perspective, ideally means defeating the adversary mentally before any direct engagement. Of course, this approach is not only limited to the enemy's troops but to the population as a whole. Berzins puts it bluntly: "the main objective is to reduce the necessity of deploying hard military power to the minimum necessary, making the opponent's military and civil population support the attacker to the detriment of their own government and country."<sup>27</sup> Thus, Russia's approach to current warfare is subversion of the enemy or, to use Clausewitz, compelling the enemy to do its bidding, but before the actual engagement or initiation of military operations.

Further insight on how Russia views contemporary wars is provided by Col. S.G. Chekinov and Lt. Gen. S.A. Bogdanov in their 2013 article "The Nature and Content of a New-Generation War." Like Gerasimov, they draw lessons from how the West, particularly the US, have conducted their military campaigns. The Russian authors identify eight particular steps of new-generation warfare:

1. Non-military measures that blend moral, information, psychological, ideological, and economic measures that aim at establishing a more favorable political, economic, and military environment.
2. Media, diplomatic channels, and top government and military agencies carry out coordinated special operations so as to mislead political and military leaders. This can include leaking false data, orders, directives, and instructions.
3. Bribing, deceiving, and/or intimidating government and military officers, to force them to abandon their duties.
4. Fuel discontent among the population. This can be further enhanced by the arrival of Russian 'volunteers.'
5. No-fly zones and blockades are established over the targeted country. Cooperation between private military contractors and armed opposition.
6. Large-scale reconnaissance and subversion operations are initiated and are immediately followed up upon with military action.

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<sup>26</sup> Bērziņš, "Russia's New Generation Warfare in Ukraine."

<sup>27</sup> Bērziņš, "Russia's New Generation Warfare in Ukraine."

7. A combination of information, electronic warfare, and air force operations are launched. They are complimented with high-precision weapons.
8. The last points of resistance are eliminated through reconnaissance operations, special operations, and artillery and missile bombardment.<sup>28</sup>

To sum up, again referring to Jānis Bērziņš: “Russians have placed the idea of influence at the very centre of their operational planning and used all possible levers to achieve this: skillful internal communications; deception operations; psychological operations and well-constructed external communications.”<sup>29</sup> This allowed Russian operations to, paradoxically, be simultaneously evident while under the radar. By blurring the lines between war and peace, falsehood and reality, and inter-state relations and subversion, they are able to conduct hybrid war campaigns against many actors and the *de facto* manifestation of military operations becomes clear much later in time. The goal is to keep it clandestine until the last stage of the planned conflict. To turn to Sun Tzu, if one cannot defeat their enemy without fighting, they should at least try to “keep them in the dark” for as long as possible.

## Russia and Bulgaria

To properly understand Russia’s influence in Bulgaria, it is vital to stress that hybrid warfare is a not a goal, but a means of achieving it. Like war itself in Clausewitz’s understanding, new-generation warfare is a means to achieve one’s aims, thus it can be both a continuation of politics and a contribution to it, simultaneously. Therefore, to understand Russian influence and hybrid war against Bulgaria specifically, and the West in general, it is vital to first identify and understand Moscow’s *de facto* goal.

The Kremlin stated in its National Security Strategy that it considers NATO’s enlargement a threat to national security.<sup>30</sup> This is also valid to a lesser extent for the European Union, but this may very well change if the EU enhances its common defense and security, particularly if an ‘EU army’ is created. Therefore, one of Moscow’s key interests is to prevent and counter both the EU and NATO enlargements. This consists of two layers. One involves creating a periphery of instability along Russia’s borders and strengthening Moscow’s say in

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<sup>28</sup> Taken from Bērziņš, “Russia’s New Generation Warfare in Ukraine,” based on the work of Col. S.G. Chekinov and Lt. Gen. S.A. Bogdanov, “The Nature and Content of a New-Generation War,” *Military Thought*, accessed April 16, 2018, [http://www.eastviewpress.com/Files/MT\\_FROM%20THE%20CURRENT%20ISSUE\\_No.4\\_2013.pdf](http://www.eastviewpress.com/Files/MT_FROM%20THE%20CURRENT%20ISSUE_No.4_2013.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> Bērziņš, “Russia’s New Generation Warfare in Ukraine.”

<sup>30</sup> “Russian National Security Strategy 2015-2020,” accessed May 2, 2018, <http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf>.

countries that are not members of both organizations yet. The second challenges the EU and NATO unity and decision-making by preoccupying members with other issues, in this manner pulling attention away from the enlargement processes.

Bulgaria is in the second group, as it is a member of both Western organizations. However, it is evident that the Kremlin is using its influence in the country, enhancing it with hybrid means to place the cohesion and future of the organizations under question. It is important to note that there is no need for these ideas to have any substance, rather the aim is to place them in the minds of Bulgarian citizens. This, of course, is achieved through spreading fake news, misinformation, and direct propaganda.<sup>31</sup> However, before elaborating further, the deep-rooted pro-Russian mentality among Bulgarians must be noted.

It is a telling story that, according to a public opinion poll by Alpha Research from 2015, over half of the inquired people, 54.3%, continued to hold positive views of Russia, despite the annexation of Crimea. Moreover, another 6.3% changed their perception to “more favorable.” However, nearly 30% came to view the Kremlin in a more negative light. This, of course, has also impacted people’s view on the sanctions placed by the EU on Moscow. While nearly 40% approved further sanctions if the ceasefire agreement was violated by Russia, 60% either opposed or strongly opposed such measures.<sup>32</sup> This led to a peculiar situation during Bulgaria’s presidential elections in 2017, where all major candidates and parties spoke in favor of lifting the sanctions.<sup>33</sup> However, while there were certain misinformation campaigns and fake news regarding the issue, this is hardly the case of hybrid warfare, which Russia does not really need to wage. Certainly, the Kremlin used hybrid means to influence the public perceptions and sentiments, but this situation was rather the case of exerting traditional soft power.

Furthermore, there are clear limits to Russian influence and hybrid efforts. The same research agency asked its participants how they would vote in a hypothetical referendum on Bulgaria remaining in the EU and NATO or aligning with Russia and the Eurasian Union. Over 62.8% were in favor of the country remaining in the Western organizations.<sup>34</sup> Moscow does not have the economic

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<sup>31</sup> According to Reporters without Borders, Bulgaria is now the lowest ranking country in the EU regarding media freedom. In their 2018 report Bulgaria has dropped to 111<sup>th</sup> position, which is also the lower than the candidate-EU states from the Western Balkans. The report is available at <https://rsf.org/en/bulgaria> (accessed May 1, 2018).

<sup>32</sup> Alpha Research, “Bulgarian Foreign Policy, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and National Security,” accessed March 7, 2018, [http://alpharesearch.bg/userfiles/file/0215\\_Public\\_Opinion\\_AR\\_present.pdf](http://alpharesearch.bg/userfiles/file/0215_Public_Opinion_AR_present.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> Yordan Bozhilov, “The Role of Russia on the Balkans” (speech at the international conference “Balkan Networks and Stability – Connecting Co-operative and Human Security,” Rome, 6-7 April 2017). A transcript of the speech is available at <http://sofiaforum.bg/front/rtf.php?cid=8&sid=58> (accessed April 4, 2018).

<sup>34</sup> Alpha Research, “Bulgarian Foreign Policy.”

and political capabilities to serve as an alternative to the West; even among its supporters throughout Europe. Moreover, albeit Bulgaria continues to be the poorest and most corrupt member in the European Union and remains outside the Eurozone and Schengen, it is in Western states that people find 'role models.' The Kremlin is well aware of this fact and, simply because it is weaker, it resorts to the use of hybrid warfare.

It cannot be overemphasized that there needs to be a distinction between hybrid warfare and soft power. First, by branding every type of influence as hybrid warfare, one also risks confusing them with normal inter-state relations and competition. Second, by ascribing to Russia the power to influence everything everywhere, one plays into the Kremlin's hands.

Russian influence is particularly noticeable in Bulgaria's economy. Its exercise is conducted via strategic investments, the housing market, but especially via the energy sector. Bulgaria is almost completely dependent on importing Russian oil and gas. This has created a political and business lobby that can push for specific energy projects that disproportionately favor Russia. This was evident in the South Stream pipeline projects which is still unclear how much it would have cost Bulgaria.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the country was going to fund its part of the pipeline via a loan from Gazprom with an interest that could have made the gas price the highest in the EU. It also remains unclear how much Bulgaria has invested in the pipeline before it fell apart, and how much more would have been required for the successful completion.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, Bulgaria's only nuclear power plant, NPP Kozloduy, is also completely dependent on Russian fuel. What is more, Russia is responsible for the entire life cycle of the nuclear fuel: from delivering it to returning and disposing of the used nuclear fuel. It is to be noted that there are still advocates for building a second NPP in Belene – a project wrapped in controversy. This specific project dates back to the 1980s but gained popularity again during the second term of President Georgi Parvanov in the late 2000s. It was discontinued again in 2013, but has now resurfaced. Like the South Stream pipeline, it will again favor Russian over Bulgarian economic interests. Several studies from think-tanks, non-governmental organizations, and the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences have emphasized that the project could be sustainable only if it meets specific criteria – foreign investor, minority part for the state, low interest on the loan, etc. However, those are almost impossible to meet.<sup>37,38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> For more information regarding the South Stream project see: Centre for the Study of Democracy, "Transparent Governance for Greater Energy Security in CEE," *Policy Brief* no. 58 (September 2015), accessed April 3, 2018, <http://www.csd.bg/~igardev/typo3/artShow.php?id=17515>.

<sup>36</sup> "'Gazprom,' how we miss you," *Capital*, June 9, 2017 ("'Gazprom,' kak ni lipsvash") accessed April 27, 2018, [https://www.capital.bg/politika\\_i\\_ikonomika/bulgaria/2017/06/09/2985663\\_gazprom\\_kolko\\_ni\\_lipsvash/](https://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ikonomika/bulgaria/2017/06/09/2985663_gazprom_kolko_ni_lipsvash/).

<sup>37</sup> For detailed information on NPP Belene see: Iliyan Vasilev, "The Belene NPP Project – Mission Impossible?" (Centre for Balkan and Black Sea Studies, February 2012); and

Interestingly, both projects were supported by pro-Russian media outlets in Bulgaria. These outlets advocated for these projects, claiming that they would create jobs, and ultimately the EU was blamed for their failures. This provides an example of 'traditional influence' enhanced by misinformation and fake news campaigns which are, of course, elements of hybrid warfare.

The situation is similar in the defense sector. Bulgaria committed to improving its military before it became a NATO member in 2004. However, there have been few and rare improvements, and very few cases of procuring new capabilities. Bulgaria still heavily relies on its Soviet-era weaponry. This is particularly problematic for the air force. There have been many discussions regarding acquiring new fighter jets. In a bid in 2016-2017, the government chose to acquire Grippens from Sweden, while the offer of second-hand F-16s from Portugal was not evaluated on the basis of formal reasons. However, due to suspicions that lobbyist had promoted an offer that was not in Bulgaria's interests, the entire procedure fell apart and it remains unclear when the country will acquire new fighter jets for its air force.<sup>39</sup> *Inter alia*, the current government agreed to send its current MiG-29s for repairs to RSK MiG. It is unclear how much the actual cost of repairs and price per flying hour will amount to, but many experts consider it to be close to that of procuring new planes.<sup>40</sup>

It is also interesting to note the massive misinformation regarding the price of the Grippens and F-16. Specific media outlets strived to convince people that it would be a mistake to procure a new type of fighter plane, especially second-hand USA-made. Thus, once again Russia achieved a deal that disproportionately promoted its own interests over those of Bulgaria. This, of course, was strongly promoted by the pro-Russian parties in Bulgaria, currently also in a coalition government with GERB. Particularly, the nationalist party of Ataka has always favored Moscow, and is vocally EU- and NATO- sceptic. However, there is also another aspect to this combination of soft power and hybrid means. Due to Bulgaria's poor military capabilities, it cannot properly fulfil its NATO obligations. An interesting aspect has been placed forward by Mikhail Naydenov, who

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the Centre for the Study of Democracy's 2014 annual report, available at <http://www.csd.bg/artShow.php?id=17243> (accessed March 30, 2018).

<sup>38</sup> The Bulgarian's Academy of Sciences' report, albeit surrounded with controversy, still concluded that it is highly unlikely that NPP would be completed as a sustainable project. The reports is available at <http://www.bas.bg/IR2.pdf> (accessed April 16, 2018).

<sup>39</sup> See Todor Tagarev, "Lessons from the Procedure of Acquiring a New Type of Combat Aircraft, 1999-2017," *IT4Sec Reports* no. 131 (Sofia: Institute of ICT, May 2018), accessed May 2, 2018, <https://it4sec.org/article/lessons-procedure-acquiring-new-type-combat-aircraft-1999-2017>.

<sup>40</sup> "The Atlantic Council Has Seen Unprofitable Clauses in the Order for Russia to Repair the MiGs ("Atlanticheskiyat suvet vidya neizgodni klauzi v poruchkata kum Rosiya za remont na MiG-ovete)" *Dnevnik*, March 15, 2018, accessed March 21, 2018, [https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2018/03/15/3147311\\_atlanticheskiyat\\_suvet\\_pred\\_upredi\\_z\\_a\\_neizgodni\\_klauzi/](https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2018/03/15/3147311_atlanticheskiyat_suvet_pred_upredi_z_a_neizgodni_klauzi/).



suggested that these hybrid means also have the aim of creating the adversary you want.<sup>41</sup> To elaborate, by having something similar to a monopoly over Bulgaria's armed forces, Moscow can *de facto* dictate the capabilities and equipment Bulgaria procures for its defense.

A more evident manifestation of hybrid means, however, were the cyber-attacks on the day of national referendum and local elections in 2015. Russian hackers carried out cyber-attacks against the Presidency, the Central Electoral Committee, and the Council of Ministers, among others.<sup>42</sup> The then President, Rosen Plevneliev, who was overtly pro-EU and pro-NATO, and also frequently and openly criticized Russia, even remarked once that "Moscow does not see partners, but vassals."<sup>43</sup> Needless to say, the Kremlin did not take kindly to President Plevneliev, and pro-Russian media was frequently spreading fake news regarding his presidency.

As stated, fake news, disinformation, and general strategic communications are easy for Russia to conduct in Bulgaria. They find fertile ground in the country and resonate with the many pro-Russian citizens in the country. It begins to pose a threat, however, when they become of Clausewitzian nature. This, perhaps, is the case of the Bulgarian National Union "Shipka" (BNO Shipka).<sup>44</sup> This is a group which formed at the wake of the migration crisis that supposedly self-organized to protect the country's Southern border. They are led by a former non-commissioned officer with a shady past and search the forests and mountains for immigrants, whom they then apprehend. While they are supposedly not doing anything illegal, it is the manner in which they self-organize, promote, and carry out their exercises.<sup>45</sup> They have also stated that they consider NATO and the EU occupiers that need to be expelled from Bulgaria. Moreover, at one point they also promoted on their website the opportunity for anyone interested to apply for training abroad, most likely in Russia or another ex-Soviet country.<sup>46</sup> While their sources of funding remain unclear and it

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<sup>41</sup> Mikhail Naydenov, "The subversion of the Bulgarian defence system – the Russian way," *Defense & Security Analysis* 34, no. 1 (February 2018): 93-112, accessed May 2, 2018, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14751798.2018.1421408>.

<sup>42</sup> Interview of President Plevneliev for the BBC, November 4, 2016, accessed April 17, 2018, <https://www.president.bg/news3428/interview-of-president-plevneliev-for-the-bbc.html&lang=en>.

<sup>43</sup> Interview of President Plevneliev for the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, October 4, 2014, accessed April 30, 2018, [http://www.rosenplevneliev.bg/7/54/news\\_item.html](http://www.rosenplevneliev.bg/7/54/news_item.html).

<sup>44</sup> Homepage of the Bulgarian Military Union "Shipka," <https://www.bnoshipka.org/en/>.

<sup>45</sup> See also Mac Bishop, "Bulgarian Vigilantes Patrol Turkey Border to Keep Migrants Out," *NBC News*, March 10, 2017, accessed April 19, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/europes-border-crisis/bulgarian-vigilantes-patrol-turkey-border-keep-migrants-out-n723481>.

<sup>46</sup> "A pro-Russian coup is looming in Bulgaria, the Russian embassy is silent (Zree rubladzhiiski prevrat v Bulgariya, ruskoto posolstvo mulchi)," *Faktor.bg*, April 20,

would not be just to immediately claim for Russia's direct sponsoring of BNO Shipka, it is at the very least a by-product of Russian propaganda and disinformation.

Thus, the blend of soft power, information warfare, and specific manifestations of hybrid means is evident in Bulgaria. Russia is, for the time being, keeping and enhancing its direct influence in the country. It is to be emphasized that a key 'ally' of Kremlin's influence in Bulgaria has been the Bulgarian Orthodox church, which very frequently echo their 'colleagues' from Russia's Orthodox Church.<sup>47</sup> This is particularly important in the context of the Russian Church serving as more of an extension than a tool of Kremlin politics. Thus, their Bulgarian counterparts have a direct role in Russian soft power and hybrid endeavors. This was particularly evident in a visit of the Patriarch Kirill to Bulgaria for the country's national holiday March 3, which celebrates the liberation from Ottoman rule. Of particular interest is the fact that the Patriarch had a meeting with President Radev. During their meeting Patriarch Kirill criticized Bulgaria's president primarily on the issue that he had acknowledged the role of Finns, Romanians and Ukrainians in the liberation war of 1877-78 and has expressed his gratitude to others than Russia. A second round of criticism from the Russian Patriarch came in an interview for Bulgarian media, right before his departure flight.<sup>48</sup> Russian media continued their bombardments of critiques labeling President Radev as a "puppet of the West."<sup>49</sup>

A plausible reason for these sudden criticisms of the Kremlin-favored President is the fact that Bulgaria declared the integration of the countries from the Western Balkans as a priority for its Presidency of the Council of the European Union.<sup>50</sup> This is clearly at odds with Russia's aspirations for the Balkan region. This highlights the fact that Moscow may have far more influence that eludes the eye. Moreover, it also highlights the fact that Russia may be seeking to enhance its 'say' in Bulgarian affairs. Bearing in mind that Russia has most probably achieved maximum influence via its soft power in the country, this possibly

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2016, accessed May 1, 2018, <https://www.faktor.bg/bg/articles/petak-13/-zreerubladzhiyski-prevrat-v-balgariya-ruskoto-posolstvo-malchi-72016>.

<sup>47</sup> Atanas Slavov, "The Bulgarian Orthodox Church – An Instrument for Russian Influence in the Region?" *Bulgaria Analytica*, June 28, 2017, accessed April 29, 2018, <http://bulgariaanalytica.org/en/2017/06/28/the-bulgarian-orthodox-church/>.

<sup>48</sup> "Russian Patriarch unhappy at Bulgarian view of Russia's 1877-1878 war role," *Reuters*, March 6, 2018, accessed March 9, 2018, [www.reuters.com/article/us-bulgaria-russia-patriarch/russian-patriarch-unhappy-at-bulgarian-view-of-russias-1877-1878-war-role-idUSKBN1GG144](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-bulgaria-russia-patriarch/russian-patriarch-unhappy-at-bulgarian-view-of-russias-1877-1878-war-role-idUSKBN1GG144).

<sup>49</sup> "Russian Priests: Radev is a Cowardly Puppet of the West in a Third-rate Country (Руски sveshtenici: Radev e strahliva marionetka na Zapada v tretorazredna strana)," *Dnevnik*, March 9, 2018, accessed March 10, 2018, [https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2018/03/09/3143033\\_ruski\\_sveshtenici\\_radev\\_e\\_strahliva\\_marionetka\\_na/](https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2018/03/09/3143033_ruski_sveshtenici_radev_e_strahliva_marionetka_na/).

<sup>50</sup> See the official website of Bulgaria's Presidency of the Council of the EU at <https://eu2018bg.bg/en/28>.

indicates that it may resort to more clandestine and hybrid means to exercise power.

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that Russia is engaged in a state of permanent hybrid war with the West. This is how Moscow has come to conduct 21<sup>st</sup> century international relations. The Kremlin utilizes a large plethora of peaceful tools and means in a Clausewitzian manner – from economics and energy, to religion and information. Democracies are particularly vulnerable to such influence due to liberties and means of mass information. Thus, Russia is striking at the very heart of democracies – the demos. It is striving to influence and shape people’s perceptions. However, to properly understand and ultimately counter the Kremlin, one must not mistake normal inter-state relations and soft power for new-generation warfare, as this again plays into Moscow’s favor.

The situation remains problematic in Bulgaria where, due to its traditional influence and soft power, Russia can easily enhance its impact by adding hybrid means. This does not only impede the Bulgarian state itself, but may, as the Kremlin strives, lead to challenging the unity of the EU and NATO. Towards this purpose, after all, Russia is using hybrid means in more than one country, and possibly in the majority, if not all, members and candidates for membership in both organizations.

The answer to these new threats is twofold. First, countries need to acknowledge the dangers of Russian influence. Further efforts in improving the quality of education can decrease people’s susceptibility to fake news, disinformation operations, and propaganda. This has proven very effective, as demonstrated in the case of Finland.<sup>51</sup> Second, new-generation warfare must be matched with more cooperation and unity among NATO, the EU, and the candidate-states. Steps have been taken in this direction, such as STRATCom, but more efforts are necessary. The rather simple antidote to new generation warfare is strengthening democracy, the rule of law, and unity. However, the main target needs to be the fight against corruption, as this is the vulnerability the enables adversaries to employ hybrid means in order to bend the other to their own will.

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<sup>51</sup> Reid Standish, “Why Is Finland Able to Fend Off Putin’s Information War?” *Foreign Policy*, March 1, 2017, accessed April 29, 2018, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/03/01/why-is-finland-able-to-fend-off-putins-information-war/>.

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## Understanding Cross-Border Conflict in Post-Soviet Central Asia: The Case of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

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**Abstract:** Despite the prevalence of works on the ‘discourses of danger’ in the Ferghana Valley, which re-invented post-Soviet Central Asia as a site of intervention, the literature on the conflict potential in the cross-border areas of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is fairly limited. Yet, the number of small-scale clashes and tensions on the borders of the Batken and Isfara regions has been growing steadily. Accordingly, this work seeks to contribute to the understanding of the conflict escalations in the area and identify factors that aggravate tensions between the communities. In particular, this article focuses on four variables, which exacerbate tensions and hinder the restoration of a peaceful social fabric in the Batken-Isfara region: the unresolved legacies of the Soviet past, inefficient use of natural resources, militarization of borders, and lack of evidence-based policymaking.

