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**The American University in Cairo**

**Department of Political Science**

**Master's Thesis**

***'US-Russia Relations after the Crisis in Ukraine'***

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**Supervisor: Dr. Riham Bahi**

**Fall 2015**

## ***Abstract***

This thesis introduces the US–Russia relations since the end of the Cold War, with special focus on the period following the Ukraine crisis. The purpose of this thesis is to address the impact of the contemporary crisis in Ukraine on the US-Russia relations. It reveals the hidden mechanism behind the contemporary crisis in Ukraine and identifies the extent by which the Ukraine crisis affects the Obama-Russia’s ‘reset.’ The impact of the crisis on Obama-Russia’s reset is measured by presenting and analyzing the US response to the crisis and the extent to which the US and Russia are cooperating on other issues than that of Ukraine. The result of this thesis indicates that Ukraine crisis did not bring an end to Obama’s ‘reset’ with Russia.

### ***Acknowledgment***

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis advisor Dr. Riham Bahi for the continuous support of my research, for her patience, motivation, and immense knowledge. Her guidance helped me in all the time of research and writing of this thesis. I could not have imagined having a better thesis advisor and mentor.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

Many political scholars and analysts anticipated that the end of the Cold War would provide the United States and Russia with new opportunities to cooperate and to establish friendly relations.<sup>1</sup> Yet, despite several mutual initiatives from successive American and Russian leadership to establish close national tie with one another after the end of the Cold War, such attempts were doomed to fail. In other words, at the beginning of the Clinton administration, the US and Russia appeared to maintain a friendly relationship. Clinton promised to support Russia's political transformation and Yeltsin declared his commitment to transform Russia into a market democracy, which was one of the Clinton administration's major goals.<sup>2</sup> However, this friendly relationship soon ended, in 1999, with Russia's disappointment by Clinton's decision to expand NATO alliance which was exacerbated by Clinton's decision to use force against Yugoslavia, and which Russia described as an unjustified use of force. During the first few years of Bush's presidency, the US and Russia regained ties on reasonably cooperative terms.<sup>3</sup> Post 9/11 attacks, the Russian President Putin sympathized with the Bush administration and called for US-Russian partnership to combat terrorism, offering broad support for the US operations in Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup> However, two years later, relationship between the US and Russia deteriorated as Putin opposed the US war on Iraq, NATO's expansion, and the 2008 color revolution in Ukraine and Georgia, which was perceived as a US product.

In 2009, Barack Obama became the US president. During the first two years of Obama's administration, improvement in the US–Russia relations was publically demonstrated. From 2009 to 2011, relations between both governments were significantly warmer than they had been

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<sup>1</sup>Rajiv Nayan. "The Moscow Summit and the US-Russia Strategic Relationship." *Strategic Analysis*. September 2000. Vol. 24, Issue 6, Pp. 1129-1142.

<sup>2</sup>Peter Rutland, and Gregory Dubinsky. "US-Russian Relations: Hopes and Fears." *Oxford University Press*, 2008.

<sup>3</sup>Peter Baker. "Days of Fire: Bush and Cheney in the White House." *Knopf Doubleday Group*, 2013.

<sup>4</sup>Andrei P. Tsygankov. "US-Russian Relations in the Post-Western World." *Springer New York*, 2012. Pp. 35-50.

in the later years of the Bush presidency.<sup>5</sup> The Obama administration claimed a number of significant successes and mutual cooperation with Russia in terms of international security, economic, and social issues. For example, in 2009, the US and Russia agreed on a greater cooperation in Afghanistan by allowing land and air transit for the US military through Russia, and by signing the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) April 2010, was considered as a major success of the Obama's 'reset.'<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the US established strategic partnership with Russia on the issue of Iranian nuclear programme. Russia, also, supported the additional sanctions against North Korea nuclear test, established through UN Security Council. These mutual measures have been considered as another prominent achievement of the Obama's 'reset' with Russia.<sup>7</sup> Although security concerns was a predominant objective of the Obama's 'reset' with Russia, other areas were also addressed, including civil nuclear cooperation, and the signing of the US–Russia 123 Agreement as well as other economic issues that gave Russia access to the World Trade Organization (WTO). More generally, it has been argued that all the alleged achievements of Obama 'reset' is a product of the Bilateral Presidential Commission (BPC), the coordinating group for bilateral cooperation between the two governments, which was announced in Moscow in July 2009.<sup>8</sup> Such cooperation reflected the mutual interests of each side and the shared experience of the two administrations in organizing the business of the two countries.

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<sup>5</sup>Ruth Deyermond. "Assessing the Reset: Successes and Failures in the Obama Administration's Russia Policy, 2009-2012." *European Security*. December 2013. Vol.22, Issue 4, Pp. 500-523.