**Keywords:** Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Ferghana, conflict, borders.

### Introduction

The significance and magnitude of violence and conflict potential in the contemporary Ferghana Valley has been identified as one of the most prevalent themes in the study of post-Soviet Central Asia. This densely populated region has been long portrayed as a site of latent inter-ethnic conflict. Not only is the Ferghana Valley a region, where three major ethnic groups—Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and Tajiks—co-exist in a network of interdependent communities, sharing buri-

al sites, grazing grounds, and markets, but it is also a region where ethnic and political boundaries often do not coincide.<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, soon after the demise of the Soviet Union, the Ferghana Valley was discursively cast as a volatile and crisis-ridden region prone to sectarian violence. Such discourses characterized post-Soviet Central Asia as a site of intervention, prompting the international community to enter the region to mitigate conflict potential and promote peaceful development. However, such interventions brought little harmony to fractured communities, as they were detached from the local context, simulated ‘bottom-up’ peacebuilding and were overly technical and procedural.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, apart from misdiagnosing the causes of the conflicts, international aid agencies inadvertently supported the strengthening of authoritarianism in Central Asia, which generated the real grievances and anxieties in the region.<sup>3</sup> Surprisingly, many academic and policy-oriented works continued to stress the need for a change that should come from the international community without questioning local realities.

In this regard, this article seeks to contribute to the mitigation of violent conflict and promotion of peaceful development in the Ferghana Valley through the advancement of an evidence-based approach to understanding conflict. This work attempts to identify drivers of conflict escalation in the cross-border areas of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, Batken and Isfara respectively, which have long been the scenes of periodic conflicts, involving civilians, security forces and state officials.

## Etymology of Conflict

Understanding different theoretical perspectives of conflict is important both for analyzing the phenomenon and for developing respective mechanisms and responses. After the end of the Cold War, conflicts were no longer perceived as resultant from ideological standpoints, but rather as a struggle of intrinsic antagonisms. New studies of conflicts favored interpretations of conflict, which underlined primordial ethnic, cultural or religious differences and which called for international therapeutic interventions to contain violence and instability.<sup>4</sup> Such “interventionism” was justified by the distorted representation of weak

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<sup>1</sup> Madeleine Reeves, “Locating Danger: *Konfliktologija* and the Search for Fixity in the Ferghana Valley Borderlands,” *Central Asian Survey* 24, no. 1 (2005): 67-81.

<sup>2</sup> John Heathershaw, “Review of the book *Conflict Transformation in Central Asia: Irrigation Disputes in the Ferghana Valley*, by Christine Bichsel,” *Central Asian Survey* 29, no. 1 (March 2010): 131-142.

<sup>3</sup> Christine Bichsel, “In Search of Harmony: Repairing Infrastructure and Social Relations in the Ferghana Valley,” *Central Asian Survey* 24, no. 1 (March 2005): 53-66.

<sup>4</sup> Daniela Nascimento, “The (In)Visibilities of War and Peace: A Critical Analysis of Dominant Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Strategies in the Case of Sudan,” *International Journal of Peace Studies* 16, no. 2 (Winter 2011): 43-57.

states as failures of the modernity project.<sup>5</sup> According to this view, the result of this failure was the growth of failed states, which laid the foundation for the proliferation of 'new wars' characterized by new forms of warfare, identity politics, decentralized violence and a globalized war economy.<sup>6</sup>

These 'new wars' construct new sectarian identities that undermine a sense of shared community and are usually difficult to end, because there is often no single cause of the conflict.<sup>7</sup> Warring parties have vested interests in the continuation of violence for various reasons, and the advocates of this 'new wars' hypothesis identified 'greed' or economic motives as the primary driver of conflict. Using a data set of civil wars over the period of 1960-1999, Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler developed econometric models to predict the outbreak of civil conflict.<sup>8</sup> They concluded that a model, which focused on the opportunities and economic conditions for rebellion, performed well, whereas grievances, such as ethnic and religious divisions within a community, added little explanatory power. These findings provoked further the "greed versus grievance" debate on the causes of conflict.

Although the economic agendas approach has revealed a new dimension of conflict, many observers were unconvinced that 'new wars' were indeed 'new' at all.<sup>9</sup> They argued that the role of economic factors cannot be easily isolated from other motivations, which lead to violence, and thus a range of motivations, including the nature of grievances, and their mutual interactions needs to be examined.<sup>10</sup> In this context, despite being considered dated, Edward Azar's theory of protracted social conflict<sup>11</sup> may also be useful to the understanding of contemporary conflict dynamics. Azar identified four variables, which are responsible for the transformation of non-conflictual situations into conflictual ones: communal content, human needs, government and the state's role, and

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<sup>5</sup> Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security* (London: Zed Books, June 2001); Christine Bichsel, *Conflict Transformation in Central Asia: Irrigation Disputes in the Ferghana Valley* (Abingdon, Oxon & New York: Routledge, 2009); Nascimento, "The (In)Visibilities of War and Peace."

<sup>6</sup> Mary Kaldor, *New & Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999); Nascimento, "The (In)Visibilities of War and Peace."

<sup>7</sup> Preeti Patel, "Causes of Conflict," in *Conflict and Health*, ed. Natasha Howard, Egbert Sondorp, and Annemarie ter Veen (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2012), 5-13.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers* 56, no. 4 (October 2004): 563-595.

<sup>9</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas, "'New' and 'Old' Civil Wars: A Valid Distinction?" *World Politics* 54, no. 1 (October 2001): 99-118; Mats Berdal, "How 'New' Are 'New Wars'? Global Economic Change and the Study of Civil War," *Global Governance* 9, no. 4 (October-December 2003): 477-502.

<sup>10</sup> Berdal, "How 'New' Are 'New Wars'?"; David Keen, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War," *International Affairs* 88, no. 4 (2012): 757-77.

<sup>11</sup> Edward E. Azar, *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict: Theory and Cases* (Hampshire: Dartmouth Publishing Company, April 1990).

international linkages. As Oliver Ramsbotham<sup>12</sup> underlined, policy recommendations from an ‘economic agenda’ approach do not significantly differ from those advanced by Azar, which are the importance of managing ethnic dominance, countering a lack of economic opportunity, remedying government inability to protect minorities and handling the influence of diasporas.

Based on these issues, Paul Rogers<sup>13</sup> identified three probable trends of broad contemporary conflicts. The first arises from human migration through social, economic and environmental motives. Increased nationalist tendencies and cultural conflict may surface in the most vulnerable communities within the recipient regions of relative wealth. The second trend is a competitive and violent response of the disempowered within and between states. The third trend points to environmental and resource conflicts over issues such as fresh water, food or fossil fuels, whether local or regional.

The latter trend has been long attributed to the region of Central Asia, as many observers forecasted a fierce struggle in the Ferghana Valley over access to and use of limited natural resources. They predicted that unsatisfied human needs and porous borders would aggravate this competition and divide national communities along the region’s ethnic lines.

## The Ferghana Valley

The Ferghana Valley is a large diamond-shaped flatland spread in the heart of Central Asia across Southern Kyrgyzstan, Northern Tajikistan and Eastern Uzbekistan. Surrounded by extensive mountains of the Kuramin, Chatkal, Ferghana, Alai, and Turkestan ranges and roughly defined by the basins of the Syr Darya river, the 22,000-square-kilometre valley is distinguished by its agricultural fertility, the principal crops being cotton, rice, wheat, fruits, and vegetables.

The first signs of irrigated agriculture dated back to the late Bronze Age, and this agricultural productivity turned the Ferghana Valley into one of the most densely populated regions in the world.<sup>14</sup> With a population of nearly 12-15 million, the valley accounts for approximately one fifth of Central Asia’s total population. Thus, as Frederick Starr<sup>15</sup> underlined, whatever will happen in the Ferghana Valley will directly affect the economic, political and religious spheres of all three states – Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

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<sup>12</sup> Oliver Ramsbotham, “The Analysis of Protracted Social Conflict: A Tribute to Edward Azar,” *Review of International Studies* 31, no. 1 (January 2005): 109-126, 123.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Rogers, “Peace Studies,” in *Contemporary Security Studies*, ed. Alan Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 35-52.

<sup>14</sup> Abdukakhor Saidov, Abdulkhamid Anarbaev, and Valentina Goriyacheva, “The Ferghana Valley: The Pre-Colonial Legacy,” in *Ferghana Valley: The Heart of Central Asia*, ed. S. Frederick Starr, Baktybek Beshimov, Inomjon I. Bobokulov, and Pulat Shozimov (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2011), 3-28.

<sup>15</sup> S. Frederick Starr, “Introducing the Ferghana Valley,” in *Ferghana Valley*, xii.



Few were surprised, when the densely populated Ferghana Valley re-emerged after the demise of the Soviet Union as a fundamentally unstable zone that was prone to violent inter-ethnic conflict. Ample academic and journalistic literature has surfaced to advise on fault lines in Central Asia. These works indicated that the valley needs to be ‘calmed,’ because it is a vulnerable area, where “new violence is likely, indeed, almost certain.”<sup>16</sup> While differing in nuances, the proponents of ‘calming’ the valley argued that the potential for conflict stemmed from a vast array of factors, including poverty, overpopulation, unemployment, ecological crises, ethnic fragmentation, drug trafficking, nationalism, corruption, authoritarianism, Muslim fundamentalism and even the conspirological engagement of third parties.<sup>17</sup>

While most of such ‘catastrophizing’ writings<sup>18</sup> failed to demonstrate the existence of violent threats in the region and link the magnitude of predictions to the paucity of supporting evidence,<sup>19</sup> what this literature succeeded in was re-inventing the Ferghana Valley as a site of intervention. As Christine Bichsel<sup>20</sup> summarized, distinctly ‘agentive’ in nature, these works described a state of affairs in Central Asia requiring action to avert the dire consequences awaiting the region without external engagement, and calling on international aid agencies to swiftly take up those recommendations to mitigate perceived conflict. Quite often, those researchers, development agencies and experts claimed both a privileged relationship to understanding the reality in Central Asia and an implied obligation to cure the ills that can be seen from their privileged positions.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Senator Sam Nunn, Barnett R. Rubin, and Nancy Lubin, eds., *Calming the Ferghana Valley: Development and Dialogue in the Heart of Central Asia* (Preventive Action Reports, V. 4) (New York: The Century Foundation Press, December 1999), xvi.

<sup>17</sup> Nunn, Rubin, and Lubin, *Calming the Ferghana Valley*; Anara Tabyshalieva, *The Challenge of Regional Cooperation in Central Asia: Preventing Ethnic Conflict in the Ferghana Valley* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1999); Randa Slim, “The Ferghana Valley: In the Midst of a Host of Crises,” in *Searching for Peace in Europe and Eurasia: An Overview of Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities*, ed. Paul van Tongeren, Hans van de Veen, and Juliette Verhoeven (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, February 2002), 489–515; Aleksandr Osipov, “Ferghanskiye sobitiya 1989 goda: Konstruirovaniye etnicheskogo konflikta (The Ferghana Events of 1989: Construction of Ethnic Conflict),” in *Ferghanskaya dolina: Etnichnost, etnicheskiye processy, etnicheskiye konflikty (Ferghana Valley: Ethnic processes, ethnic conflicts)*, ed. Sergei Abashin and Valentin Bushkov (Moscow: Nauka, 2004), pp. 164–223; Igor Rotar, “Will the Fergana Valley Become a Hotbed of Destabilization in Central Asia?” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 9, no. 180 (October 2012), <https://jamestown.org/program/will-the-fergana-valley-become-a-hotbed-of-destabilization-in-central-asia>.

<sup>18</sup> As described by Starr, “Introducing the Ferghana Valley,” in *Ferghana Valley*, xiii.

<sup>19</sup> Nick Megoran, “Calming the Ferghana Valley Experts,” *Central Asian Monitor* 2000, no. 5 (2000): 20–25, 21.

<sup>20</sup> Bichsel, *Conflict Transformation in Central Asia*.

<sup>21</sup> Chad D. Thompson and John Heathershaw, “Discourses of Danger in Central Asia: Introduction,” *Central Asian Survey* 24, no. 1 (March 2005): 1–4, 4.

Henceforth, from the late 1990s international aid agencies advanced a wide range of conflict prevention activities in the Ferghana Valley, which included prejudice reduction and tolerance education projects, early warning systems, topic-focused cross-border cooperation initiatives, entrepreneurship courses, micro-lending programs, and border management trainings.<sup>22</sup> Such aid was usually spearheaded along the tenets of promoting ‘liberal peace’ to the Global South with its focus on democratization and economic liberalization.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the ‘magic trio’ of the market, democracy and civil society emerged as development panaceas in the 1980s to become a prescriptive solution to the problems of development in the 1990s.<sup>24</sup> Interventions of this nature were linked directly to a particular conceptualization of conflict by international aid agencies. Most of the aid agencies assumed that conflict in Central Asia will erupt over scarce natural resources; that conflict parties will be divided along ethnic lines; and that economic underdevelopment, porous borders and unsatisfied human needs will lead to the violence.

While Western blueprint reforms failed at triggering the development of a pluralistic society and fostering democratic transformations in the region, a myriad of introduced conflict prevention initiatives exposed the notion that conflict in Central Asia, whether real or perceived, cannot be reduced to a single variable. Ultimately, as Nick Megoran underlined, many of the factors, which have triggered conflicts elsewhere in the world, are present in the Ferghana Valley, and thus the main goal of the researchers, aid agencies, governments, and local communities alike is to introduce the changes necessary to prevent conflicts.<sup>25</sup>

## Batken and Sughd

Despite the prevalence of such ‘catastrophizing’ works about the Ferghana Valley, the literature on conflict potential in the Kyrgyz-Tajik border areas is limited. Yet, the number of small-scale clashes and tensions on these borders has been growing steadily. Constituting part of the Ferghana Valley, the Batken region is located in the southwest of Kyrgyzstan. The region was established as a seventh separate oblast of Kyrgyzstan on October 12, 1999, partially as a result of the incursions of militant pan-Islamist extremists into the Ferghana Valley. The region has the population of 492,600 and relies heavily on livestock and

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<sup>22</sup> Luigi De Martino, “Peace initiatives in Central Asia: An inventory,” Situation Report (Geneva: Cimera, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> Bichsel, *Conflict Transformation in Central Asia*.

<sup>24</sup> Gordon White, “Civil Society, Democratization and Development (I): Clearing the Analytical Ground,” *Democratization* 1, no. 2 (1994): 375-390; Sunil Khilnani, “The Development of Civil Society,” in *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, ed. Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, October 2001), 12.

<sup>25</sup> Megoran, “Calming the Ferghana Valley Experts,” 25.

cultivation.<sup>26</sup> Located in the northwest of Tajikistan, Sughd is home to nearly 2,349,000 inhabitants and has the largest proportion of cultivated land in the republic, in addition to being the only region of Tajikistan fully dependent on external sources of water.<sup>27</sup>

Of the 971-kilometre border dividing Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, only 519 kilometers have been officially agreed upon.<sup>28</sup> The disputed sections that separate the two states run through Kyrgyzstan's Batken and Tajikistan's Sughd provinces. There are also two enclaves, the Tajik districts of Vorukh and Western Qalacha, which are located within the Batken region. These are the areas which see periodic conflict incidents involving civilians, security forces and state officials. More specifically, the southern part of Isfara district of the Sughd region (Chorkuh, Surkh, Shurab and Vorukh jamoats<sup>29</sup>) and the western part of the Batken region (Ak-Sai, Samarkandek and Ak-Tatyr municipalities) are the areas identified by observers as the most prone to inter-ethnic tensions.<sup>30</sup>

In general, the years of independence for both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have been marred by conflicts on the borders of their Batken and Sughd provinces, respectively (for instance, in 2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2015). Per some reports, in the period from 2011 to 2013, there were 63 incidents on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border, ranging from small fights to hostage taking.<sup>31</sup> Serious conflict escalations usually involved arson, stone-throwing and the usage of garden tools. As a result, such escalations were often labelled as "ketmen wars."<sup>32</sup>

The conflict of January of 2014, however, was marked by a new dynamic. The Kyrgyz government began constructing an alternative road along Kok-Tash–Ak-Sai–Tamdyk, which would bypass the Tajik enclave of Vorukh. On January 11, soldiers of the Tajik Border Guard Service arrived on a construction

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<sup>26</sup> National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, "Chislennost naseleniya Kirgizskoi Respubliki za 1 Janvarya 2016 goda (Population of the Kyrgyz Republic for 1 January 2016)," 2016, <http://stat.kg/ru/statistics/naselenie/>.

<sup>27</sup> Asel Murzakulova and Irène Mestre, *Natural Resource Management Dynamics in Border Communities of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan*, Research Report (Bishkek: University of Central Asia, 2015), 7.

<sup>28</sup> David Trilling, "Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan: What's Next After Border Shootout?" *Eurasia-net.org*, January 13, 2014, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/67934>; "Kabmin odobril delimitaciu 519 km granicy s Tajikistanom (Government Approved the Delimitation of a 519-km Border with Tajikistan)," *Sputnik*, January 16, 2016, <https://ru.sputnik.kg/politics/20160116/1021605681.html>.

<sup>29</sup> In Tajikistan, a jamoat is an administrative division, a municipality.

<sup>30</sup> Bichsel, *Conflict Transformation in Central Asia*, 103.

<sup>31</sup> Abdulkholiq Kholiqi and Nabijon Rahimov, "Disputable Territories as Hotbeds of Tension on the Border," *Bulletin of TSULBP* (2015): 188-196.

<sup>32</sup> Bichsel, *Conflict Transformation in Central Asia*. 'Ketmen' is a garden tool.

site and confronted workers laying the road.<sup>33</sup> In the ensuing standoff Kyrgyz and Tajik border guards fired shots. As a result, 5 Kyrgyz soldiers and 3 Tajik soldiers were injured.<sup>34</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan insisted that a stretch of the bypass road was going through a contested plot of land, and thus the Tajik border guards had the right to block the construction.<sup>35</sup> The Kyrgyz side insisted that the road was going through Kyrgyz territory and was built to ensure the secure and independent movement of Kyrgyz citizens who otherwise had to pass through Vorukh.<sup>36</sup>

If previous escalations were “ketmen wars” or clashes, involving civilians equipped with stones and garden tools, this conflict involved regular army units from both sides who allegedly used heavy weapons such as mortars and rocket-propelled grenades.<sup>37</sup> This menacing trend has prompted the governments of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to sit down again at the negotiating table and devise solutions addressing the root causes of the problem.<sup>38</sup>

Nonetheless, despite the ongoing inter-governmental discussions on the need to mitigate tensions on the Kyrgyz-Tajik borders, incidents of sporadic violence and escalations thereof have not diminished. Two months after the meeting of the intergovernmental commission, on May 7, 2014, clashes involving nearly 1,500 people broke out again on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border, leaving several people injured in addition to burned out cars and a gas station.<sup>39</sup> Only recently,

<sup>33</sup> “Kto pervim otkril ogon na tajiksko-kirgizskoi granitse? (Who Opened Fire First on the Kyrgyz-Tajik Border?),” *Asia-Plus*, January 11, 2014, <https://news.tj/ru/news/kto-pervym-otkryl-ogon-na-tadzhiksko-kyrgyzskoi-granitse>.

<sup>34</sup> “Stroitelstvo dorogi Ak-Sai-Tamdyk-Kok-Tash prodoljajetsya (Construction of the Road Ak-Sai-Tamdyk-Kok-Tash Continues),” *Azattyk*, January 12, 2014, <http://rus.azattyk.org/a/25227290.html>.

<sup>35</sup> “Kto pervim otkril ogon na tajiksko-kirgizskoi granitse? (Who Opened Fire First on the Kyrgyz-Tajik Border?).”

<sup>36</sup> “Uchastok v 0.78 sotok na trasse Kok-Tash-Aksai-Tamdyk, kotoryi osparival Tajikistan prinadlezhit Kirgyzstanu – A. Mamataliev (The plot of land of 0.78 acres on the road Kok-Tash-Aksai-Tamdyk disputed by Tajikistan belongs to Kyrgyzstan – A. Mamataliev),” *Kabar*, May 12, 2014, <http://old.kabar.kg/rus/society/full/79246>; “Stroitelstvo avtodorogi Kok-Tash-Ak-Sai-Tamdyk budet dovedeno do konca (The construction of the road Kok-Tash-Ak-Sai-Tamdyk will be completed),” *Knews*, January 12, 2014, <http://knews.kg/2014/01/stroitelstvo-avtodorogi-kok-tash-ak-say-tamydik-budet-dovedeno-do-kontsa/>.

<sup>37</sup> “Kto pervim otkril ogon na tajiksko-kirgizskoi granitse? (Who Opened Fire First on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border?),” Timur Toktonaliev, Lola Olimova, and Nazarali Pirnazarov, “Kyrgyz-Tajik Row After Border Clash” (Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 15 January 2014), <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/kyrgyz-tajik-row-after-border-clash>.

<sup>38</sup> “Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan: Chego ozhidat ot peregovorov? (Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan: What to Expect from the Negotiations?),” *Azattyk*, January, 13, 2014, <http://rus.azattyk.org/a/25228797.html>.

<sup>39</sup> “GPS soobshaet podrobnosti incidenta na kyrgyzko-tajikskom uchastke granitsy v Batkenskome raione (State Border Service Reports the Details of the Incident on the Kyrgyz-Tajik Border in the Batken Region),” *Turmush*, May 8, 2014, <http://www.turmush.kg/ru/news:57661>; “Zamglavi MVD K. Asanov posetil zhitelei

on January 22, 2017, dozens of young men from both sides clashed near Kok-Tash village.<sup>40</sup> As Abdulkholiq Holiki and Nabijon Rahimov advised,<sup>41</sup> the latent Isfara-Batken conflict inherited from the Soviet past is still haunting modern Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, thus hindering economic and cultural cooperation, complicating interstate relations and taking lives of civilians.

## Causes of Conflict

As identified earlier, from the late 1990s international aid agencies advanced a wide range of conflict prevention activities in the Ferghana Valley under the tenets of promoting 'liberal peace.' Most of them perceived conflict as resultant from disputed borders, scarce natural resources, economic underdevelopment and unsatisfied human needs. A more detailed scrutiny of the Batken-Isfara tensions revealed that escalations in the region were also related to the Soviet past and a lack of evidence-based policy advice in addition to the inefficient use of natural resources and militarization of borders.

## Soviet Legacy

Although modern Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have witnessed a rise of conflict escalations on their borders, such conflict trends are not exclusive to the period of their independence. During the Soviet period the region also witnessed a number of conflict escalations despite the prevailing assumptions that territorial conflicts in Central Asia are inherently a post-Soviet phenomenon.

In 1924, after the initial Soviet national-territorial delimitation, the Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) requested the Soviet central government to assign Isfara and Sokh administrative units to the Kyrgyz ASSR.<sup>42</sup> Based on the evaluation of inter-republican commissions, the central government rejected the petitions of the Kyrgyz ASSR and ruled that Isfara and Sokh would remain within the jurisdiction of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic

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sel Batkenskogo raiona, gde vo vremya prigranichnogo incidenta bili sozhzheni ryad ob'ektov (Deputy Head of the Ministry of Interior Affairs K. Asanov Visited the Villagers of the Batken Region, Where Several Objects Have Been Burned Down During the Cross-border Conflict)," *Turmush*, May 15, 2014, <http://www.turmush.kg/ru/news:58559>; Mark Vinson, "Border Clashes With Kyrgyzstan Threaten Tajikistan's Regional Integration," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 11, no. 94 (20 May 2014), <https://jamestown.org/program/border-clashes-with-kyrgyzstan-threaten-tajikistans-regional-integration/>.

<sup>40</sup> Bakyt Tolkanov, "Obe storoni kinflikta na kyrgyzsko-tajikskoi granitse – o chem govoryat (Two Sides of Conflict on the Kyrgyz-Tajik Borders – What They Are Talking About)," *Sputnik*, January 23, 2017, <https://ru.sputnik.kg/analytics/20170123/1031403221/chto-proizoshlo-na-granice-kyrgyzstana-i-tadzhikistana.html>.

<sup>41</sup> Kholiqi and Rahimov, "Disputable Territories as Hotbeds of Tension on the Border."

<sup>42</sup> Arslan Koichiev, "Ethno-Territorial Claims in the Ferghana Valley During the Process of National Delimitation, 1924-7," in *Central Asia: Aspects of Transition*, ed. Tom Everett-Heath (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 45-46; Bichsel, *Conflict Transformation in Central Asia*.

(SSR).<sup>43</sup> Although the Soviet central government declared that national-territorial delimitation in the Ferghana Valley was “decisively settled,” both the Kyrgyz ASSR and the Uzbek SSR disputed the final settlement.

As a result, regional territorial disputes were suspended, while an administrative borderline was often not enforced.<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, from time to time the region of Batken and Isfara turned violent over land plots.<sup>45</sup> For instance, in 1936, violence between nomadic Kyrgyz and sedentary Tajik people over a winter encampment in the area of the Vorukh enclave resulted in the deaths of several people and left numerous others injured.

In the late 1960s, a cultivation farm of the Isfara region began expanding onto pastures of a state farm of the Batken region. Although the Soviet Ministry of Agriculture allowed the Isfara collective farm to use the land as pastures, under pressure from rapid population growth the Isfara farm decided to build a canal on this land to extend the irrigated area beyond the hitherto cultivated land.<sup>46</sup> The aggrieved Kyrgyz villagers appealed on various instances, including sending a petition to the central government.<sup>47</sup> After receiving no proper response from the authorities, Kyrgyz villagers decided to intervene themselves, which led to violent escalations between Kyrgyz and Tajik villagers in 1969, 1970 and 1975.

After the escalation of 1975 the inter-republican commission resolved to divide the disputed land between the two farms and resettle the Kyrgyz people to the newly-established village of Ak-Sai.<sup>48</sup> The commission also obliged the Isfara farm to provide the Batken farm with water during the irrigation periods. However, this prescription was not sustained, because the water from the Mekhnatobod-Ak-Sai canal barely fulfilled the needs of the Vorukh community.<sup>49</sup> As a result, under pressure from the aggrieved Kyrgyz villagers, the Kyrgyz SSR decided to construct a pump station of its own to satisfy the needs of the Ak-Sai community.

In 1989, a dispute over a land plot between the villages of Uch-Dobo and Khodjai Alo escalated into a violent conflict involving the villagers of Vorukh and Ak-Sai.<sup>50</sup> Allegedly, the Tajik villagers had attempted to extend their culti-

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<sup>43</sup> The Tajik ASSR was an autonomous republic within the Uzbek SSR.

<sup>44</sup> Koichiev, “Ethno-Territorial Claims in the Ferghana Valley.”

<sup>45</sup> Bichsel, *Conflict Transformation in Central Asia*.

<sup>46</sup> Bichsel, *Conflict Transformation in Central Asia*.

<sup>47</sup> Bichsel, *Conflict Transformation in Central Asia*.

<sup>48</sup> Bichsel, *Conflict Transformation in Central Asia*; Jamoat Resource Centre of Vorukh, “Potential for Peace and Threats of Conflict: Development Analysis of Cross-border Communities in Isfara District of the Republic of Tajikistan and Batken District of the Kyrgyz Republic” (2011).

<sup>49</sup> Bichsel, *Conflict Transformation in Central Asia*.

<sup>50</sup> Bichsel, *Conflict Transformation in Central Asia*; Jamoat Resource Centre of Vorukh, “Potential for Peace and Threats of Conflict”; Tokhir Safar, “Vesna – goryachaya pora dlya tajiksko-kirgizskih otnosheni? (Spring – Is It a Hot Season for the Tajik-Kyrgyz

vations towards Kyrgyz pastures, but after being met with resistance from the Kyrgyz villagers they blocked the Ak-Tatyr canal, which provided water to the Kyrgyz downstream villages. The Kyrgyz villagers attempted to forcibly unblock the canal which in turn was met with violent resistance from the Tajik villagers. The violence between the villagers was halted only after the intervention of Soviet soldiers.<sup>51</sup>

A brief overview of conflict escalations in the Batken-Isfara region during the Soviet period reveals that the conflictual dynamics in this part of the Fergana Valley have not emerged as a new phenomenon exclusive to the period of post-Soviet state building, and that incidents of conflict escalations were recorded as early as in the 1930s. The nature of these conflicts reveals that the Soviet central government had a clear preference to a sedentary lifestyle and agricultural modes of production over a transhumant lifestyle and animal husbandry which, in turn, accounts for most of the conflict history in the Batken-Isfara region.<sup>52</sup> In an attempt to secure Soviet self-sufficiency, Moscow focused on increasing arable land for agriculture, even at the expense of pastures. Soviet modernization projects not only affected nomadic and semi-nomadic populations and the long-established lifestyles in Central Asia, but also paved the way for environmental catastrophes such as the depletion of the Aral Sea. In turn, the failures of the Soviet government to address the unintended repercussions of its policies turned the Batken-Isfara region into a site of contestation that divided sedentary Tajiks and transhumant Kyrgyz.

### *Inefficient Use of Natural Resources*

Many observers have underlined that the real causes of conflict, which divide Batken and Isfara communities on ethnic lines, are rooted in the scarcity of natural resources. In particular, water is perceived to be a cause of conflict. There is a plethora of literature, however, which advises that causality between water and conflict is difficult to validate.<sup>53</sup> On the contrary, even if conflict is already waged over other issues, shared interests along waterways consistently outweigh conflict-inducing characteristics, while cooperative water regimes tend to be particularly resilient over time.<sup>54</sup>

Nonetheless, there is a recurring discourse that the tensions on the Batken-Isfara border segment are directly linked to water scarcity, although this asser-

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Relations?),” *Radio Free Europe*, March 24, 2011, [http://www.ozodi.org/a/chorkuh\\_isfara\\_kyrgyzstan/2348352.html](http://www.ozodi.org/a/chorkuh_isfara_kyrgyzstan/2348352.html).

<sup>51</sup> Bichsel, *Conflict Transformation in Central Asia*.

<sup>52</sup> Bichsel, *Conflict Transformation in Central Asia*.

<sup>53</sup> William Mitchell, “The Hydraulic Hypothesis: A Reappraisal,” *Current Anthropology* 14, no. 5 (December 1973): 532-534; Hans P. W. Tose, Nils P. Gleditsch, and Håvard Hegre, “Shared Rivers and Interstate Conflict,” *Political Geography* 19, no. 8 (2000): 971-96.

<sup>54</sup> Aaron T. Wolf, “Conflict and Cooperation along International Waterways,” *Water Policy* 1, no. 2 (1998): 251-65.

tion fails to withstand more detailed scrutiny. According to the AQUASTAT of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, total per capita amounts of renewable water resources in Kyrgyzstan (4,336.00 m<sup>3</sup>) and Tajikistan (3,095.00 m<sup>3</sup>) are higher than those of China (2,051.00 m<sup>3</sup>), Czech Republic (1,245.00 m<sup>3</sup>), Spain (2,384.00 m<sup>3</sup>), France (3,325.00 m<sup>3</sup>) and Germany (1,878.00 m<sup>3</sup>). The difference between fresh water and agricultural water withdrawals as a percentage of total renewable water resources in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is significant, but not critical. In their study, Asel Murzakulova and Irene Mestre<sup>55</sup> applied the Falkenmark indicator to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which uses a threshold of 1,700 m<sup>3</sup> per capita per year to determine if a population is under water stress. Accordingly, both countries do not fall into the category of states under water stress and are well resourced with water. Bichsel<sup>56</sup> goes even further to argue that the whole notion of scarcity is a relative concept constituted by the social relations, political interests and moralities that shape the access to, control over and struggle for natural resources, and thus it should not be detached from the specific political, historic and cultural context.

In other words, water scarcity in Central Asia is defined by the use of water rather than by its real amount. As aforementioned, the policies of the Soviet central government favored a sedentary lifestyle and agricultural modes of production; however, water was not effectively managed during the Soviet times neither, while irrigation channels were in a poor state even before the 1990s. During the period of independence, water infrastructure has only deteriorated further, since the budgets of both governments and farms have fallen dramatically.<sup>57</sup> Complex hydraulic infrastructure systems inherited from the Soviet Union assumed cooperation between the Central Asian states, especially between the upstream and downstream states. Nonetheless, the unified position of the USSR has been long replaced by sharply divergent economic interests and security arrangements, corresponding to the different strategic views of the Central Asian leadership.

As a result, the current water infrastructure on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border has fallen into a state of disrepair. Water channels are either silted up or damaged, while water pumps are broken or not working at full capacity, all of which leads to further water losses. Since hydraulic infrastructure is transboundary in nature, there is no dedicated institution responsible for its rehabilitation and maintenance, while neither the government of Kyrgyzstan nor that of Tajikistan is willing to invest in water systems beyond its own national borders.

Accordingly, tensions on the border areas of Batken and Isfara escalate when the irrigation season starts. The cooperative expectations quite often do

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<sup>55</sup> Murzakulova and Mestre, *Natural Resource Management Dynamics in Border Communities of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan*.

<sup>56</sup> Bichsel, *Conflict Transformation in Central Asia*.

<sup>57</sup> Lisa Marie Izquierdo, Mari Stangerhaugen, Diana Castillo, Robert Nixon, and Gloria Jimenez, *Water Crisis in Central Asia: Key Challenges and Opportunities* (New York: New School University, December 2010).



not match the reality both at inter-state and local levels. Even though the area is not under water stress, downstream users are still often deprived of water, while upstream users often abuse water abstractions. In turn, downstream users seek to mitigate this unequal arrangement through negotiations, protests, obstructions and sabotage, which in turn increase the security dilemma and escalate tensions.

### ***Militarization of Borders***

In the early August of 2015, a thin lane separating Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan became a zone of conflict between the citizens of both countries. Different sources quote up to 200 people involved from each side in a two-day rock-throwing incident.<sup>58</sup> According to the account of the Kyrgyz side, Tajik citizens blocked a road to a cemetery used by both the Kyrgyz villagers of Kok-Tash and the Tajik villagers of Somonien. In response, the residents of Kok-Tash blocked a water canal supplying Somonien. According to the account of the Tajik side, these events took place in the reverse order. While the social fabric in these villages was restored promptly, such incidents serve to expose how minor violations of unwritten rules have the potential of sparking violent conflicts.<sup>59</sup>

Most observers refer to a border demarcation as a solution that will ease such tensions on the Kyrgyz-Tajik borders. Indeed, for over 25 years Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan could not agree on border delimitation and demarcation. The map of the Ferghana Valley is marked by disputed and porous borders and territorial units, known as 'enclaves,' which are separated from its mainland by the lands of other countries. It appears that such divisions aggravate existing water and land disputes and fuel further economic uncertainties and inter-ethnic animosities.

As aforementioned, soon after the collapse of the USSR, the Ferghana Valley was discursively cast as a volatile and crisis-ridden region prone to sectarian violence. These assumptions were based on the normative idea that the conception of territorial ambiguity is a metonym for latent conflict and danger to united citizenry.<sup>60</sup> As a result, those discourses characterized Central Asia as a site of intervention, prompting the international community to enter the region to mitigate conflict potential and promote peaceful development. However,

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<sup>58</sup> Peter Leonard, "Tajikistan & Kyrgyzstan: Interethnic Clash Shines Light on Fraying Social Fabric," *Eurasianet*, August 11, 2015, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/74631>; "Konflikt mezhdhu grazhdanami Kyrgyzstana i Tajikistana v sele Kok-Tash (Conflict between the citizens of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in the village of Kok-Tash)," *Sputnik*, August 4, 2015, <https://ru.sputnik.kg/infographics/20150804/1017166313.html>; Mariya Zozulya, "Na granice Batkenskoi oblasti i Tajikistana proizoshel konflikt (A conflict took place on the border of the Batken region and Tajikistan)," *Vechernii Bishkek*, August 3, 2015, [http://www.vb.kg/doc/321945\\_na\\_granice\\_batkenskoy\\_oblasti\\_i\\_tadjikistana\\_proizoshel\\_konflikt.html](http://www.vb.kg/doc/321945_na_granice_batkenskoy_oblasti_i_tadjikistana_proizoshel_konflikt.html).

<sup>59</sup> Leonard, "Tajikistan & Kyrgyzstan."

<sup>60</sup> Reeves, "Locating Danger."

quite often, those investments did not translate into calm and peaceful borders.<sup>61</sup>

One of the greatest misconceptions of national and international observers was that stricter border control would mitigate the conflict potential of the region. While the fortification of border services and infrastructure may be a prerequisite for the modern nation-state, the fortification of yet unsettled border segments may emerge as a challenging step to introduce. As Bichsel<sup>62</sup> highlighted, in the case of the Batken-Isfara region, border posts and checkpoints have only served to aggravate existing tensions. The region, where different ethnic groups have long co-existed in a network of interdependent communities, needed a more sensitive and human approach. As Madeleine Reeves<sup>63</sup> underlined, the assertion of state territoriality in the Ferghana Valley often cuts across lines of kinship, worship, friendship, work, and trade.

Rather than repairing, barbed wire fencing, passport checks, and bypass roads only dent the existing microcosms further.<sup>64</sup> This phenomenon explains why, for instance, the bypass road, known locally now as “the Kyrgyz road,” has emerged as a cause of rupture between the Kyrgyz and Tajik villages. The application of state territoriality has excluded Tajik communities from using previously shared spaces. As a result, aggrieved Tajik youth have been known to pelt bypassing cars with stones, which in turn leads to retaliatory measures from drivers and an escalation of the situation.

Anna Matveeva<sup>65</sup> identified borders as places, where communities project their fears onto each other, whether these are the fears of being encircled and trapped or the fears of losing territory, assets and resources. In a sense, fear becomes a catalyst for identity formation in cross-border communities: it fortifies perceptions of collective insecurity even during periods of tranquility and fosters the emergence of strong ethnic borderland identities reinforced by new nationhood ideologies and “us against them” associations.<sup>66</sup> In turn, even petty disputes in Central Asia can acquire a feature of ethnic polarization.<sup>67</sup>

That said, it is not porous borders that escalated conflict in the Batken-Isfara area, but rather it has been the greater focus on security through the militarization of borders that has transformed the nature of relations in the region. Strict border regimes often contribute to instability instead of strengthening fragile peace by hampering cross-border movement across invisible fron-

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<sup>61</sup> D.T., “Enclaves in Central Asia: The Post-imperial Chessboard,” *The Economist*, April 1, 2014, [www.economist.com/banyan/2014/04/02/the-post-imperial-chessboard](http://www.economist.com/banyan/2014/04/02/the-post-imperial-chessboard).

<sup>62</sup> Bichsel, *Conflict Transformation in Central Asia*.

<sup>63</sup> Madeleine Reeves, *Border Work: Spatial Lives of the State in Rural Central Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014).

<sup>64</sup> Reeves, *Border Work*.

<sup>65</sup> Anna Matveeva, “Divided we fall ... or rise? Tajikistan–Kyrgyzstan border dilemma,” *Cambridge Journal of Eurasian Studies* 1 (2017): 1-20.

<sup>66</sup> Matveeva, “Divided we fall ... or rise?”

<sup>67</sup> Matveeva, “Divided we fall ... or rise?”

tiers that have been long governed by established rules, traditions and history. During the Soviet times, the borders, which separate modern Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, had divided two Soviet socialist republics administratively. Accordingly, the rules and arrangements that governed the transboundary relations of two Soviet republics were not as strict as those that applied to the neighbors of the USSR. However, these practices changed in the early 1990s, as the internal administrative borders that separated the communities of Batken and Isfara suddenly re-emerged as international borders that thereafter separated “us” from “them.”

For this reason, a stricter border regime in Central Asia does not necessarily embody a more peaceful social fabric. The involvement of border guards and the use of military hardware are more likely to escalate the conflict to a completely new level – to the extent that one could even reconsider the plausibility of the aforementioned ‘catastrophizing’ writings. As the conflict near Vorukh in May 2014 served to show, this was no longer a “ketmen fight,” as it involved regular army units, heavy weapons and diplomatic protest notes. As Jeremy Slack and co-authors emphasized, for many politicians ‘secure’ means ‘militarized,’ which is not true for the people living on the borders.<sup>68</sup> For instance, harassment perpetrated by border and immigration agents contradicts and often violates the notion of “human security.”<sup>69</sup>

Accordingly, it is not the disputed and porous borders that drive the conflict in the Batken-Isfara area, but rather the ‘securitization’ of border relations that aggravates existing disputes and fuels further uncertainties and animosities. Instead of diminishing the number of “ketmen fights,” the militarization of borders escalates the tensions stalling any further progress to a peaceful resolution of local disputes.

### ***Lack of Evidence-Based Policy Advice***

The ineffective use of natural resources or the militarization of borders quite often stem from a lack of evidence-based decision-making in the region. Although evidence-based policymaking is predominantly well established in the developed world, Central Asian states are yet to fully experience the benefits of informed decision-making. Such an approach assumes the application of systematic evidence in order to continually improve policy decisions. Policymaking, derived from quality research and applied analyses, is instrumental in producing better policy options, reducing poverty, stimulating economic growth, and enhancing the quality of life.

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<sup>68</sup> Jeremy Slack, Daniel E. Martinez, Alison Elizabeth Lee, and Scott Whiteford, “The Geography of Border Militarization: Violence, Death and Health in Mexico and the United States,” *Journal of Latin American Geography* 15, no. 1 (March 2016): 7-32.

<sup>69</sup> Mary Kaldor, Mary Martin, and Sabine Selchow, “Human Security: A New Strategic Narrative for Europe,” *International Affairs* 83, no. 2 (March 2007): 273-88; Slack, Martinez, Lee, and Whiteford, “The Geography of Border Militarization.”

However, institutional capacity to conduct sustained and policy-relevant research is weak across the region. One of the main factors contributing to the pervasive capacity gap in public administration and applied research is the overall lack of investment in professional development opportunities for civil servants and researchers. The collapse of the USSR and the subsequent decline of its educational institutions along with a lack of national funding to sponsor quality research eroded the capacity of the Central Asian states to conduct evidence-based analyses. In addition, the interest of the international academic community in Central Asia (compared to that of the early 1990s) has also decreased significantly.

As a result, since governments, international donors, and civil society actors often lack access to sufficiently well-founded options to inform robust policy debates and sound decisions, certain policy choices are detached from the actual context on the ground, do not address the root causes of the problem and at worst only exacerbate situations.

For instance, Murzakulova and Mestre<sup>70</sup> advised that due to public administration reforms pasture lands in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are managed by diverse institutions with different interests and priorities such as pasture users' unions, state forestry administrations, and collective and individual farms. Such fragmentation complicates the processes of effective pasture management. In fact, the current Land Code of Kyrgyzstan prohibits the lease of pastures. This legislature, introduced to mitigate pasture degradation, however, is not conducive to mitigating the conflict potential of the Batken-Isfara region. On the contrary, Tajik communities often pay bribes for illegal grazing, which not only increases potential points of friction between Tajik villagers and Kyrgyz border guards, but can also trigger grievances among the Kyrgyz communities.<sup>71</sup>

In addition, the underreported livestock of the Kyrgyz villagers who also use the same pastures as Tajik villagers contributes to an increasing pressure on land and a faster degradation of pastures, which may lead to new conflicts over access to lands in the future. The Jamoat Resource Centre of Vorukh<sup>72</sup> reports that occasionally Tajik shepherds who have to pass through the Kyrgyz territory to reach remote Tajik grazing territories fail to pass "environmental checkpoints" and are subject to money extortions from border guards, police, and even youth gangs. As a solution, Tajik villagers often hire Kyrgyz shepherds to ease the transit. However, the potential losses of Tajik livestock also lead to disputes, since there is usually no written agreement between the Tajik owners of livestock and the Kyrgyz shepherds.

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<sup>70</sup> Murzakulova and Mestre, *Natural Resource Management Dynamics in Border Communities of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan*.

<sup>71</sup> Jamoat Resource Center of Vorukh, "Potential for Peace and Threats of Conflict: Development Analysis of Cross-border Communities in Isfara District of the Republic of Tajikistan and Batken District of the Kyrgyz Republic" (2011).

<sup>72</sup> Jamoat Resource Centre of Vorukh, "Potential for Peace and Threats of Conflict."

Accordingly, evidence-based policymaking has the potential to improve the quality of life in the Batken-Isfara region. Evidence-based policymaking concerns the process of devising policy. This process should be rational and rigorous and grounded in the best available, contextual, and experiential evidence. In fact, building effective, efficient and accountable institutions on both national and subnational levels has been identified by the United Nations as one of the most paramount goals to be achieved within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Such an informed approach may not only help mitigate cross-border tensions, but also help to address a wider range of structural problems prevailing in the region.

### Threats of Radical Islamism

There is a popular discourse both within and outside of the region that Muslim radicalization is rapidly taking place across Central Asia. The widespread view is that the region is harboring violent religiously-motivated extremism. Recently, the International Crisis Group (ICG)<sup>73</sup> reported that the Islamic State (IS) is attracting a coalition of Central Asian jihadists and sympathizers and fostering a network of links within the region and nearby areas, including the Caucasus and Xinjiang. Violent extremist groups are gaining renewed traction, while Central Asian governments are using these threats to support their own political agendas and to curtail civil liberties.

As ICG concluded,<sup>74</sup> the environment in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is favorable for radical groups with violent agendas to establish their strongholds. Poverty, ethnic divisions, state weaknesses and persistent corruption, among many other factors, draw some economically and socially marginalized Kyrgyz, Tajiks and Uzbeks to more radical and externally sponsored Islam. According to ICG interlocutors, Hizb ut-Tahrir already has thousands of members in Kyrgyzstan who are connected to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the IS.

Indeed, at first glance, it may appear that the application of such discourse to the Batken-Isfara region may be quite relevant. In 1999 and 2000, the south of Kyrgyzstan was invaded by militant pan-Islamist extremists of the IMU led by Juma Namangani. Several hundred guerrillas wreaked havoc in the Batken re-

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<sup>73</sup> International Crisis Group, "Syria Calling: Radicalisation in Central Asia," *Europe and Central Asia Briefing* no. 72 (Bishkek/Brussels: Crisis Group, 20 January 2015), accessed May 18, 2018, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/syria-calling-radicalisation-central-asia>.

<sup>74</sup> International Crisis Group, "Kyrgyzstan: State Fragility and Radicalization," *Europe and Central Asia Briefing* no. 83 (Osh/Bishkek/Brussels: Crisis Group, 3 October 2016), accessed May 18, 2018, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/kyrgyzstan/kyrgyzstan-state-fragility-and-radicalisation>; International Crisis Group, "Tajikistan Early Warning: Internal Pressures, External Threats," *Europe and Central Asia Briefing* no. 78 (Bishkek/Brussels: Crisis Group, 11 January 2016), accessed May 18, 2018, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/tajikistan/tajikistan-early-warning-internal-pressures-external-threats>.

gion, terrorizing villagers and taking hostages including high-ranking Kyrgyz officials and Japanese geologists. Nearly 60 people were killed on the Kyrgyz side during the fights with militant extremists in 1999 and 2000. Although such extremist incursions have not taken place since in Kyrgyzstan, ICG warns that the IMU has a sleeping presence in southern Kyrgyzstan, while some of its members have emerged recently as recruiters for those Central Asians who want to go to Syria.<sup>75</sup>

Nonetheless, despite the daunting predictions that the region is falling into the abyss of radical Islamism, there is little evidence at this stage to support the idea that Central Asia is being significantly infiltrated by violent Islamic extremist organizations.<sup>76</sup> John Heathershaw and David Montgomery<sup>77</sup> argue that the threat of violent extremism in the region is both of a lower magnitude and different form than that identified in the public discourses, in that it is isolated, localized and inhibited by secularization as much as it is driven by radicalization. In the period between 2001 and 2013, there were only three attacks in Central Asia that have been claimed by violent Islamic groups (with a total of 11 deaths), while out of the 51 organizations on the US State Department's Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations list only two—the IMU and the Islamic Jihad Union—have any links to Central Asia.

In an open letter to ICG concerning its reporting of Islamic radicalization in Central Asia, a group of Central Asia scholars stressed that ICG's "specious and methodologically weak conclusions" can lead to a series of mistaken assumptions, problems, and solutions in the reactive policy environment of Central Asia.<sup>78</sup> The signatories of this letter underlined that there is no link between poverty and low education levels and a desire to join violent extremist groups, as well as the growth of non-traditional religious groups is not an indicator of the growth of violent extremism. The academics denote that such unsupported claims along with the absence of rigorous methodology influence policy and decision-makers in government and international organizations to believe in the existence of an imminent security threat from Islam and devise rapid responses in the form of a security policy on religion.

ICG immediately responded by welcoming an exchange of views and ideas in order to better understand the specific and multiple factors that can lead to radicalization. The very existence of such conflicting approaches to understanding Islamic radicalization in Central Asia demonstrates that this topic of common concern is extremely contested. There is even no agreement on how many

<sup>75</sup> International Crisis Group, "Kyrgyzstan: State Fragility and Radicalization."

<sup>76</sup> John Heathershaw and David Montgomery, "The Myth of Post-Soviet Muslim Radicalization in the Central Asian Republics," Research Paper (London: Chatham House/The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 11 November 2014).

<sup>77</sup> Heathershaw and Montgomery, "The Myth of Post-Soviet Muslim Radicalization."

<sup>78</sup> An open letter from Central Asia scholars to the International Crisis Group, "Understanding Islamic Radicalization in Central Asia," 2017, <http://thediplomat.com/2017/01/understanding-islamic-radicalization-in-central-asia>.

Central Asians left for Syria and Iraq to join ISIS. According to the Polish Institute of International Affairs, Central Asia sends far less fighters to Iraq and Syria than the countries of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>79</sup> On a state-by-state basis, 1 in 14,400 Turkmen, 1 in 40,000 Tajiks, 1 in 56,000 Kyrgyz, 1 in 58,000 Uzbeks, and 1 in 72,000 Kazakhs have become foreign fighters in Syria.<sup>80</sup>

The Polish Institute of International Affairs reports that in some countries of the Middle East and North Africa these numbers are more staggering. For example, 1 in 6,500 in Lebanon, 1 in 5,300 in Jordan, 1 in 7,300 in Tunisia, 1 in 18,200 in Saudi Arabia, and 1 in 22,000 in Morocco have joined foreign fighter ranks in Syria and Iraq. In Europe, 1 in 11,700 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1 in 23,800 in Belgium, and 1 in 55,200 in France have gone to fight for Islamic radicals in Syria and Iraq.<sup>81</sup>

Yet, despite the assertive claims of the Polish Institute of International Affairs, the range in the estimates of the actual Central Asian recruits varies significantly. Indira Zholdubayeva, the Prosecutor General of the Kyrgyz Republic, reported that there are approximately 500 Kyrgyz citizens fighting in Syria and that another 500 Kyrgyz citizens affiliated with terrorist organizations were uncovered by Kyrgyz secret services.<sup>82</sup> The State Committee for the National Security of the Kyrgyz Republic also confirmed that approximately 400 Kyrgyz nationals are currently in Syria, 60 more returned to Kyrgyzstan and were prosecuted, and 51 people were killed in Syria.<sup>83</sup> In Tajikistan, official reports estimate that up to 700 Tajik citizens joined ISIS in Syria.<sup>84</sup> The Ministry of Interior Affairs of Tajikistan stated that according to its information there are 1,100 citizens of Tajikistan fighting for ISIS in Syria and Iraq.<sup>85</sup>

However, the relatively low interest amongst Central Asians to join radical Islamic organizations does not render the problem obsolete. Recent terrorist attacks in a shopping district of Stockholm, at Istanbul's Reina nightclub and in a Saint Petersburg metro station threw Central Asian natives in a notorious

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<sup>79</sup> Anna Dyer, Arkadiusz Legieć, and Kacper Rękawek, "Ready to Go? ISIS and Its Presumed Expansion into Central Asia," *Policy Paper* no. 19(121) (Warsaw: The Polish Institute of International Affairs, June 2015), [www.pism.pl/files/?id\\_plik=20020](http://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=20020).

<sup>80</sup> Dyer, Legieć, and Rękawek, "Ready to Go?"

<sup>81</sup> Dyer, Legieć, and Rękawek, "Ready to Go?"

<sup>82</sup> Ekaterina Ivashenko, "Kyrgyzstan: Kto uezjaet voevat v Sirii (Kyrgyzstan: Who goes to fight in Syria)," *Fergana News*, November 20, 2015, <http://www.fergananews.com/articles/8774>.

<sup>83</sup> Ivashenko, "Kyrgyzstan: Who goes to fight in Syria."

<sup>84</sup> Zinaida Burskaya, "Tajikistan, Rossiya, dalee IGIL (Tajikistan, Russia, and then ISIS)," *Current Time*, December 22, 2015, <http://www.currenttime.tv/a/27442533.html>.

<sup>85</sup> Sairakhmon Nazriev, "Glava Hatlona obespokoen bolshim kolichestvom bokhtarcev v Sirii (Head of Hatlon is concerned with a large number of bokhtars in Syria)," *Asia-Plus*, January 21, 2017, <https://news.tj/ru/news/tajikistan/security/20170121/glava-hatlona-obespokoen-bolshim-kolichestvo-bohtartsev-v-sirii>.

spotlight;<sup>86</sup> and although it is nearly impossible to objectively assess the threats posed by violent extremist organizations to Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan, existing evidence, albeit scarce, shows that Central Asians do get radicalized and join militant groups in Syria and Iraq. Profiling Tajik fighters in Syria and Iraq, Edward Lemon advised that most of these fighters have been recruited in Russia and transited through Turkey to reach Syria.<sup>87</sup> However, there is no basic profile that fits all of those who travelled to Syria: some fighters have received formal religious education; some have worked in low-paid jobs; some are highly educated.<sup>88</sup> Meanwhile, those who travelled to Syria and Iraq include both men and women. In other words, the diverse backgrounds of radicalized Central Asians demonstrate that understanding the causes of radicalization in a single linear way is reductionist and even misleading.

Accordingly, it is too simplistic to assume that villagers of the Isfara and Batken regions are particularly prone to radicalization. Scarce natural resources, economic underdevelopment, disputed borders, and unsatisfied human needs do not necessarily translate into religiously motivated extremism. Yet, Central Asia remains one of the most volatile and vulnerable regions in the world with weak political institutions and poor economic performance. A lack of religious knowledge, social exclusion and the attractiveness of anti-secular political ideas may inspire Central Asians to join violent extremist organizations. As Central Asia scholars advised in their 2017 letter to ICG,<sup>89</sup> factors that lead to Muslim radicalization are specific, multiple and predominantly non-religious. Thus, a more nuanced and methodologically rigorous approach is needed for understanding this phenomenon and its relevance to regions such as Batken and Isfara.

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<sup>86</sup> Nick Bailey, "St. Petersburg Subway Bomb: 5 Things to Know About Central Asia," *NBC News*, April 4, 2017, <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/st-petersburg-subway-bomb-5-things-know-about-central-asia-n742436>; "Turkey nightclub attack: IS says it carried out shooting," *BBC News*, January 2, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38487509>; David Gauthier-Villars and Drew Hinshaw, "Stockholm Attack Puts Focus on Terrorists from Central Asia," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 9, 2017, [www.wsj.com/articles/stockholm-attack-puts-focus-on-terrorists-from-central-asia-1491764083](http://www.wsj.com/articles/stockholm-attack-puts-focus-on-terrorists-from-central-asia-1491764083); Per Nyberg and James Masters, "Sweden Terror Suspect 'Confesses' to Stockholm Attack," *CNN*, April 11, 2017, accessed May 19, 2018, <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/04/11/europe/stockholm-terror-attack-rakhmat-akilov/>.

<sup>87</sup> Edward Lemon, *Governing Islam and Security in Tajikistan and Beyond: The Emergence of Transnational Authoritarian Security Governance*, PhD dissertation (Exeter, United Kingdom: University of Exeter, 2016).

<sup>88</sup> Lemon, "Governing Islam and Security in Tajikistan and Beyond."

<sup>89</sup> An open letter from Central Asia scholars to the International Crisis Group, "Understanding Islamic Radicalization in Central Asia."



## Conclusion

Despite the prevalence of works on conflict in the Ferghana Valley, the literature on conflict potential in the cross-border areas of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is fairly limited. Yet, the number of small-scale clashes and tensions on the borders of the Batken and Isfara regions has been growing steadily. Accordingly, this article sought to contribute to the understanding of the ontology of conflict escalations in the area and identify factors that aggravate tensions between the communities.

A brief overview of conflict escalations in the Batken-Isfara region revealed that cross-border conflict in Central Asia cannot be explained in a single linear way and reduced to a variable of primordial inter-ethnic antagonisms. There are many factors, which can account for sectarian animosities. This article has identified four drivers, which exacerbate tensions and hinder the restoration of a peaceful social fabric in the Batken-Isfara region: the unresolved legacies of the Soviet past, inefficient use of natural resources, militarization of borders, and lack of evidence-based policymaking.

Since this work has been driven by normative aspirations, the author hopes that national actors and the international community will introduce the changes necessary to avert conflicts arising and to turn the Batken-Isfara region into a place free of contestation and hostility. Finally, Central Asian folklore attributes aspects of friendship and hospitality to its peoples. There should be empirical grounds to prove that point.

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## Georgia and Ukraine in the Kremlin's Policy

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**Abstract:** The Russian Federation believes that the post-Soviet region is strategically important and considers it to be the exclusive zone of its influence. Each of the former republics occupies a specific place in its foreign and security policy. In the following article the author has made an attempt to determine the place of Georgia and Ukraine in the aforementioned policy. It was made by analyzing Moscow's policy towards them, including actions that clearly enabled the implementation of a strategic political turn towards the West, which for the Kremlin would mean a gradual loss of influence in the area of the former USSR.

**Keywords:** Georgia, Ukraine, Russian policy, post-Soviet area.

### Introduction

The President of Russia opened a new chapter in relations with the West through his speech at a conference in Munich in 2007. He filled the western world with consternation by openly demanding equal treatment for Russia and the cessation of meddling with its internal affairs. In the face of such an assertive Russian stance, the American administration felt obliged to respond to the speech, in which they detected elements of the cold war rhetoric, and it was decided to speed up the process of NATO's enlargement by admitting Georgia and the Ukraine.

At the beginning of 2008, to the surprise of its European allies, Kyiv, inspired by Washington, turned to NATO with a request to include Ukraine in its Membership Action Plan (MAP). At the same time, Washington made its intention clear to include Georgia in the MAP as well. From Moscow's point of view, this was a drastic crossing of a certain boundary and a threat to its security interests. Georgia, similarly to Ukraine, had always had a special status in the Russian em-

pire and the former USSR. Georgia was conquered by Russia in 1801, but it was as early as in 1812 that Piotr Bagration, the descendant of a Georgian dynasty, became a hero of the war with Napoleon and was mortally wounded during the battle of Borodino. At the top of the leadership of the USSR there were many people of Georgian origin, including Joseph Stalin and Sergo Ordzhonikidze (People's Commissar of Heavy Industry in the 1930s), as well as the chief of the NKVD, Lavrenti Beria. Stalin was born in the Georgian city of Gori and his figure divides both the Georgian and Russian society even today. In 1956, after the 20<sup>th</sup> congress of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) during which Nikita Khrushchev debunked the cult of Stalin, protests took place in Tbilisi which resulted in casualties. Stalin was very popular among Georgian political elites. Vasil Mzhavanadze, a long-time secretary of the Georgian communist party in the period of 1953–1972, participated in a plot against Khrushchev and advocated keeping Stalin's museum in Gori. Stalin's monument was not destroyed either after the debunking of his cult or the breakup of the USSR,<sup>1</sup> and is still there today. On the other hand, in the final years of the USSR, Georgia was the center of destabilization and de-sovietization. Georgian cinematography, painting, music, and theater were an important part of the Soviet culture. The film "Repentance" by Tengiz Abuladze, directed in the Georgian language in 1984 before Gorbachev's perestroika, was the first film presenting the era of Stalinism and was a ground-breaking event in Russian cinematography, as well as an important artistic event with political meaning. In 1987, the film won a Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival. This is a story of the life and activity of a dictator who resembles Stalin and Beria at the same time. In the final scene, the son of the dictator throws his corpse out of its grave.<sup>2</sup>

The First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party, Eduard Shevardnadze, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR at the end of the 1980s, together with Gorbachev was the architect of the Soviet foreign policy which contributed to the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Berlin Wall.

Ukraine was of even more importance to Russia. The sensitivity of Putin and of the Russian political elites concerning this country can be easily understood. It is strongly embedded in historical experiences. In order to reach the vast Russian territory and attack the center of power in Moscow, which Napoleon's France, and the imperial, fascist Germany tried to do, it was necessary to first enter the territory of Ukraine. Thus, it plays the role of a buffer state of vital, strategic importance. Therefore, no Russian leader can tolerate Ukraine's political and military alliances with states considered by Russia to be enemies.

The Kremlin cannot also be indifferent to a situation in Ukraine where there is a center of power championing integration with a western alliance. Washing-

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<sup>1</sup> Natalia Antelava, "Stalin Still Revered in Georgia," *BBC News*, December 21, 2002, accessed December 16, 2017, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2596671.stm>.

<sup>2</sup> *Pokajanie [Repentance]*, directed by Tengiz Abuladze (Tbilisi: Kartuli Pilmi studio, 1987), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdiZCRH9Vj4>, with English subtitles, accessed December 18, 2017.

ton probably does not like Moscow's stance, but the USA should understand this geopolitical logic. Great countries are always oversensitive to potential threats in the vicinity of their territory. The United States would also not tolerate a situation if another superpower—even one that is geographically distant—deployed its military potential in the western hemisphere, not to mention close to their borders. One can imagine the outrage and reaction of Washington if China attempted to build a political or military alliance with Canada or Mexico. Russian leaders informed the authorities of western states many times that the enlargement of NATO by the accession of Georgia and Ukraine was unacceptable to Russia.<sup>3</sup>

The aim of this article is to determine the place of Georgia and Ukraine in the policy of the Russian Federation. Research has been undertaken to answer the question: What place does Georgia and Ukraine take in the policy of the Russian Federation? Theoretical methods such as source and literature criticism, analysis, synthesis and inference have been used in order to answer these questions.

## Disagreements between the Allies over Ukraine and Georgia Joining NATO

At the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008, Vladimir Putin issued a warning that if Ukraine and Georgia joined the Alliance, it would result in their division.<sup>4</sup> France and Germany realized the implications of the consequent threats and blocked the MAP.<sup>5</sup> Chancellor Angela Merkel and President Nicolas Sarkozy, referring to Ukraine, argued that the majority of Ukrainian society was against membership, while in the case of Georgia, its leader Mikhail Saakashvili was not a real democrat. His actions were to prove this to be true. In November 2007, he closed the biggest opposition TV channel and broke up a rally of protesters who opposed his leadership. Another justification for such a course of action was the unstable situation in Georgia with its two unresolved border conflicts – in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. If these conflicts evolved into a military confrontation, in

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<sup>3</sup> See John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault," *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (September/October 2014): 77-89, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault>; Mirosław Minkina, "NATO i UE w nowej rzeczywistości po aneksji Krymu [NATO and the EU in the New Reality after the Annexation of Crimea]," *De Securitate et Defensione. O Bezpieczeństwie i Obronności* 1, no. 1 (January-June 2015): 9-16, accessed December 16, 2017, [www.desecuritate.uph.edu.pl/images/De\\_Seuritate\\_nr\\_11\\_2015\\_Minkina.pdf](http://www.desecuritate.uph.edu.pl/images/De_Seuritate_nr_11_2015_Minkina.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> "Putin ne zjavljal o tom, chto Ukraina ne javljaetsia gosudarstvom [Putin Did Not Claim that Ukraine Is not a State]," *Segodnya.ua*, April 18, 2008, accessed December 13, 2017, <http://www.segodnya.ua/ukraine/putin-ne-zjavljal-o-tom-chto-ukrainane-javljaetcja-hocudarctvom-ctenohramma.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Steven Erlanger and Steven Lee Myers, "NATO Allies Oppose Bush on Georgia and Ukraine," *New York Times*, April 3, 2008, accessed December 13, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/03/world/europe/03nato.html>.

the case of the implementation of the MAP, the North Atlantic Alliance would be forced to react in line with the provisions of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty.<sup>6</sup>

At the summit, there was almost a scandal. The stance of France and Germany resulted in fierce criticism. The leaders of the Central and East European states declared openly that Sarkozy and Merkel were being bribed with Russian gas. The strongest words were, however, directed at the German minister of foreign affairs, Frank-Walter Steinmeier. He was told that after what Germany did in the 20<sup>th</sup> century it did not have any moral right to stand in the way of the freedom of East European countries.<sup>7</sup> The dispute lasted during supper and into the next day. Quoting eyewitnesses, Mikhail Zygar reports, that the argument between Angela Merkel and Condoleezza Rice, the US Secretary of State, was a very interesting event. The two women—the only women present at the summit—were standing aside and loudly arguing in Russian, the language which they both know perfectly well.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, a compromise was reached. It was decided that Georgia and Ukraine would not be included in the MAP program, and at the same time they were promised full membership of NATO but without a clearly determined time perspective. However, the compromise was not satisfactory either for Georgia or for Ukraine, or for Russia. Saakashvili and Putin, who came to Bucharest on the last day, were outraged. Resignation from the MAP had already been agreed, but even this was not acceptable to the Russian president since the perspective of NATO's enlargement by admitting two states from the post-Soviet region had been clearly expressed.

During the meeting behind the closed doors, when the discussion concerned Ukraine, Putin was to tell Bush: "Ukraine, generally speaking, is not a state. A part of its territory is Eastern Europe, and a part—a significant one—is a gift from us. If Ukraine joins NATO, it will be without the Crimea and its eastern region – it will simply fall apart."<sup>9</sup> At that time, not many paid attention to Putin's threat since everyone focused on the escalating clash between Tbilisi and Moscow. Nobody, at that time, believed or anticipated an actual conflict between Russia and the Ukraine. Another factor contributing to the lack of reflection on the threat was the upcoming inauguration of the new president, Dmitry Medvedev, which was to be held the following month, on May 7.

## The War with Georgia

The policies of the new president were largely a continuation of the policies of his predecessor. Medvedev attempted to increase the social support base for

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<sup>6</sup> Mikhail Zygar, *Vsya kriemlevskaya rat'. Kratkaja istorija sovremennoj Rossii [All the Kremlin's Army: Brief History of Contemporary Russia]* (Moscow: Alpina Digital, 2016), 207.

<sup>7</sup> Zygar, *Vsya kriemlevskaya rat'.*

<sup>8</sup> Zygar, *Vsya kriemlevskaya rat'.*

<sup>9</sup> Zygar, *Vsya kriemlevskaya rat'.*, 208.

the administration with liberal intelligentsia and the citizens of municipalities. He also sought the improvement of relations with the West. His first diplomatic initiative was presenting the draft of a new treaty on European security at the end of 2009. In accordance with the points proposed in the document, the new European security architecture would not be based on NATO but on the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations (UN).<sup>10</sup>

However, the activity that preoccupied him the most during the first months of his presidency was the war with Georgia which had started as a response to Saakashvili's actions aiming at establishing control over South Ossetia. Just after the end of the summit in Bucharest, the tension increased due to the concentration of the Georgian army close to the border with Abkhazia. As a response, Russia enlarged the military contingent of its so-called peacekeeping forces there and began to hand Russian passports to the citizens of Abkhazia and South Ossetia on a large scale. At the end of May, the Kremlin deployed its railroad troops to Abkhazia, which evoked a strong protest from the West including the OSCE and the EU. Moscow justified the move by the need for the rebuilding of Abkhazian infrastructure and providing humanitarian aid.<sup>11</sup>

In the beginning, Medvedev tried to open a new page in Russian-Georgian relations. During his first meeting with Saakashvili in Saint Petersburg in June 2008, he declared that he was ready to restore good, bilateral relations without looking back on the past.<sup>12</sup> But during the second meeting in July in Astana, the atmosphere of talks was not that friendly. That was a clear proof that Russia had planned military operations against Georgia much earlier. Many different authors have tried to reconstruct the course of events leading to the outbreak of this war. Their analyses indicate that Russia had been preparing for the war for some time past. Certain events might suggest that.

Prior to the military operations, Russia had launched a massive cyber attack paralyzing the Georgian governmental portals. Carrying out such an operation requires earlier preparations. Russia was already experienced in a "denial-of-service" attack when in the spring of 2007 it blocked banking and governmental servers in Estonia.

It was a weird coincidence that, just before the breakout of the war, large Russian military maneuvers known as "Caucasus 2008" were carried out close to the Georgian border. In the exercise, held on the territory of South Ossetia, the

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<sup>10</sup> "The draft of the European Security Treaty," the website of the President of the Russian Federation, November 29, 2009, accessed January 14, 2018, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/6152>.

<sup>11</sup> "Medvedev i Saakashvili schitajut, chto nerashaemych problem v otnoshenii RF i Gruzii net [Medvedev and Saakashvili think that there are no insoluble problems between the Russian Federation and Georgia]," *Izvestia*, June 6, 2008, accessed December 16, 2017, <http://izvestia.ru/news/427048>.

<sup>12</sup> "Medvedev i Saakashvili schitajut, chto nerashaemych problem v otnoshenii RF i Gruzii net."

forces of the 58<sup>th</sup> Army, stationed in Northern Caucasus, were supported by the forces and materiel of the Black Sea Fleet. The official aim of the exercise was to improve the skills of combating terrorism in a mountainous terrain, but such a scenario was a perfect fit for the operation of invading another country. The maneuvers officially ended on August 2nd. Simultaneously, the Russian media carried out a disinformation campaign. In order to diminish the importance of the undertaking, the media reported the participation of about eight thousand soldiers, 700 tanks and armored personnel carriers, dozens of aircraft and some helicopters.<sup>13</sup> In fact, the number of engaged personnel and military equipment was much larger. At the end of these military maneuvers, the forces did not return to where they had been previously stationed. Not only did they remain in place but they were quickly strengthened and enlarged to 80 thousand soldiers and members of paramilitary formations, out of which 60 thousand would take part in war operations.

Four thousand citizens were evacuated from the capital of South Ossetia Tskhinvali to Russia. The evacuation was carried out in a planned and organized way, which proves that it was coordinated by the authorities.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, about five thousand journalists of the Russian media appeared in the city, as well as in the metropolitan TV station.<sup>15</sup> It seems that the Russian preparation for the invasion of Georgia had begun over two years before. During this period, geopolitical and strategic goals were formulated. The main geopolitical purpose was the elimination of all structures of Georgian statehood from South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In this way, the separatist republics were to become independent, and then integrated into the Russian Federation. The planned military attack on Georgia was, on the one hand, to prevent the country from joining NATO, and, on the other hand, it was a clear message for Ukraine that membership in NATO could mean a war with Russia. Such an action was intended to undermine the effectiveness of the North Atlantic Alliance's defense umbrella, as it would not be able to mobilize its resources for a non-member state. The plan of the operation against Georgia also had long-term strategic goals. For Russia it was a priority to increase control over the most important fuel pipelines. If it was possible to place a pro-Russian government in Georgia, the Kremlin could control the oil pipeline Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, which transports oil from the deposits located by the Caspian Sea to Europe bypassing Russia, as well as the South-Caucasus pipeline called Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum, transporting natural gas from the Shah Deniz

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<sup>13</sup> "Krupnye vojennye uchenija "Kavkaz-2008" prochodiat na juge Rossii, Pervyj kanal [Massive Military Exercises "Caucasus 2008" Are Going on to the South of Russia, Channel One]," July 20, 2008, accessed December 16, 2017, [http://www.1tv.ru/news/2008-07-20/186261-krupnye\\_voennye\\_ucheniya\\_kavkaz\\_2008\\_prohodyat\\_na\\_yuge\\_rossii](http://www.1tv.ru/news/2008-07-20/186261-krupnye_voennye_ucheniya_kavkaz_2008_prohodyat_na_yuge_rossii).

<sup>14</sup> Marcel H. Van Herpen, *Putin's War. The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 242.

<sup>15</sup> Herpen, *Putin's War*.



gas field in Azerbaijan to Turkey.<sup>16</sup> A pro-Russian government in Tbilisi would mean controlling the transport corridor of gas, oil, and other natural resources, connecting Central Asia and Azerbaijan with the Black Sea and other reservoirs. In 1999, western concerns reached an agreement with the states of Central Asia concerning the construction of the oil pipeline Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, which began to be used in 2006. The pipeline allowed Azerbaijan, as well as Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, to become independent of the Russia-controlled pipelines and to transport oil from the Caspian Sea through Georgia and Turkey, bypassing Russian territory. The Russian-Georgian alliance would enable the control of Azerbaijan from the west and north, making it difficult at the same time for the United States to station armed forces and intelligence assets on the territory of this country. It is worth mentioning that until the annexation of the Crimea, Azerbaijan pursued a definitely pro-western policy.<sup>17</sup>

On 8 August 2008, when world leaders were participating in the Olympic Games opening ceremony in Beijing, Russian tanks crossed the Georgian border. The night before, fighting between the Georgian armed forces and the military formations of South Ossetia broke out. Troops on both sites used machine guns, grenade launchers, and mortars. On the 8 May at 04:00 the Georgian artillery of the 4<sup>th</sup> infantry brigade began a twenty minutes artillery bombardment, after which the land forces took up arms and started capturing districts in Ossetia. In the morning, after capturing the cross-border villages, the Georgian troops entered the capital of South Ossetia, Tskhinvali.

The immediate Russian reaction was overwhelming, which might confirm the earlier hypothesis on the planned operation against Georgia, or on having intelligence concerning the decisions of Saakashvili and the Georgian armed forces. At about 1 am the troops stationed near the border with South Ossetia were given orders to regroup in the direction of the Roki Tunnel,<sup>18</sup> connecting North and South Ossetia, about 60 km from Tskhinvali. The 58<sup>th</sup> Russian Army stationed in Vladikavkaz quickly gained advantage over the Georgian forces. It consisted of

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<sup>16</sup> Ariel Cohen and Robert E. Hamilton, *The Russian Military and the Georgia War: Lessons and Implications* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2011), 2.

<sup>17</sup> Since 2014, Azerbaijan started to walk away from the West. Lack of faith in its political effectiveness and the growing pressure of Russia forced Baku to isolate itself from the world. The policy exercised by the authorities was more and more distant from the expectations and plans of the western states. In the context of the conflict in Ukraine, Azerbaijan revised the balance of powers and the regional policy. For the West and Russia, Azerbaijan is the key country of South Caucasus given its natural resources (oil and gas) as well as demographic potential. Azerbaijan supported Georgia during the gas conflicts with Russia in 2007 and 2008. See Aleksandra Jarosiewicz, "Azerbejdżan – narastający problem dla Zachodu [Azerbaijan – A Growing Problem for the West]," *Komentarze* no. 146 (Warsaw: Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich [Centre for Eastern Studies], 15 September 2014).

<sup>18</sup> Michail Barabanov, Anton Lavrov, and Viaczeslav Celuyko, "Tanki avgusta. Sbornik statiej [The Tanks of August: A Compendium of Articles]," *Centr Analiza Strategiy i Tehnologiy* [Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies], 2009, 57.

the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 42<sup>nd</sup> mechanized divisions and the 98<sup>th</sup> Air Assault Division. The 76<sup>th</sup> Assault-Aviation Division was also redeployed from Pskov. Moreover, the 33<sup>rd</sup> Mountainous Battalion, trained to operate in the Caucasus region, took part in the operation as well. On the third day of the war, Russia opened a second front of operations – in Abkhazia. The following troops operated there: the 7<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division, the 76<sup>th</sup> Assault-Aviation Division, marines of the Black Sea Fleet, as well as the 20<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Division from Volgograd. According to different sources, the war involved around 35 to 40 thousand soldiers, about 300 combat aircraft and two naval craft.<sup>19</sup> The Georgian forces amounted to 12-15 thousand soldiers, 8 Su-25 attack aircraft, and 20 helicopters. Aviation, however, did not play a major role in the conflict.<sup>20</sup> With a considerable numerical advantage and convenient starting positions for operations, the Russian forces prevented the Georgian troops from achieving any of their goals – taking control over the route leading to Tskhinvali and blocking the key Roki Tunnel. After the capture of the capital of South Ossetia, the Georgian forces clashed with the 135<sup>th</sup> and the 693<sup>rd</sup> regiments of the 58<sup>th</sup> Army north of the city. Georgia threw its most valuable forces into the fight—the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> brigades—which resulted in leaving the western part of the country defenseless. The situation was taken advantage of by the Russian forces which did not encounter any resistance when entering Abkhazia. In the city of Senaki they destroyed the infrastructure of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade engaged at that time in South Ossetia. They also captured the Georgian Black Sea base in Poti. The defeat of Georgia was assured from the beginning of the conflict, mostly due to the fact that the Roki Tunnel had not been blocked.<sup>21</sup>

The operations of Russian forces were supported by a war in cyberspace. 28 Internet sites were attacked both in Georgia as well as in the western states, including the official portal of the Georgian president, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Central Bank, the parliament, the highest court, as well as the embassies of the USA and the United Kingdom in Georgia. It seems that the attacks were centrally coordinated. They began on the 8 August at 05:15, were repeated every 30 minutes, and ended on 11 August when the Russian forces announced a ceasefire. As a result of the negotiations by the President of France, which at that time held the EU presidency, the Russian forces did not enter Tbilisi.

Along with cyber-attacks, Russia undertook disinformation activities attempting to impose its own version of events upon the world. According to their interpretation, Georgia, and its president in particular, was the aggressor, while Russia was the victim of the aggression. Moscow was forced to intervene in defense of Russians living in South Ossetia and Abkhazia in order to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe. Moreover, they insisted that the West and the USA did not have

<sup>19</sup> Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military and the Georgia War*, 11.

<sup>20</sup> Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military and the Georgia War*, 12.

<sup>21</sup> *Voyna na Kavkaze 2008: russkiy vzgljad. Gruzino-osietinskaja vojna 8–13 avgusta 2008 goda [War in the Caucasus 2008: Russian Views. Georgian-Ossetian War of August 8-13, 2008]*, ed. A.D. Cyganok (Moscow: AIRO-XXI, 2011).

any moral right to criticize, since they had launched military interventions in Kosovo and other regions of the world.

The conflict with Georgia lasted five days. According to Agnieszka Legucka, such a swift end to the conflict meant that Russia had attained its political goals by preventing the progress of NATO's enlargement in the Caucasus.<sup>22</sup>

### Russia's "niet" to Ukraine's European Aspirations

As has already been mentioned, from the point of view of Moscow's security and politics, Ukraine is of even greater importance than Georgia, and in the context of its pro-European aspirations the crisis, which took place after almost one hundred years since the beginning of World War I, was unavoidable. It meant *de facto* a new form of confrontation between the superpowers, i.e. the West with the USA in the leading role and Russia.

During the night of 21/22 of February 2014, an agreement concerning a political solution to the crisis in Ukraine was reached. The document was signed by the president of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich as well as the leaders of the opposition – Arseniy Yatsenyuk, Vitali Klitschko, and Oleh Tyahnybok. The foreign ministers of France, Germany, and Poland were the guarantors of the agreement. Also, a representative of the Russian Federation, who was present in Kyiv, participated in the meeting. The compromise was, however, not accepted by the protesters at the Maidan in Kyiv. Yanukovich, deprived of the support of his power base including the law enforcement departments, escaped from Kyiv together with few of his co-workers, first to the Crimea, and then to Russia.<sup>23</sup>

Protesters gathered at the Maidan at the end of 2013. They demanded: the choice of the European way for Ukraine, respect for civil rights, and opposition to the corruption of the authorities. The crowd in Kyiv was supported by some oligarchs as well as nationalist groups. After Yanukovich's escape, the goals of Ukraine's foreign policy were clearly expressed, and included integration with the EU and Euro-Atlantic institutions. The new Ukrainian identity that the protesters demanded was to be built on the rejection of the Soviet and imperial past of Russia as well as on the primacy of the Ukrainian language and culture.

The governments and public opinion in the West welcomed the Ukrainian revolution with satisfaction, seeing it as a victory for European values as well as proof of the attraction of western democracy and its market economy. During the events at the Maidan, the representatives of the USA and the EU member

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<sup>22</sup> Agnieszka Legucka, "Konflikty zbrojne jako instrument wpływu Federacji Rosyjskiej na obszarze poradzieckim. Wnioski dla Ukrainy i Polski [Armed Conflicts as an Instrument of Influence of the Russian Federation on the Post-Soviet Area. Consequences for Ukraine and Poland]," in *Polska – Rosja. Perspektywa sąsiedzka [Poland – Russia. Neighborhood Perspective]*, ed. Mirosław Minkina and Malina Kaszuba (Siedlce, Poland: Siedlce Pracownia Wydawnicza Wydziału Haministycznego UPH, 2015), 23.

<sup>23</sup> "Krym. Vozvrashchenie domoy. Specialnyi reportazh [Crimea. Returning Home. Special Reportage]," (TV Center, 24 March 2014), available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4x\\_1Ek4nSYc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4x_1Ek4nSYc), accessed November 20, 2017.

states openly took the side of protesters, trying to persuade the President of Ukraine to agree to concessions, and warned him against the use of force against his own citizens. The Maidan was not only treated as the democratic expression of the protest of Ukrainians against a corrupt state, but also as a protest against the Moscow-oriented foreign policy. The direct reason for the riots was Yanukovich's decision on November 2013 not to sign the already prepared agreement on the association of Ukraine with the European Union. The president was afraid of the political and economic costs as well as the threat to his office in the context of presidential elections due to be held in 2015. Obviously, this decision by the head of the Ukrainian state was influenced by the Kremlin which had sent unambiguous signals of dissatisfaction to Kyiv. It was argued, by Russia, that any association with the EU would bring serious harm to the economic cooperation between the two countries, while joining the Customs Union with Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus would significantly invigorate the Ukrainian economy.

Yanukovich had a huge problem in trying to make a decision. At the end of 2013 and the beginning of 2014, he suspended the process of association with the EU and turned to Moscow with a request for financial support, which was granted immediately. In December 2013, Russia declared its readiness to provide financial support in the amount of 15 billion USD, out of which 3 billion would be transferred immediately.<sup>24</sup> The Ukrainian leader hoped that it would be possible to maneuver between Russia and the EU, without having to make a final decision. A kind of competition between the West and Russia commenced, in which what was at stake was a European country that was second in terms of the size of its territory and seventh in terms of the number of citizens – Ukraine.

The association agreement between the EU and the Ukraine and the subsequent establishment of a free-trade zone did not mean much. The road from association to membership in the EU was still long, but it was impossible for Russia to ignore the symbolic step in terms of politics and geopolitics. The fact that Ukraine was leaving the historical Russian sphere of influence and its pro-western orientation meant a fundamental shift in the eastern part of Europe. Both Europe and Russia realized how meaningful the change was. In this way, Moscow's hopes to create the Euro-Asian center of political and economic influence on the basis of the former USSR region were undermined. Without Ukraine, the Russian integration plan did not make any sense. Russia assumed that the Ukrainian example of overthrowing the existing power would be an inspiration for anti-systemic movements in other countries, e.g. Armenia, Belarus, and even in Russia itself. At the same time, it seemed that counter revolutions were gaining new energy and motivation. The events in Kyiv were shocking for Moscow. Putin's policy towards Ukraine was based on the historical approach and the thesis of the organic and historical unity of the Russian world (*Russkiy mir*). He re-

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<sup>24</sup> "Rossiya vlozhyt 15 mlrd doll. v cennye bumagi ukrainskogo pravitelstva [Russia will invest 15 billion dollars in securities of the Ukrainian Government]," *UNIAN*, December 17, 2013, accessed November 20, 2016, <https://economics.unian.net/stockmarket/864591-rossiya-vlozhit-15-mlrd-doll-v-tsennyie-bumagi-ukrainskogo-pravitelstva.html>.

peated it many times, including, *inter alia*, at the meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club in September 2013, when he claimed that “Russians and Ukrainians constitute one nation.”<sup>25</sup> At the same time, the Kremlin pursued a systematic and pragmatic policy aiming at the membership of Ukraine in the Euro-Asian Union, and the authorities in Kyiv were the only partner and ally of the project. The essence of this project was putting Yanukovych, who was never fully trusted in Moscow, in a situation in which only one choice was possible – the alliance with Russia and the membership in the Euro-Asian Union.

Yanukovych, who was always guided by private interests and not the good of the state, escaped from Ukraine. At the same time, the representatives of the western states negotiating the association agreement, were not able to restraint the Maidan's emotions after its signing. In Moscow, the situation was perceived as the United States entering the political game, with US agents provoking clashes in Kyiv between protesters and the law enforcement services. According to Russia, American agents deprived the president of Ukraine of the support of the power ministries and pushed Europe away from having any influence on the course of events at the Maidan. What is more, the Kremlin concluded that Ukraine had not only separated itself from Russia, but was also being transformed into an American stronghold, from which it would be possible to carry out an operation of exerting pressure on Moscow at all levels – political, economic and, finally, the military one. In this situation, a decision was taken to carry out the annexation of the Crimea. Russia also attempted to provoke riots in south-west Ukraine which were to be of an “anti-Maidan” character. The operation, however, turned out to be ineffective. It was only in Donbas, in May 2014, that they managed to organize a referendum which resulted in the creation of the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic which did not recognize the new administration in Kyiv. The Ukrainian authorities tried to counteract this by taking full control of the separatist republics and this became the cause of a conflict lasting until today and produced an area of destabilization. The conflict evolved fast into an open confrontation between Russia, the USA and the American allies from NATO. The regions which did not recognize the administration in Kyiv could not be fully pacified due to the economic, military, and diplomatic support provided by Russia.

At the same time, it should be remembered that the Ukrainian administration, appointed after the ousting of Yanukovych, also took part in this course of events. However, the authorities made a few basic political mistakes. They failed to convince and attract the Russian-speaking part of society that was skeptical about the change of administration.<sup>26</sup> A few short-sighted laws and political dec-

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<sup>25</sup> “Zasedaniye mezhdunarodnogo diskussionnogo kluba «Valday» [Meeting of the International Discussion Club ‘Valday’],” website of the President of the Russian Federation, September 19, 2013, accessed November 20, 2017, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19243>.

<sup>26</sup> Vladimir Solovjev and Nikolay Zlobin, *Russkiy virazh. Kuda idet Rossiya?* [Russian Turn: Where is Russia Going?] (Moscow: Eksmo, 2014), 169.

larations were produced, such as the prohibition of the Russian language (which was soon lifted), the promise of a speedy entrance into NATO, the termination of the agreement on the stationing of the Russian fleet in the Crimea, and the banning of the Party of Regions and the Communist Party of Ukraine. Arrest warrants were issued for the head of the Supreme Council of the Crimea, Vladimir Konstantinov, the prime minister of the Crimea, Sergey Aksyonov,<sup>27</sup> and Rear Admiral Denis Berezovsky – the commander of the Ukrainian naval forces, who had sworn allegiance to Russia.<sup>28</sup> In Donetsk, the governor Pavel Gubayev was arrested.

The administration in Kyiv made one mistake after another. They did not take into consideration the ethnic diversity of Ukraine, and they perceived the situation only through the prism of the Maidan. They did not make any effort to visit the east and the south-east to talk, to ease the tense situation and to calm everything down. The nationalistic Right Sector should also have been disarmed, and the use of extreme nationalistic rhetoric and fascist symbols should have been banned. The memories of World War II and the atrocities of soldiers as well as the security forces of Nazi Germany were still too vivid in the Ukrainian society, and especially for the Russian-speaking people. Consequently, they lost the confidence of a great part of society, which maybe did not support the change of power, but also had not acted aggressively against it. Regardless of the reliability of the election mechanism, it might be assumed that the erroneous decisions of the new administration in Kyiv contributed largely to the result of the referendum in the Crimea.

In the meantime, western countries openly and firmly supported the Ukrainian administration which had gained legitimacy in the elections in May and October. In the West, there was no doubt that only Russia should be held responsible for the crisis in Ukraine. This conviction was only made stronger by the shooting down of a Malaysian Airlines passenger plane over Donbas by the pro-Russian militants in June 2014. The political condemnation of Russia's activities was supported with economic and financial sanctions, the strengthening the eastern NATO flank as well as with increased confrontation.<sup>29</sup> In the spring and summer of 2014, what had been a qualified relationship between Russia and the West—although far from ideal since the end of the Cold War—transformed into

<sup>27</sup> "Aksenov: arest Kievom imushchestva Kryma– vystrel vcholostuju [Aksenov: Arrest by Kyiv of Crimean Property – A Blank Shot]," *Vesti.ru*, March 16, 2015, accessed January 6, 2018, <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=2430256>.

<sup>28</sup> "Kontr-admiral Berezovskij pytalsia zachvatit' stab VMS Ukrainy [Rear Admiral Berezovskij Tried to Seize the Headquarters of the Ukrainian navy]," *Fakty i Kommentarii*, March 3, 2014, accessed January 6, 2017, <http://fakty.ua/177790-kontr-admiral-berezovskij-pytalsya-zahvatit-shtab-vms-ukrainy>.

<sup>29</sup> Vide Marta Stempień, "Interesy wywiadowcze Federacji Rosyjskiej na Bliskim Wschodzie w kontekście konfliktu syryjskiego [Intelligence Interests of the Russian Federation in the Middle East in the Context of the Syrian Conflict]," *Secretum 1*, no. 4 (2016): 119-130.

a new form of conflict and the growing isolation of Russia. The specter of military confrontation was revived again.

## The Breakthrough in the Foreign and Security Policy of the Russian Federation

The year 2014 was earth-shaking for Russian foreign and security policy. It turned out that the two geopolitical concepts that had existed during the period between 1989–2014, i.e. an orientation towards Europe and, alternatively, towards Asia had turned out to be of limited use.

The concept of a European orientation was formulated at the end of the Soviet era. It presupposed economic, political, and social reforms transforming Russia into a state similar to the western democracies, integration with the Euro-Atlantic institutions (including NATO and the EU) as well as an equal partnership with the USA.<sup>30</sup> Despite attempts to put these assumptions into practice—by Mikhail Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin, Vladimir Putin (in the first years of his presidency) and Dmitry Medvedev—they had never been realized. It is worth noticing that the fast pace in which the declared partnership transformed into a confrontation in 2014 proves, without any doubt, that it did not mean much and it was actually always in a state of constant crisis. The development of an alternative concept—orientation towards Asia—also did not prove to be successful. In January 2015, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) was officially established, but the actual scope of the integration was very different from the assumed intention.<sup>31</sup> The idea of a large organization, fully integrated in terms of politics, economy, and law, as well as the pursuit of a common security policy has not been realized. Ukraine, which was to be its key state, did not find a place there. As a result, the EAEU is a shaky structure, within which only partial economic integration functions, and it has been unable to become the world center of power under the leadership of Russia that it had hoped to be.<sup>32</sup>

According to the Kremlin, there were many causes for the crisis in Ukraine. One of them was the lack of political understanding between the collapsing USSR, and later Russia, and the West. In the period of 1989–1991, no meeting between the East and the West similar to the Congress of Vienna or the Yalta Conference was convened, although it could have been an ideal solution. There were attempts to regulate the new order in a contemporary way. In November 1990, the Charter of Paris for a New Europe was signed, which was to set new rules for relations between the European states. Also at that time, the Treaty on

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<sup>30</sup> Dmitriy Trenin, *Rossiia i mir v XXI veke* [Russia and the World in the Twenty First Century] (Moscow: Eksmo, 2016), 14.

<sup>31</sup> Vladimir Putin, "Novyi integracyonnyi proekt dlja Evrazii – budushchee, kotoroe rozhdaetsia segodnia [The New Integration Project for Eurasia: The Future Born Today]," *Izvestia*, October 3, 2011, accessed November 28, 2016, <http://izvestia.ru/news/502761>.

<sup>32</sup> Trenin, *Rossiia i mir v XXI veke*, 15.

Conventional Armed Forces in Europe was signed with the goal to prevent any unexpected mass conventional attack. In addition, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), functioning since 1975, was transformed into the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

The crisis in Ukraine is in fact an expression of the collapse of the Soviet world. The outcome of the referendum in the Crimea evoked a powerful reaction in the western world and in many other countries around the world. The Peninsula's annexation prompts the thesis that the process of the USSR's dissolution has not yet been fully completed. Empires collapse—as history proves—in the course of long and agonizing processes. Many administrative borders do not correspond with historical, ethnic, cultural, religious, and economic borders. Their shape was determined by earlier geopolitics and today the borders of countries created after the breakdown of the Soviet Union run against logic, contradicting the reality. The post-Soviet area is a region which is very unstable, characterized by political improvisation. It will continue to reveal tendencies to create new states and correct existing borders. The Crimea is a precedence and, unfortunately, it is impossible to exclude the likelihood that other states of the former Soviet Union, including Russia itself, will not want to make use of this precedence. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century, borders changed and new states were established also in the territories beyond the former USSR. The scenario of events will largely depend on whether there exist effective instruments protecting against counter revolutions, as well as against the economic factor.

It will be very interesting to see in which direction the situation in Ukraine will develop. Despite the support of the West, it can be supposed that it will pose a serious problem both for the USA and Western Europe.

Unlike other Soviet satellite bloc states, Ukraine has the potential to build nuclear weapons, and to do so in a short space of time. The West is worried about Ukraine's resentment concerning their forced renouncement of the possession of a nuclear arsenal.<sup>33</sup> There are certain political and intellectual circles in Ukraine that believe the Crimean scenario would have never taken place if they had not renounced the possession of nuclear weapons. They refer to North Korea towards which the international community does not take any radical steps aiming at overthrowing the authoritarian regime and which constitutes an oddity in the contemporary world.

If a country with serious economic problems—and the problems will not disappear quickly—had at its disposal nuclear weapons, there would be no other choice but to neutralize it through the membership of NATO. For it is not possible to leave it beyond international control, and membership of the Alliance would make its control much easier.

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<sup>33</sup> Anthony Zurcher, "Ukraine's nuclear regret?" *BBC News*, March 20, 2014, accessed January 6, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-echochambers-26676051>.



Taking into consideration the fact that, after the loss of the Crimea, the Ukrainian political elites have shown attitudes of revenge and retaliation, Ukraine will be a difficult, and demanding, ally trying to play its own game. In this situation, the USA and Western Europe will face a real challenge if the Ukraine were ever to become a member of NATO. It means that the geopolitical order in the post-Soviet region shaped after the breakdown of the USSR will have to be seriously revised in the context of the Ukrainian situation. Unfortunately, probably no one presently assumes such a scenario.

The activities of the Russian Federation towards the Crimean Peninsula made the West face a new, surprising problem – how to react to the referendum, and then the annexation of the Crimea. It is already known that the situation got out of hand. It was the failure of intelligence, experts, and intellectual elites. It is all the more striking that professional, analytical centers in the West, highly appreciated for their predictions, did not notice even the smallest signs of the later development of events until the last moment. It was not even noticed that the chairman of the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of the Crimea Volodymyr Konstantinov announced that the peninsula wished to join Russia.<sup>34</sup> It seems that the West took the statement as a bluff. Almost all the possible mistakes typical of intelligence analysis were made, including:

1. A lack of empathy, namely the lack of an ability to understand the views and the perception of interests of the Russian society in the Crimea;
2. Intentional neglect of proof, namely ignoring, *inter alia*, the moods and statements of the members of the Crimean Duma; thus, information contrary to the views previously held was rejected, and it was assumed that the Crimea was still a part of Ukraine;
3. Hypothesis of a rational actor (an assumption that others will act in a rational way, similarly to the assessing party), wishful thinking (optimism resulting from the excessive trust in one's own perception and analytical abilities), defensive avoidance (refusal to notice and understand particularly dangerous symptoms as well as avoiding difficult choices leading to wishful thinking), reluctance to take into consideration probability (tendency to avoid assessments of particularly small probabilities). This array of many mistakes in one meant the assumption that the Russians would act in a rational way—similarly to any democratic state—and that they would not decide to act irrationally by moving borders and breaking the memorandum signed in Budapest in 1994 which

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<sup>34</sup> Dina Ivanova, "Vossoyedineniye s Rossiey: krymchane chotyat vosstanovit' istoricheskuyu spravedlivost [Reunion with Russia: Crimeans Want to Restore Hystorical Justice]," *Vesti.ru*, March 7, 2014, accessed January 6, 2018, [www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=1355622&tid=106314](http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=1355622&tid=106314).

gave Ukraine the guarantee of territorial integrity in exchange for the waiver of the ambition to possess nuclear weapons;<sup>35</sup>

4. The mistake of analogy as well as the syndrome of considering the events, experiences, and data from the past as coinciding with the development of events taking place presently.<sup>36</sup> The West counted on the fact that the Crimean scenario would develop in the same way as the situation in the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia which definitely wanted to join the Russian Federation but were not given permission to do so, a situation that has not changed today. The diplomacy and the western intelligence services assumed that Russia, even if it occupied the Crimea, would create a pseudo-independent country, which would not be incorporated into the Russian Federation. However, it became obvious, very quickly, that Moscow did not intend to play out such a scenario.

## Conclusions

Both Georgia and Ukraine occupy an important place in the policy of the Russian Federation. Ukraine is particularly crucial due to its location. In the opinion of the Russians, their domination over Ukraine would make it possible to extend their influence basically to the whole of Europe. The loss of this state could threaten Russia's vital interests, including its security. The historical experience and the sense of the cultural and civilizational community also play a significant role. The economic partnership existing between the two countries is also relevant, taking on the form of a specific addiction in some branches of the economy, e.g. in the armaments industry.

In the case of Georgia, its geographical location on the Black Sea, between Eastern Europe and Western Asia is of great importance for Russia. From the point of view of the Russians, it is important to use the eastern Black Sea coast, which is located on the territory of Abkhazia, for the operational capabilities of its armed forces. Despite its lack of energy resources, the location of Georgia makes it an important player in energy diplomacy. The Kremlin, due to its interests in the post-Soviet area and the strive to rebuild its superpower position, would like to subordinate both countries, which were once part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The proof of such action can be found in both the war with Georgia in 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Both cases prove that the Federation will not release these countries from its influence, even at the expense of engaging in armed conflict. They are too important in the policy pursued by Moscow.

In the context of these incidents, it seems that the international community, especially the West, can hardly interfere with the implementation of Russian

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<sup>35</sup> Mirosław Minkina, *Sztuka wywiadu w państwie współczesnym [The Art of Intelligence in the Modern State]* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza "Rytm", 2014), 160–162.

<sup>36</sup> Minkina, *Sztuka wywiadu*.

goals. Today, it is even more difficult than it was in 2008 when Russia also managed to attain these set objectives. Now the economic and geopolitical reality has changed. Namely, the world economic crisis has been tackled, but the various events and political factors having negative influences on the world economy are taken with greater caution and limited optimism. The sanctions imposed on Russia are criticized by economic and political circles, and there are more and more voices calling for their abandonment.<sup>37</sup> What is also important is the effort of the Russian Federation aiming at avoiding isolation by the intensification of relations with BRICS states, and especially with China. One thing is certain – Moscow will never allow itself to lose its control and influence in the post-Soviet region. The case of Georgia and Ukraine supports this thesis beyond doubt.

## About the Author

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<sup>37</sup> Finian Cunningham, "Europe Revolts Against Russian Sanctions," *Strategic Culture Foundation*, May 16, 2016, accessed January 6, 2017, <http://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2016/05/26/europe-revolts-against-russian-sanctions.html>.





## Russia and Montenegro: How and Why a Centuries Old Relationship Ruptured

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**Abstract:** In 2016 Montenegro and America shared a common problem – Russian meddling in the democratic process of both countries. According to an official assessment from American intelligence agencies, Russia was involved in an obstruction of the American presidential elections. During the 2016 October election night in Montenegro, Russian citizens together with individuals from Serbia and Montenegro, planned to kill former Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic and overthrow his pro-Western government. Russian nationalists, members of the Russia’s military intelligence service GRU, were involved in the planned action with the goal of stopping Montenegrin accession to NATO. Officially Moscow denied its involvement in both cases. The aim of this article will be to offer answers to the dilemma – how did it happen that Montenegro, after a clear commitment to become the next member of NATO, has found itself in the center of the Russian sphere of influence? Moreover, this article is written with an intention to clarify how modern techniques of Russian hybrid warfare became visible in the case of Montenegrin accession to NATO.

**Keywords:** Montenegro, USA, 2016 elections, Russia, democratic process, NATO, hybrid warfare.

### Introduction

By the end of 2016 Montenegro (MNE) and America were experiencing similar problems. Among numerous accusations by politicians that the Presidential elections in the USA and the Parliamentary elections in Montenegro were irregular, there was one more thing that was common for Montenegro and USA last year

– Russian meddling in the democratic process of both countries. According to an official assessment from American intelligence agencies, Russia was involved in the obstruction of the American presidential elections. Also, during the 16 October—election night in Montenegro—a group of Russian citizens together with individuals from Serbia and Montenegro, reportedly planned to kill the former Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic and overthrow his pro-Western government. According to the official statement about this by the Montenegrin Special Prosecutor Milivoje Katnic, given at a press conference on 6 November 2016, Russian nationalists were involved in this planned action with the goal of stopping Montenegrin accession to NATO.<sup>1</sup> On 18 November, Katnic released the names of two Russians who are accused of organizing the attack – Eduard Shirokov, currently on the Interpol’s red notice, and Vladimir Popov.<sup>2</sup> In 2014, Shirokov was a deputy military attaché in the Russian embassy in Poland, but was expelled as *persona non grata* due to espionage activities for Russia. Apparently, both Shirokov and Popov are members of GRU, Russia’s military intelligence service.<sup>3</sup>

With high-tech assistance from British and American intelligence services to view encrypted calls and emails between plotters, there was credible evidence from both countries that the allegations of an attempted terrorist attack were genuine, and it resulted in the arrest of 20 suspects in this case. Montenegrin society remains divided on the veracity of this case, with many believing that these allegations were manufactured by the ruling party on Election Day.<sup>4</sup> There are strong divisions in the country between Montenegrins and Serbs (who support stronger ties with Russia) that date from the period of separation from Serbia in 2006. This has created a society in which the Serbian portion of the nation want to annex Montenegro to Serbia, oppose NATO integration and support the formation of a militarily neutral country under the protection of Russia.

## Historical Relations between Two Countries

A look at the history of the Balkans helps to explain the strong Russian influence in the area. Russia has held a centuries-long ambition to become “the third

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<sup>1</sup> “Montenegro Says Russian ‘Nationalists Were Behind Plot to Kill Djukanovic,” *Radio Free Europe*, November 6, 2016, <https://www.rferl.org/a/montenegro-russian-nationalists-plot-assassination-djukanovic/28100046.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Veseljko Koprivica, “Istraga o pokušaju ‘državnog udara’ u Crnoj Gori [An Investigation into the Attempt of a ‘State Strike’ in Montenegro],” *Aljazeera Balkans*, November 20, 2016, accessed January 24, 2018, <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/istraga-opokusaju-drzavnog-udara-u-crnoj-gori>.

<sup>3</sup> Ben Farmer, “Montenegro ‘to Indict Russian Spy Behind Coup Plot’,” *The Telegraph*, February 26, 2017, accessed January 24, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/02/26/montenegro-indict-russian-spy-behind-coup-plot/>.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Recknagel, “Montenegrin Opposition Calls Charges of Plot to Kill Djukanovic ‘Fabricated’,” *Radio Free Europe*, November 7, 2016, <https://www.rferl.org/a/montenegro-russia-denies-role-plot-to-kill-pm/28101516.html>.

Rome”<sup>5</sup> – an idea hatched in the 15<sup>th</sup> century after the fall of Constantinople under the Ottomans. This ambition of Russia can be clearly seen in the letters of Monk Filofej to the Russian emperor Peter the Great in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in which he says: “All the kingdoms of the Christian Orthodox faith are poured into your kingdom, and you are the only Christian Emperor under the heavens.”<sup>6</sup> In his book *Political Thought* Dostoevsky explains the necessity for Russia to be a world leader: “In order to exist for a long time, every great nation must believe that the salvation of the world lays in them, only them, that their only goal is to rule other nations, in order to unite them and lead them to a greater cause.”<sup>7</sup> In a political statement by Peter the Great, written in 18<sup>th</sup> century, one can find his grand plan for Russia to win world domination through the conquest of the Middle East.<sup>8</sup> This document also states that Russia must extend her boundaries over the Balkan states and Constantinople, across the Dardanelles and so forth. Peter the Great writes: “Approach as near as possible to Constantinople and India. Whoever governs there will be the true sovereign of the world. Consequently, excite continual wars, not only in Turkey, but in Persia. Establish dockyards on the Black Sea. Penetrate to the Persian Gulf...”

Here are some additional points of the statement:

1. To keep the Russian nation in constant warfare, in order to always have good soldiers;
2. Interfere in the affairs of all Europe, particularly Germany, which deserves your main attention;
3. Divide Poland by raising up continual disorders and jealousies;
4. Take all you can from Sweden; isolate her from Denmark, and vice versa. Be careful to rouse their jealousy;
5. Do all in your power to approach closely Constantinople and India. Hasten the fall of Persia. Open a route towards the Persian Gulf. Re-establish, as much as possible, the ancient commerce of the Levant, and then approach India.

Every serious analysis of Russian foreign policy recognizes the Balkans as an important area where Imperial and later Soviet Russia had strong ambitions and constant geostrategic interest. Thanks to the cultural, religious and political relations, the Balkans was an area where the Orthodox religion created a special tie, together with the historic fight against the Ottomans.

During the long history of their relations, Montenegro and Russia have had a love-hate relationship. A significant number of those who are not familiar with

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<sup>5</sup> R. Radonjic, *U predjelima duha* (Podgorica, 2015), 80.

<sup>6</sup> Vladik S. Nersesyanc, *Istorija politicheskikh i travovyyih ucheniy [History of Political and Legal Teachings]* (Moscow: Norma, 1994), 157.

<sup>7</sup> Feodor M. Dostojevski, *Political Thought* (Belgrade, 1934), 243.

<sup>8</sup> Dimitry V. Lehovich, “The Testament of Peter the Great,” *American Slavic and East European Review* 7, no. 2 (April 1948): 111-124.

Montenegrin history, of which, unfortunately, there are many, believe that Russia and Montenegro had a centuries long partnership of brotherhood, friendship and mutual respect. Russian diplomacy towards Montenegro, before and after gaining independence at the Congress of Berlin in 1878, was more of a diktat, a continuous attempt to keep a small country such as Montenegro under control. There were periods during which Montenegro saw Russia as a patroness figure, to whom they owed loyalty. But the long-term patronage that Russia managed to achieve in MNE by sending money to the Montenegrin rulers was, in fact, a way to keep this small country on a leash, and a short one at that, in order to ensure that this small, but militarily competent, nation could join their wars when it suited Russian interest. Each time Montenegrin rulers tried to turn to other countries in order to establish or strengthen an alliance, Russia reacted aggressively by cutting financial help significantly. As many historians claim, Russia was even behind the murder of the Montenegrin ruler Prince Danilo in 1860. According to a historical theory, that was never proven, the motive was the Montenegrin desire to create closer ties to France during Danilo's governance, which was perceived by Russia as a betrayal.

Perhaps the most vivid expression of how Russia viewed a small country such as Montenegro is detailed in the document "Montenegro from 1860-1900" that was published in the magazine of the Russian Academy of Science "Slavyanovedenie" by the historian Dr. Varvara Borisovna Hlebnikova. In this paper the Russian ambassador in Montenegro, Konstantin Arkadijevic Gubastov is quoted as saying: "Montenegro cannot have any kind of citizen mission that other communities might have; no independent form of state can exist within that territory. As a country, Montenegro is too small, too poor and deprived of the ability to have peaceful civil existence."<sup>9</sup>

The idea of Russia as a superpower has continued during the long history of its many leaders. It is worth mentioning Stalin and his definition of internationalism that states: "The touchstone and infallible criteria of internationalism is the attitude towards the Soviet Union – the socialist motherland to all working people, bastion of peace and security of the nation. Internationalist is the one who is without question, without hesitation, without any conditions willing to protect the SSR because the SSR is the base of the world revolutionary movement."<sup>10</sup> The modern history of international relations shows how this Russian special vision of the world continuously evolved and grew. Another example is President Dmitry Medvedev's call for a new European security architecture, the most ac-

<sup>9</sup> Varvara Borisovna Hlebnikova, *Rossia i Chernogoriia v kontse XIX-nachale XX vv. [Russia and Montenegro in the Context of the Nineteenth and the beginning of the Twentieth Centuries]* (Vladivostok: Izd-vo Dal'nevostochnogo universiteta, 1992), 40-51, <https://www.antenam.net/index.php/istorija/item/13205-strogo-povjerljivo-ruski-car-pocetkom-1914-odlucio-drzavu-crnu-goru-unistiti-pripojiti-je-srbiji-1>.

<sup>10</sup> *Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Enciclopedia [The Grand Soviet Encyclopedia]*, Second edition, vol. 18 (Moscow, 1953), 300.



tive initiative undertaken by Russian diplomacy in recent years.<sup>11</sup> The Medvedev project was launched in 2009 with an attempt to introduce Russia's own vision of European and Euro-Atlantic security. The Kremlin seeks to exploit divisions within the Western alliance, between the US and Europe, and amongst the Europeans themselves. In a very real sense, it reflects Russia's desire to play, and have the leading role as a 'responsible stakeholder' in regional and global affairs.

## **Russian Economic Penetration after Montenegrin Independence in 2006**

After gaining its independence, based on a peaceful referendum in 2006, Montenegro set a priority for Euro-Atlantic integration as a constitutional cornerstone. Once a stable economy had been established, membership of NATO became one of Montenegro's primary goals. That was the moment when the Montenegrin economy went through a period of so-called investment boom, and was one of the leading countries in terms of Direct Foreign Investments per capita. The investment wave lasted until 2008, when the global economic crisis exposed the severe structural problems of the Montenegrin economy. By 2007, some thirty thousand Russians had bought land and real property, and invested nearly 2 billion dollars in Montenegro. In a briefing paper requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs, the author Matija Rojec explained how out of all the Central Eastern and South Eastern European countries, Russian Foreign Direct Investments in 2006 were the highest in Montenegro, while the importance of Russian investors in other CEE and SEE countries was more or less negligible.<sup>12</sup> These direct investments in the economy were seen as creating a solid Russian basis in the Balkans, while many characterized it as an expected result of the attractiveness of the Montenegrin market, combined with the closeness and traditional friendship between two countries. Some projects have been implemented while others were suspended due to the economic crisis or illegal building. Russian "Lukoil" also participated in the privatization of the Montenegrin company "Montenegro Bonus," a petrol stations network, with a plan to open an additional 15 gas stations.

However, it is important to mention one case of privatization that had serious consequences for Russia-Montenegro relations. In 2005, a majority package of shares for the KAP aluminum factory and bauxite mine was sold to the Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska. The deal was endorsed by the Kremlin which sent two Russian officials (the Speaker of the Duma, Boris Gryzlov, and the then-Emer-

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<sup>11</sup> Bobo Lo, "Medvedev and the new European security architecture," *Open Democracy*, August 3, 2009, accessed January 24, 2018, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/article/email/medvedev-and-the-new-european-security-architecture>.

<sup>12</sup> Matija Rojec, Mojmir Mrak, Tamás Szemlér, and Tamás Novák, "The Russian Economic Penetration in Montenegro," *Briefing Paper* (Brussels: Directorate General External Policies of the Union, European Parliament, December 2007).

gency Situations Minister, Sergei Shoigu) to visit the factory.<sup>13</sup> After the collapse in global aluminum prices in 2009, the government was forced to buy back nearly 30 percent of the shares. Nevertheless, the Central European Aluminum Company (CEAC) still controlled the management of the company and had led KAP into debt. In addition to buying back half of Deripaska's KAP stake following the price collapse in 2009, the Government also provided guarantees for a 132 million Euro loan that Deripaska took from Hungary's OTP bank and Russia's state-controlled VTB bank.<sup>14</sup> The whole case ended up at an arbitration tribunal of the Vienna-based UN Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) with Deripaska filing a suit for 93 million euros against Montenegro in front of the arbitration court.<sup>15</sup> Deripaska's law suit was eventually rejected by the court but the company, which once employed 5,000 workers, ended up in bankruptcy in 2013, with 180 million Euros of debt.<sup>16</sup>

The ultimate goal of the Russian economic presence in Montenegro was to establish a firm base for future political action. As a group of authors recently claimed in the publication *The Kremlin Playbook*, Russia has cultivated an opaque web of economic and political patronage across the region in order to advance its interests by influencing policy making.<sup>17</sup>

### Russia's Close Ties with the Serbian Church in Montenegro

Establishing Montenegro as a zone of their economic interest and power was not the only way in which Russia tried to gain influence. During the last eight years, numerous associations of Russian-Montenegrin friendship have been established. In particular, the powerful Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro has

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<sup>13</sup> Esad Krcic, "Montenegrin Aluminum Plant's Woes Cast Geopolitical Shadow," *Radio Free Europe*, July 15, 2013, accessed January 25, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/montenegro-russia-aluminum-plant/25046657.html>.

<sup>14</sup> John Helmer, "Oleg Deripaska's Newest Disappearing Trick – En+ Share Price Dives After Prospectus Draws No Commercial Demand; VTB Required to Finance Chinese Share Buyer," November 12, 2017, accessed January 25, 2018, <http://johnhelmer.net/oleg-deripaskas-newest-disappearing-trick-en-share-price-dives-after-prospectus-draws-no-commercial-demand-vtb-required-to-finance-chinese-share-buyer/>.

<sup>15</sup> Sebastian Duda, "Arbitration in Vienna dismissed the claim of the company Mr. Deripaska to Montenegro," *Russia News Today*, January 16, 2017, accessed January 28, 2018, <https://chelorg.com/2017/01/16/arbitration-in-vienna-dismissed-the-claim-of-the-company-mr-deripaska-to-montenegro>.

<sup>16</sup> Dusica Tomovic, "Russian Billionaire Sues Montenegro Over Lost Investment," *Balkan Insight*, December 7, 2016, accessed January 28, 2018, [www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/russian-tycoon-deripaska-sues-montenegro-over-investment-loses-12-07-2016](http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/russian-tycoon-deripaska-sues-montenegro-over-investment-loses-12-07-2016).

<sup>17</sup> Heather A. Conley, James Mina, Ruslan Stefanov, and Martin Vladimirov, *The Kremlin Playbook: Understanding Russian Influence in Central and Eastern Europe* (Washington, DC / Lanham, MD: Center for Strategic and International Studies / Rowman & Littlefield, October 2016), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/kremlin-playbook>.

intensified cooperation with the Russian Orthodox Church resulting in three Russian Orthodox churches being built in Montenegro. At the same time, an anti-NATO movement was also established<sup>18</sup> which exploited the divisions in Montenegrin society between national Montenegrins, that voted in favor of the NATO referendum, and those who consider themselves to be Serbs. Using the Serbian Church, its leading man in Montenegro, Bishop Amfilohije Radovic established close ties with Russian representatives in Montenegro and in Serbia to obstruct Montenegro's path to membership in NATO. Radovic was an honored guest at numerous events dedicated to the concept of military neutrality in Montenegro and in favor of organizing a referendum against joining NATO. He even gave a blessing in May 2016, when one of the leaders of the opposition Democratic Front, Milan Knezevic, signed a declaration about cooperation with Putin's Unified Russian Party. According to the declaration, the Democratic Front will work together with Russia to create an alliance of neutral sovereign states of South-east Europe and will support the suspension of the sanctions on Russia.<sup>19</sup>

The Serbian Church even gave an Order of the Holy Emperor Constantine to the director of the Russian Institute for Strategic Research, Leonid Reshetnikov, for the "nurturing and spreading of Orthodoxy."<sup>20</sup> Reshetnikov was one of the loudest critics of Montenegrin membership of NATO. During Reshetnikov's book promotion in 2014, Bishop Radovic cursed all of those "who are not loyal to Russia" with a short message declaring that "living flesh will come of their skin" if they do not obey this.<sup>21</sup>

## **Russian Reactions to the Last Phase of Montenegrin Membership in NATO**

Perhaps the most significant defeat for Russia was the decision to pursue membership in NATO, that Montenegro made when it gained independence. One of the first reactions to Montenegro's aspiration to join NATO was in November 2013 when, during a lecture to students in Belgrade, the Russian ambassador to

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<sup>18</sup> Draško Đuranović, "Kad Moskva pozove [When Moscow Calls]," *Portal Analitika*, April 16, 2014, accessed January 28, 2018, <http://www.portalanalitika.me/clanak/142605/kad-moskva-pozove>.

<sup>19</sup> Miloš Rudović, "DNP saraduje sa Putinovom partijom: Deklaracija potpisana uz blagoslov Amfilohija [DNP Cooperates with Putin's Party: Declaration Signed with the Blessing of Amfilohije]," *Portal Vijesti*, May 7, 2016, accessed January 28, 2018, <http://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/dnp-saraduje-sa-putinovom-partijom-deklaracija-potpisana-uz-blagoslov-amfilohija-886998>.

<sup>20</sup> "‘Braća po SPC ordenju’: Vujanović, Rešetnjikov, Velja Ilić ... [‘Brothers by SPC Ordination’: Vujanović, Reshetnikov, Velja Ilić ...]," *Portal Analitika*, June 4, 2014, accessed January 28, 2018, <http://www.portalanalitika.me/clanak/148996/arhiv>.

<sup>21</sup> "Amfilohije osudio politiku Crne Gore prema Rusiji [Amfilohije Condemned Montenegro's Policy Towards Russia]," *Blic*, April 29, 2014, accessed January 28, 2018, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/amfilohije-osudio-politiku-crne-gore-prema-rusiji/j2n5hnm>.

Serbia, Alexander Chepurin, described the Montenegrin ambition to become a member of the Alliance as “monkey business.”<sup>22</sup> Following Montenegro’s decision in 2014, Russia continued to increase political pressure. The tone of their diplomacy became openly aggressive after Montenegro joined the EU in imposing sanctions on the Russian Federation as a response to Russia’s illegal annexation of the Crimea. In response, the Russian ambassador made a statement in which he stated that “the Montenegrin choice will have an appropriate place in the common history of the two countries” and that “Montenegro, regardless of what is the policy of the European Union, should avoid offending Russia.”<sup>23</sup> That was just the beginning of Russia’s harsh reactions to many of the decisions taken by the Montenegrin government which, Russia claimed, were directed against it.

The displays of anger and the offensive statements were a sign that Moscow was not planning to give up so easily in their efforts to influence Montenegro. Several days after Prime Minister Đukanović met with the US Vice President Biden in Washington in April 2014, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs reacted with this statement: “In his speech Milo Djukanovic allowed himself hostile statements against Russia, which in combination with joining EU sanctions create great disappointment.”<sup>24</sup> Reacting to the Russian statement, a Montenegrin opposition delegation offered an apology to Moscow during their official visit to Russia, as well as an explanation that “the irresponsible statements of Djukanovic don’t represent the majority will among Montenegrin citizens.”<sup>25</sup>

In September 2014, the Foreign Minister of Russia, Sergei Lavrov, warned Montenegro that “The expansion of NATO to the former Yugoslav republics is an irresponsible policy and we in Moscow see it as a provocation.”<sup>26</sup> The Montenegrin Ministry of Foreign Affairs reacted immediately with a statement that the country has a clear foreign policy commitment, which is in line with national interests and which has been repeatedly stated in communications with Russian

<sup>22</sup> “Čepurin: CG u NATO-majmunška posla [Chepurin: Montenegro in NATO – Monkey Business],” *RTCG*, November 28, 2013, accessed January 29, 2018, [www.rtcg.me/vijesti/politika/33180/cepurin-cg-u-nato-majmunška-posla-.html](http://www.rtcg.me/vijesti/politika/33180/cepurin-cg-u-nato-majmunška-posla-.html).

<sup>23</sup> “Nesterenko: Sankcije Crne Gore biće dio zajedničke istorije [Nesterenko: The Sanctions by Montenegro Will Be Part of the Common History],” *Radio Televizija Republike Srpske*, May 13, 2014, accessed January 29, 2018, <http://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=112063>.

<sup>24</sup> Nebojša Redžić, “Podgorica odgovara na kritiku Moskve [Podgorica responds to the Critique by Moscow],” *Voice of America*, April 15, 2014, accessed January 29, 2018, [http://www.glasamerike.net/a/podgorica\\_moskva/1893750.html](http://www.glasamerike.net/a/podgorica_moskva/1893750.html).

<sup>25</sup> “Rukovodstvo SNP-a putuje u Moskvu da se ogradi od Đukanovića, Danilović tvrdi da se premijer preigrao [The Leadership of SNP Travels to Moscow to Demonstrate it Differs from Djukanovic, Danilovic Claims that the Prime Minister Has Overplayed It],” *Portal Analitika*, April 15, 2014, accessed January 29, 2018, <http://portalanalitika.me/clanak/142538/rukovodstvo-snp-a-putuje-u-moskvu-da-se-ogradi-od-djukanovica-danilovic-tvr-di-da-se-premijer-preigrao>.

<sup>26</sup> “NATO’s Planned Balkan Expansion a ‘Provocation’: Russia’s Lavrov,” *Reuters*, September 29, 2014, accessed January 29, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nato-balkans-russia-idUSKCN0HO11W20140929>.

officials and other countries. During 2014, harsh, rude and inappropriate statements by Russian officials were part of the everyday political life in Montenegro. From Sergei Lavrov, who stated in December 2016 for the Russian news agency Sputnik, that Montenegro “betrayed Russia,”<sup>27</sup> to the Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, Dmitry Rogozin, who said that, “Montenegro will regret its decision to join NATO.”<sup>28</sup> These and other statements from such a significant world player towards a small Balkan country created a kind of political hysteria which was yet another example of how Russia conducts its high-pressure international relations.

Some of those statements came from the Director of the Russian Institute of Strategic Research, Leonid Reshetnikov, who had been a KGB agent in Serbia, and who was fired by Putin less than a month after the failed attempts on the life of Djukanovic in Montenegro. In 2016, on a political talk-show, while he was commenting an attempted terrorist attack on a Russian television station, Reshetnikov said that he believes that there could be bloodbath in Montenegro.<sup>29</sup> He also invited Russian tourists to boycott Montenegro during the summer season and “not to leave money to Djukanovic.” The same TV show hosted an opposition leader from Montenegro, Milan Knezevic. During the live appearance, just before Knezevic began to explain the decision of the opposition parties to boycott the Parliament in the upcoming period, the host of the show asked him, “How are you dealing with the difficult situation, our brothers? Are you being tortured? Our hearts suffer because of what you are going through.” The main title on the screen was, “War in Montenegro.” Knezevic used the opportunity to call for help from the Russian state to save them from Djukanovic and NATO. It is worth mentioning that this TV station is owned by the Russian tycoon Constantine Malofeyev, who is also a great admirer and friend of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Malofeyev, who was blessed by Bishop Amfilohije Radovic, is on the list of Russian citizens who have had their assets frozen by the European Union and is banned from travelling to EU countries. Malofeyev was also one of the main financiers of anti-Western and anti-NATO movements in Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> “Are We Supposed to Betray Ourselves in Order to Avoid Betraying Russia?” *Portal CDM*, December 15, 2016, accessed January 29, 2018, <https://www.cdm.me/english/trebali-da-izdamo-sebe-da-ne-bi-izdali-rusiju-2/>.

<sup>28</sup> “Statement by Montenegro’s Foreign Ministry Regarding DPM of Russia Dmitry Rogozin’s Claims,” Government of Montenegro, January 13, 2016, accessed January 29, 2018, <http://www.gov.me/en/News/156731/Statement.html>.

<sup>29</sup> “Rešetnjikov: U Crnoj Gori može biti krvoprolića [Reshetnikov: There May Be a Bloodbath in Montenegro],” *Portal Analitika*, November 27, 2016, accessed January 29, 2018, <https://portalanalitika.me/clanak/251798/resetnjikov-u-crnoj-gori-moze-biti-krvoprolica>.

<sup>30</sup> Joachim Bartz, Arndt Ginzel, and Christian Rohde, “Frisches Geld aus Moskau: Wie Russland antiwestliche Bewegungen in Europa finanziert [Fresh Money from Moscow: How Russia Funded Anti-Western Movements in Europe],” *ZDF*, May 23, 2017, ac-

The main opposition party in Montenegro, the Democratic Front, and their Russian partners, have collaborated for many years. During the opposition protests against Djukanovic and NATO in October 2015, opposition leaders were publicly accused of receiving millions of dollars from Russia to organize the protests and later, in 2016, for their parliamentary election campaign.<sup>31</sup> Two of the opposition leaders, Milan Knezevic and Andrija Mandic, travelled to Moscow in February 2016 to get instructions from their Russian financiers and mentors, such as the senior official of the Unified Russian Party, Sergey Zeleznjak, and the Vice President of the Russian parliament, Pyotr Tolstoy. It is reported that they held a number of discussions about topics including organizing a referendum about NATO, the suspension of the sanctions against Russia and the withdrawal of the decision to recognize Kosovo.<sup>32</sup> Knezevic even signed the so-called *Lovcen Declaration* on mutual cooperation between the Party of Unified Russia and the Democratic Front of Montenegro, in which they clearly specified the necessity of improving relations between Montenegro and Russia, creating an alliance of military-neutral states, and holding a referendum on the membership in NATO.<sup>33</sup> It came as no surprise when Russia expressed a great deal of interest during the 2015 opposition protests in Montenegro, organized by the two opposition leaders. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave an official statement during the protests in which they pointed out that they had “a significant concern because of the excessive use of force over protesters in Podgorica.”<sup>34</sup>

Only a month after signing the *Lovcen Declaration*, on the same day that the process of ratification of the Protocol on Montenegrin accession to NATO was taking place, three opposition parties from Montenegro – the New Serbian Democracy, the People’s Party, and the Socialist People’s Party, signed the Unified Russia Declaration. The main aim of this Declaration was to establish a military

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cessed January 30, 2018, <https://www.zdf.de/politik/frontal-21/frisches-geld-aus-moskau-100.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Aleksandar Vasovic, “Montenegro PM Accuses Russia of Financing anti-NATO Campaign,” *Reuters*, October 13, 2016, accessed January 30, 2018, [www.reuters.com/article/us-montenegro-election-idUSKCN12D2QV](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-montenegro-election-idUSKCN12D2QV).

<sup>32</sup> “Mandić: Iscenirani, skandalozni državni udar u organizaciji Đukanovića produbio krizu u CG [Mandić: Staged, Scandalous State Coup Organized by Djukanovic Deepens the Crisis in Montenegro],” *Portal Vijesti*, December 2, 2016, accessed January 30, 2018, <http://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/mandic-iscenirani-skandalozni-drzavni-udar-u-organizaciji-djukanovica-produbio-krizu-u-cg-914484>.

<sup>33</sup> “Uz blagoslov Mitropolita Amfilohija potpisana Lovčenska deklaracija [The Lovcen Declaration was Signed with the Blessing of Bishop Amfilohije],” *Demokratska narodna partija*, May 6, 2016, accessed January 30, 2018, <http://www.dnpcg.me/uz-blagoslov-mitropolita-amfilohija-potpisana-lovcenska-deklaracija/>.

<sup>34</sup> “Moscow Perplexed by Russia’s Accusation of Provoking Protests in Montenegro,” *Interfax, Russia beyond the Headlines*, October 27, 2015, accessed January 30, 2018, [https://www.rbth.com/news/2015/10/27/moscow-perplexed-by-rusias-accusation-of-provoking-protests-in-montenegro\\_534477](https://www.rbth.com/news/2015/10/27/moscow-perplexed-by-rusias-accusation-of-provoking-protests-in-montenegro_534477).

alliance in the Balkans.<sup>35</sup> Opposition leaders have continued their efforts to stop Montenegro in its progress towards NATO membership even when membership in the Alliance has become a certainty. After the parliaments of Iceland and Slovenia ratified the Protocol on Montenegro's accession on June 8, 2016, members of the Democratic Front sent a public request to the parliaments of NATO countries not to approve Montenegro's accession to the Alliance because, as they warned, "Montenegrin membership will cause an escalation of the political crisis in the country."<sup>36</sup>

The numerous Russian attempts to interfere in Montenegrin internal affairs reached their climax on October 16, 2016 – election night in Montenegro. Two Russian citizens, members of the GRU service, together with a group of Serbian and Montenegrin citizens tried to kill Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic and violently take over the Montenegrin Assembly. At a subsequent press conference on November 6, 2016, the special prosecutor Milivoje Katnic said that this criminal organization had been formed on the territories of Montenegro, Russia and Serbia with an aim of committing acts of terrorism.<sup>37</sup> According to Katnić, this group, which was led by two Russian citizens, Vladimir Popov and Eduard Shishmakov, aimed to stop Montenegrin accession to NATO.<sup>38</sup> Shishmakov had been Russia's deputy military attaché in Poland until he was expelled for spying for Russia. Despite the fact that its citizens were being prosecuted in Montenegro, Russia denied the allegations of involvement in the events in Montenegro on October 16, 2016. Russia also officially refused to offer any kind of assistance in this case, and would not extradite Popov or Shishmakov, together with one of their accomplices, Ananije Nikic, who was given asylum in Russia.<sup>39</sup> Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, rejected accusations that Moscow was behind this unsuccessful coup attempt, saying that there was "no evidence," while a spokes-

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<sup>35</sup> Esad Krcić, "Demokratski principi i ruski sentimenti [Democratic Principles and Russian Sentiments]," *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, June 29, 2016, accessed January 30, 2018, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/demkratski-principi-i-ruski-sentimenti/27828601.html>

<sup>36</sup> Srđan Janković, "Pristupanje Crne Gore NATO savezu napreduje, opozicija oštro protiv [Montenegro's Accession to the NATO Alliance is Progressing, the Opposition is Strongly Against]," *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, June 9, 2016, accessed January 30, 2018, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/pristupanje-cg-nato-napreduje-opozicija-protiv/27788500.html>.

<sup>37</sup> Rada Brajović and Savo Njunjić, "Katnić: Politička struktura iz CG uključena u pokušaj rušenja vlasti [Katnić: A Political Organization in Montenegro is Involved in the Attempt to Destroy Government]," *Portal Vijesti*, November 6, 2016, accessed January 30, 2018, <http://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/katnic-politicka-struktura-iz-cg-ukljucena-u-pokusaj-rusenja-vlasti-910641>.

<sup>38</sup> John R. Schindler, "Putin's Balkan Terror Plot Exposed," *Observer*, February 27, 2017, accessed January 30, 2018, <https://observer.com/2017/02/vladimir-putin-kremlin-montenegro-nato-eduard-shirokov>.

<sup>39</sup> "Russia Says It Won't Extradite Suspect in Montenegro Alleged Coup Attempt, *Radio Free Europe*," November 1, 2017, accessed January 30, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-extradite-montenegro-coup-suspect/28829550.html>.

man for the Russian President, Dmitry Peskov, reacted by calling the media reports “irresponsible,” saying that they were not supported by “concrete facts.”<sup>40</sup> The Montenegrin Special Prosecutor’s Office indicted 25 people in this case, among them were the leaders of the Democratic Front, Andrija Mandic and Milan Knezevic, who lost their parliamentary immunity because of their involvement in this case. Their trial is still going on.

This case of an attempted state coup in Montenegro is an example of Russian hybrid warfare techniques in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Despite the fact that the international community has accused Russia of an attempted terrorist attack in Montenegro, Moscow has continued to interfere in the internal affairs of the country. Opposition leaders Mandic and Knezevic travelled to Moscow in February 2017, where they met with Sergey Zeleznyak, who supported their plans to organize a referendum on Montenegro’s accession to NATO.<sup>41</sup> But, all attempts to stop Montenegro on its way to joining NATO have failed and the country became the 29<sup>th</sup> member on June 5, 2017. However, Russian resentment at losing a strategically important coastal area has not ended. Immediately after Montenegro joined NATO, Sergei Lavrov said that “Montenegro’s accession to NATO was a purely geopolitical project imposed on that country in exchange for Russo-phobia.”<sup>42</sup> The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared that, as a result of NATO membership, the official policy of Podgorica is “hostile” and that Russia will take “reciprocal measures” because of Montenegrin accession to NATO.<sup>43</sup> Those reciprocal measures were introduced soon afterwards and included:

1. Blocking the import of Montenegrin wine “Plantaže” by the Russian Federal Service for the oversight of consumer protection, allegedly because they found pesticides in the wine;<sup>44</sup>
2. Declaring the Montenegrin politician Miodrag Vukovic a *persona non grata* after detaining him for over ten hours at Moscow’s Domodedovo

<sup>40</sup> “Montenegro Accuses Russia of Masterminding Coup Attempt,” *Fox News*, February 20, 2017, accessed January 30, 2018, <https://www.foxnews.com/world/2017/02/20/montenegro-accuses-russia-masterminding-coup-attempt.html>.

<sup>41</sup> “Železnjak i crnogorska opozicija podržali referendum o NATO [Zeleznyak and the Montenegrin Opposition Backed a Referendum on NATO],” *Blic*, February 2, 2017, accessed January 30, 2018, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/svet/zeleznjak-i-crnogorska-opozicija-podrzali-referendum-o-nato/pe0dlsn>.

<sup>42</sup> Predrag Tomović, “Moskva prijeti najmlađoj NATO članici [Moscow Threatens the Youngest NATO Member],” *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, June 6, 2017, accessed January 30, 2018, [www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/rusija-prijeti-crnoj-gori/28531462.html](http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/rusija-prijeti-crnoj-gori/28531462.html).

<sup>43</sup> “Moskva: Imamo pravo da odgovorimo na neprijateljsku politiku Podgorice [Moscow: We Have the Right to Respond to the Hostile Policies of Podgorica],” *Portal Vijesti*, June 5, 2017, accessed January 30, 2018, <http://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/moskva-imamo-pravo-da-odgovorimo-na-neprijateljsku-politiku-podgorice-941037>.

<sup>44</sup> Alan Crosby and Lela Scepanovic, “Kremlin’s Diplomatic Sour Grapes Leave Bad Taste for Montenegrin Winemaker,” *Radio Free Europe*, June 4, 2017, accessed January 30, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/montenegro-plantaze-winery-russia-ban-nato/28527931.html>.



airport and putting him on a black list of Montenegrin citizens who are blocked from entering Russia because of the Montenegrin participation in imposing sanctions on Russia in 2014;<sup>45</sup>

3. Increasing Russian propaganda and fake media by reporting that there is a “civil war going on in Montenegro” because of its membership of NATO, and advising Russian citizens to avoid travelling there.<sup>46</sup>

The latest case of Russian meddling in Montenegro was during the 2018 presidential elections in Montenegro when it was discovered that the honorary consul of the Russian Federation in Podgorica, Boro Djukic, was one of the founders and a principal financier of the Prava Crna Gora party,<sup>47</sup> whose president was one of the opposition candidates in the April presidential elections. Djukic was expelled as part of the Montenegrin response, with their NATO allies, to the poisoning of the ex-spy, Sergei Skripal, and his daughter Yulia on British soil by Russia.<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusion

Today's Russia, controlled in an authoritarian manner by Putin, has no desire to adjust to the changes in the world. In fact, a non-democratic society such as the Russian seems to have no capacity for change. It is no secret that in the modern world some state actors are trying to influence others. It is, however, surprising, that Russia uses its many capabilities to make an impact on small countries such as Montenegro. From economic penetration at the precise moment when a newly independent country such as Montenegro needed investments; to building close ties with the Orthodox Church and the Montenegrin opposition; to the latest phase expressed by harsh diplomacy, propaganda and the spreading of false news, all with the intention of preventing the expansion of NATO. While commenting on Russian meddling in the US and Montenegrin 2016 elections, the late US Congressman John McCain claimed in his article “Russia threat is dead serious. Montenegro coup and murder plot proves it,” that this plot, organized

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<sup>45</sup> “Montenegro’s Accession to NATO is ‘One of the Biggest Betrayals in History’,” *Sputnik News*, June 6, 2017, accessed January 30, 2018, <https://sputniknews.com/politics/201706061054357050-montenegro-nato-membership-consequences>.

<sup>46</sup> Gordana Knezevic, “Moscow Bad-Mouths Montenegro, But Russians Still Flocking to Its Beaches,” *Radio Free Europe*, April 15, 2017, accessed February 21, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/montenegro-russian-tourists-accusation-crime/28450918.html>.

<sup>47</sup> “Đukić potpisao osnivanje Prave Crne Gore [Djukic Signed the Founding of True Montenegro],” *Pobjeda*, March 30, 2018, p. 3, accessed March 31, 2018, <https://www.pobjeda.net/protected/listalica/2018-03-30/files/assets/common/downloads/publication.pdf>.

<sup>48</sup> Predrag Tomović, “Crna Gora protjeruje ruskog diplomatu [Montenegro Expels a Russian Diplomat],” *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, March 28, 2018, accessed March 31, 2018, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/crna-gora-protjeruje-ruskog-diplomatu/29130249.html>.

by Russia, should be a warning to every American that Russia's interference in US 2016 election should not be treated as an isolated incident. McCain says, "We have to stop looking at this through the warped lens of politics and see this attack on our democracy for what it is: just one phase of Putin's long-term campaign to weaken the United States, to destabilize Europe, to break the NATO alliance, to undermine confidence in Western values, and to erode any and all resistance to his dangerous view of the world."<sup>49</sup>

It is expected that Russia will continue its attempts to reinforce its influence on the Balkans through economic measures. The Russian giant will probably turn to Montenegro's neighbor Serbia in the future, and will invest whatever it takes to keep them on a militarily neutral track. Their influence will remain strong in Serbia because of the powerful influence of the Orthodox Church on politicians and the decision-making processes in that country. As long as Serbia remains trapped both in the Kosovo myth and under the strong guidance of a Church that cultivates a centuries' long brotherhood with 'Mother Russia,' it will continue to support views that are at odds with Western values. Those Balkan countries that have leaders who are still encumbered with the burdens of the last war, who still feed their nations with false post-war facts and who are winning elections based on nationalism and separation will not make any progress in the future as long as they stay on this path. Furthermore, they will continue to be a target for regimes such as the Russian one.

What Russia is seeking is a combination of political instability, socio-economic crisis and nationalism. Only those countries with strong leadership, focused on the Euro-Atlantic vision, and who are pursuing reforms within their society will not be attractive partners to Russia. One thing is pretty clear, the Russian influence in Montenegro will be limited in the future, because the Montenegrin opposition is weak. Moscow needs strong opposition leaders in Montenegro in order to achieve its aim, and that is to overthrow the pro-Western government and bring the pro-Russian opposition to power. Fortunately, the power of the opposition in Montenegro is, and will remain, negligible for quite a time. As Mark Galeotti claims in his publication "Controlling Chaos: How Russia manages its political war in Europe," in countries where institutional safeguards are weak, Moscow will target the state, not in the expectation of being able to capture it, but to seek to influence it on specific issues—such as sanctions—and to work on nudging it into a more favorable position.<sup>50</sup> Montenegro still struggles with the weakness of its institutions, and strong support for Russia within some sections

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<sup>49</sup> John McCain, "McCain Flashback: Russia Threat is Dead Serious. Montenegro Coup and Murder Plot Proves It," *USA Today*, June 29, 2017, accessed February 21, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2017/06/29/russian-hacks-john-mccain-column/436354001/>.

<sup>50</sup> Mark Galeotti, "Controlling Chaos: How Russia Manages Its Political War in Europe," *Policy Brief* (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, August 2017), [https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR228\\_-\\_CONTROLLING\\_CHAOS1.pdf](https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR228_-_CONTROLLING_CHAOS1.pdf), accessed January 31, 2018.

of society which has been exploited by Kremlin in the last ten years. Nevertheless, Montenegro is the first country that has openly opposed the new Russian hybrid warfare by bringing to trial those who organized the attempted coup in 2016.

## **About the Author**

**Ivana Gardasevic** is a Marshall Center Alumni who recently obtained her Master's degree, presenting a thesis on geostrategic confrontation of Russian and US interest in the context of Montenegrin accession to NATO. She worked as a journalist from 2009-2012, covering political issues in Montenegro and hosted two political radio shows about EU and NATO accession. From 2012-2015 she worked as an assistant for Public Relations to the Speaker of the Parliament of Montenegro. Since November 2015 she is an advisor in Security and Defense Committee within the Parliament of Montenegro.

Ms. Gardasevic successfully attended the Program on Applied Security Studies (6 September to 16 November 2017), the Program on Terrorism and Security Studies (PTSS-July to August 2016), and the European Security Seminar – South (May 2016). She participated in GCMC's Global Counter Terrorism Alumni Community of Interest Workshop in Garmisch-Partenkirchen on the "Role of Women in Counter Terrorism" (January 2017) and gave a presentation in April 2017 to the Seminar on Regional Security on "The Role of Women in Conflict."





## American Leadership and the End of Genocide in the Balkans

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James W. Pardew, *Peacemakers: American Leadership and the End of Genocide in the Balkans*, in the series “Studies in Conflict Diplomacy Peace” (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2018). – 424 pp.

“Peacemakers: American Leadership and the End of Genocide in the Balkans” offers an insight into America’s diplomatic engagement in the Balkans, more particularly after the disintegration of former Yugoslavia. Ambassador James W. Pardew recollects in his memoir the variety of crucial moments and negotiations, starting from the finalization of the Dayton agreement in 1995, and ending with Kosovo’s proclaimed independence in 2008. Pardew’s masterpiece combines the historian narrative with the vast diplomatic overview of events that help us to better understand the political logic of decisions taken by policy-makers, the way how the Europeans struggled to find a peaceful solution for the Balkan crisis in the 1990s and why America was obliged to diplomatically and militarily intervene to stop the humanitarian tragedy after Yugoslavia’s collapse.

At the outset of the 1990s, most of the former Soviet satellite-states grasped the historic moment’s significance (fall of Communism in 1989) and started reforms towards market economy, free competition, democratization, establishment of transparent and functional institutions, rule of law, and opted for European values. Conversely, other Balkan leaders choose violence over peace and threatened in this way Europe’s stability. It was Europe’s myopia and lackadaisical attitude during the 1990s that led to a situation in which simmering ethnic tension transformed into carnages with tens of thousands of people killed and millions displaced.

The lack of vision for a democratic, European future by local leaders has been illuminated by Ambassador Pardew as the primary reason for the outbreak of violence in the former Yugoslavia. The zero-sum thinking, combined with the persistent reluctance to come to a compromise—“except under very specific and almost mathematical conditions”—was deeply rooted in the political mindset of leaders such as Milosevic, Tudjman, Izetbegovic, etc. Moreover, the “new world order”—adage, proclaimed by President George H.W. Bush, which should have led the world after the Cold War to peace, stability, and prosperity, failed dramatically, if we use the example of Yugoslavia.

In the beginning of the 1990s, the American political commentator Charles Krauthammer coined the phrase “unipolar moment” which referred to the unchallenged US power after the Cold War and the responsibility Washington bears as a country whose mission is to spread and to defend freedom and democracy in the world. The US was once again (after WW I and WW II) called upon)—through international engagement—to take charge of restoring peace and stability to Europe. And because of the US engagement in that forgotten and often portrayed as backward European region, seven new nations had received the right of legal existence, and apart from Kosovo which still fights for its international recognition, the rest (save Croatia that is already EU and NATO member and Albania which joined NATO in 2009) has been slowly moving towards EU and NATO integration.

The Srebrenica genocide in July 1995 was the decisive turning point which has convinced even the last sceptics in the Clinton administration that Washington cannot stand idly by when human lives are in peril. The Dayton Agreement signed in Paris, December 14, 1995 that put an end to the Bosnian war, would not have been possible without the relentless and strenuous diplomatic and logistic support provided by the US host at the Wright-Patterson Air Force base near Dayton, Ohio. The three-week negotiations (1-21 November 1995) underwent several ups and downs and were almost on the brink of collapse because neither side was willing to make significant concessions. Finally, the breakthrough was achieved as the warring parties agreed on a peaceful solution which temporarily ended the bloodshed in former Yugoslavia. But Kosovo and Macedonia were the next former Yugoslavia-remnants in disarray and only years later will the US be taken aback and engaged in another round of back-breaking negotiations which will prevent a war in FYROM (2001) and terminate a potential warfare in Kosovo (1999).

Ambassador Pardew portrayed Milosevic during the negotiation marathon as a flexible negotiator and President Tudjman was according the author the major winner of the Dayton Accords. Not only succeeded the Croats in resolving the Eastern Slavonian stalemate but they also received a considerable international credit for being flexible on territory. The Bosnian leadership saw itself as the major loser and on several occasions Mr. Izetbegovic described the Dayton Accords as a bitter and unjust peace. Although the Bosnian team longed for peace, which has been achieved during the negotiation process, what the Bosnian state did

not receive was the eagerly awaited justice and viable government. The Agreement's flaws, which have prevented Bosnia from becoming a functioning and viable state until these days and which have been also at the core of Bosnia's institutional fragility, are deeply rooted in the complete inability of the negotiating parties to see the forest for the trees: the bevy of compromises "did not grant the central government sufficient power to overcome the individual parties' divisive strategies." Based on his long-lasting experience as diplomat, Mr. Pardew proceeds on the assumption that all the flaws incorporated in the Dayton Agreement could be resolved if the Bosnian leaders, and especially the Republika Srpska's representatives were interested in improving the fragile and unstable conditions in their country. First, they have to express their commitment to the Bosnian nation and, secondly, they must heavily invest in making Bosnia a fully functional state, opines James Pardew.

Ambassador Pardew quotes in his paperback extracts from his personal memos and reveals his personal efforts and those of President W. Clinton and Secretary Christopher to convince the Bosnian leadership to refrain from relying on Muslim foreign fighters coming from outside the region. Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps personnel was beyond debate America's biggest concern which, along with the various mujahedeen volunteers, posed a direct threat to the internal stability of the country. The potential danger coming from radicalized Islamic groups remaining in Bosnia was seen by the US administration as a main source of instability and mayhem. Due to American pressure chiefly, Mr. Izetbegovic concurred with the US proposal and opted for demobilization of those fighters by granting some of them permission to stay in Bosnia under humanitarian circumstances.

Another interesting point which can be read in the book is a feisty and forward-looking discussion between Ambassador Pardew and his Russian long-time colleague from the Contact Group Mr. Sasha Botsan-Kharchenko. The conversation took place in the end of 2007 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow and it will become a self-fulfilling prophecy in August 2008. Knowing that the Russian Federation has neither the power nor the instruments to prevent the US from supporting Kosovo's unilateral decision to declare independence, the Russian counterpart expressly pointed out to Mr. Pardew that the price for America's stance on Kosovo will be paid in Georgia. The youngest European state declared, therefore, independence on February 17th, 2008 and in August 2008, during the Olympic Games in Beijing, the Russian military supported by locals intervened in Georgia and seized South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Another personal observation of James Pardew which can be found in the book refers to the public-media aspects of negotiation processes in which he had been involved during his time as diplomat and negotiator. First thing to remember is that the negotiator has to remain cautiously positive and keep modest expectation in media interactions; secondly, from US point of view, it is of crucial importance to interact with international media outlets by being even-handed and demonstrating profound knowledge of actors, events, and ongoing pro-

cesses. Thirdly, envoys and negotiators must be prepared to ward off local media attacks. The frenetic media environment in the Balkan region, as Mr. Pardew has observed, can easily spin out of control and inflict a devastating damage to all parties involved in the process. Lastly, local media outlets in the Balkans were controlled by political figures who had sufficient leverage to exert control over decision-makers without paying any attention to professional journalist standards. Thus, media in the hands of regime's cronies obstructed occasionally the mediation's political progress. One example given by James Pardew is the case of Ambassador Robert Frowick, a career US Foreign Service officer, involved in brokering a peace deal between the Macedonian-Albanians and the central government in Macedonia, who fell prey to a media leak in the newspaper "Koha Ditore" and was forced to leave Macedonia.

The most compelling evidence of Ambassador Pardew's determination to prevent a creeping war in Macedonia was his perseverance and commitment to pre-emptively stop a bloody conflict which might have spread outside Macedonia. The Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA), signed on August 13, 2001 in Skopje, ended the ethnic fighting in Macedonia and since then has been at the core of the democratic political system which zeroes in on human rights and respects cultural identity and language diversity in Macedonia. And although there have been resentments towards the Ohrid document inside the Macedonian political establishment, Macedonia was preserved as a unitary nation only because of both parties' readiness to seek and find a mutually acceptable compromise. From today's perspective it is obvious that the Ohrid Agreement "preserved Macedonia as a nation." The OFA stipulates for both parties that they are obliged to recognize the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Macedonia as one nation. In fact, the document contains a direct reference to the Macedonian territorial integrity mentioning that "there are no territorial solutions to the ethnic issues." Avoiding the territorial separation of Macedonia, ceasing hostilities between the Slavic-Macedonians and the Albanian-Macedonians, disarming the National Liberation Army (NLA) and offering the chance to their members to return to civil society by simultaneously granting the right that any language spoken by over 20 % of the population must become co-official with Macedonian on municipal level were the final outcomes of the treaty. The objective of the Ohrid Treaty was to create a formula for power sharing between the two major ethnic groups. Furthermore, based on the European experience the document includes the concept of qualified majority which is used as common practice elsewhere in Europe to ensure the protection of minority rights in specific areas.

In addition to the conflict in Macedonia, Ambassador Pardew dedicates one chapter of his book to the American diplomat Mr. Holbrooke who is perceived by Mr. Pardew as the diplomatic engine of the Dayton Accords. This historical achievement would not have been possible without Holbrooke's leadership and diplomatic stamina. In sync with other US diplomats, Mr. Holbrooke managed to broker a peace deal among the warring factions in Bosnia. By the time the Dayton Agreement was cut and dried, Richard Holbrooke was one of the most prom-



inent American officials in the globe, probably second only to President Clinton. Being ambitious and fast on making snap decisions about people and events, R. Holbrooke did not manage to achieve his ultimate goal – becoming a Secretary of State. For that nomination his personality was too strong, his dominance in meetings with other senior officials too evident and the political environment in Washington was not conducive to his promotion for the State of Secretary profile.

In one of the chapters of his book, Ambassador Pardew looks into the factors that predetermined the US engagement in post-Cold-War Yugoslavia. He underlines the fact that only the mix of force and diplomacy (“speaking softly but carrying a big stick” principle which is often attributed to President T. Roosevelt’s foreign policy view) was able to stop the humanitarian crisis in former Yugoslavia and to restore peace and stability in the Balkans. And precisely because the US has been portrayed as the major power in the Western world which has been championing democracy and fundamental rights, it was impossible for the top brass in Washington to turn a blind eye on atrocities and manslaughter in the Balkans. Had the US failed in its efforts to stop the bloodshed and hatred in this part of Europe, human suffering in Bosnia, Macedonia, Kosovo, and Serbia would have been far worse and even having a devastating impact on the stability of the European Union. One should not forget that we Europeans have been deriving the most benefit from the US intervention in the 1990s and this can be noticed in the 2018 EU Commission strategy towards the Western Balkans: “A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans.” It was the US engagement in former Yugoslavia that forced the Europeans to start thinking about the Western Balkans by offering the affected countries the perspective to join one day the European Union.

The US did not intervene in former Yugoslavia in 1995, 1999, and 2001 because it was “looking for monsters” (John Quincy Adams) but rather because vital US interests were put at risk due to the messy and gory disintegration of former Yugoslavia. The US has for sure a plethora of national interests in other regions of the world (the “pivot to Asia” for example) but none of them is as crucial to the US security as the relationship with the other Western democracies. One should always bear in mind that Europe is the most influential and powerful region across the globe outside of the US which means nothing more than the following quote with which James Pardew addressed the US House of Representatives Committee on International Relations in 2000:

History has proven that America is not secure without a stable Europe, and Europe is not stable if its south-eastern corner is not at peace.

James Pardew’s book elaborates also on the intricate relations between Russia and the West and how those relations worsened gradually. Ambassador Pardew mentions the intensive cooperation with Russia, especially regarding the 1995-1996 negotiations on Bosnia and the constructive role played by Moscow. But as time went by, the high-water cooperation between Russia and the West

deteriorated and the level of partnership achieved in mid-1990s has reached an absolute low point in the aftermath of the Crimea crisis. James Pardew shows in an exemplary way in his book based on the EU-NATO-Russia relations by the end of the 1990s how the leading partners and friends in the Balkans have become enemies.

In a similar manner, the author focusses on the importance of multilateral diplomacy and uses the example of the Contact Group, NATO and other international organizations to emphasize the importance of multilateral engagement. The Contact Group, for instance, had been the crucial instrument with whose help Post-Soviet Russia and the West worked hand in glove on the development of international policy towards Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia. The Contact Group was also of great importance to the West and it helped better understand Russian concerns. Additionally, the NATO Alliance—which struggled to find its identity after losing the Soviet ideological and military nemesis—was the first adequate tool for military policy in the region. And it was exactly the Balkan experience that had transformed NATO as an intergovernmental organization into an international security alliance by expanding its area of responsibility and creating the fundamentals of the so called R2P (responsibility to protect) doctrine which allows military intervention on humanitarian grounds under certain circumstances. When confronted with ethnic cleansing, mass killing, gross and systematic violation of human rights, NATO could not sit idly by, notes James Pardew.

Together with NATO's engagement, Mr. Pardew put emphasis in the book on the relations between the US and Muslims in the Balkans. The author debunks the myth about the cabbala between Washington and the Muslim communities in the Balkans. Very often American envoys had been accused by their opponents of taking sides and clandestinely supporting the Muslims in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia. Nothing could be further from the truth, narrates Ambassador Pardew. The driving force for the US engagement (military and diplomatic) in the Balkans in the period 1995-2008 was not to support one group but to expeditiously react to situations and events of compelling and pressing needs for human protection. Given these points, Mr. Pardew recaps his take on the US-Muslim relations by pointing out the positive aspects of secular Islam in the Balkans. If the Balkan nations in this region—which host large Muslim populations—orientate themselves towards the EU, adopt EU values, and abide by European law, they will be embraced by the mainstream of Western democracies. In short, Muslims living in the Balkans can be regarded as role models for accommodating Islam, good governance, civil societies which are run by transparent institution and accountable leaders. The Muslims in the Balkans have been practicing a moderate type of Islam for many centuries and the tight-knit bond they can forge with other religious groups (the so called inter-religious dialogue) will serve as a counterweight to extremists who have been long interested in creating divisions between Islam and Western democracies.

On a final note, Ambassador Pardew can be regarded as a proponent of the Wilsonian School in the US foreign policy tradition. Like President W. Wilson, Ambassador Pardew advocates the spread of democracy, puts emphasis on the self-determination of peoples, opposes isolationism and non-interventionism, favors US military and diplomatic commitment to stop the outbreak of crisis and potential wars. Ambassador Pardew's book represents a first-hand record of US policy making on the Balkans during the dissolution of former Yugoslavia. It combines various discourses related to diplomacy, military history, memoir, personal observations and talks with decision-makers from former Yugoslavia. The conclusion he draws from the experience in the Balkans underscores the importance of a high-profile diplomacy backed by military force (activist diplomacy) and multilateral cooperation which includes the involvement of Western allies, key players like the Russian Federation, and the value of international organization for successfully resolving major international conflicts.

## **About the Author**

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