<sup>6</sup>'Reset' is a term adopted by many politicians and analysts that refers to Obama's US policy towards Russia. See For example, "The Obama Moment: European and American Perspectives." *European Union Institute for Security Studies*, 2011. Pp. 187-189.

<sup>7</sup>White House. "US-Russia Relations: 'Reset' Fact Sheet," June 2010. Available on <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/us-russia-relations-reset-fact-sheet>>. Retrieved on April 10, 2015.

<sup>8</sup>James F. Collins and Matthew Rojansky. "An Enduring Approach to U.S.-Russian Cooperation." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, July 2011.

However, in 2012, beginning of Obama's second term administration and the return of Putin to the Russian Presidency witnessed a setback in the US-Russia relations, ending Obama's aspiration for first term 'reset.' Many differences have emerged between Obama and Putin on several issues, including Syria, Georgia, and the role of NATO.<sup>9</sup> In addition, a number of pundits cite the 2013 crisis in Ukraine as the most serious dilemma, which turns the tables of the Post-Cold War relationship between the US and Russia.<sup>10</sup> In the late 2013, a crisis has been erupted in Ukraine between the pro-Russian government and the pro-Western political movement, resulting in the toppling of pro-Russian government in Kiev. Putin, instantly, provided pro-Russian rebels, in Eastern Ukraine, with the needed military aid. In March 2014, the US and its Western allies responded by imposing limited economic sanctions on Russia in order to deter Putin from expanding in Eastern Europe and invading Ukraine; yet, Putin retaliated and annexed Crimea. In July 2014, the US and the EU agreed to impose broader economic sanctions on Russia.<sup>11</sup> However, Putin, again, retaliated and restricted Russia's imports of food and agricultural products from the US and all the other Western states that impose sanctions on Russia.

Many political scholars emphasize that the crisis in Ukraine did escalate the tension between the US and Russia as both governments attempt to shape and manipulate events in Ukraine in their own interests.<sup>12</sup> Their relationship became more competitive rather than cooperative in solving the Ukraine crisis. On one hand, "Maidan was cheered on by the United States and the EU, which clearly sought advantage from it against Russia."<sup>13</sup> The United States perceives Ukraine's potential alignment with the EU and NATO as a victory. On the other hand,

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<sup>9</sup>Mark N. Katz "Can Russian-US Relations Improve?" *Strategic Studies Quarterly*. July 2014. Vol. 8, Issue 2.

<sup>10</sup>Ondrej Ditrych . "Bracing for Cold Peace. US-Russia Relations after Ukraine." *The International Spectator*. October 2014. Vol. 49, Issue 4, Pp. 76-96.

<sup>11</sup>Andrew Whitworth and Erik Jones. "The Unintended Consequences of European Sanctions on Russia." *Survival*. September 2014. Vol. 56, Issue 5, Pg. 21-30.

<sup>12</sup>Joanne Landy. "Ukraine between a Rock and a Hard Place." *New Politics*. July 2014. Vol. 15, Issue 1, Pp. 59-64.

<sup>13</sup>Kevin B. Anderson. "Ukraine: Democratic Aspirations and Inter-Imperialist Rivalry." *New Politics*. July 2014. Vol. 15, Issue 1, Pp. 65-70.



Russia considered Ukraine's membership in the EU or NATO enlargement on Russia's borders as a direct threat to its national security.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the absence of pro-Russian government in Kiev implied that Russia would lose its influence on Ukraine and on the region, in turn; consequently, Russia, quickly, invaded Eastern Ukraine and annexed Crimea in order to maintain its national security and reinforce its regional influence. The purpose of this thesis is an attempt to address the impact of the contemporary crisis in Ukraine on the US-Russia relations.

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<sup>14</sup>Sean Kay. "America's Search for Security: The Triumph of Idealism and the Return of Realism." *Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers*, 2014. Pp. 271.

## Research Problem

This research addresses the US–Russia relations since the end of the Cold War, with special focus on the period following the Ukraine crisis. During the Post-Cold War era, although the two countries may have learned to cooperate on some issues, the US-Russia relationship may be described as “restricted engagement with elements of rivalry rather than cooperation.”<sup>15</sup> Since 2012, differences between the two countries gradually widened and Obama’s first term publicized ‘reset’ faced various challenges in establishing mutual trust between the two powerful nations. Today, many political scholars consider the crisis in Ukraine as the most serious in Europe since the end of the Cold War, which seriously frustrated the US-Russia ‘reset.’<sup>16</sup> Since early 2014, the Russian aggression in Eastern Ukraine and the US response to events in Ukraine raised serious concerns about and doubts in the Obama ‘reset’ with Russia. Thus, the problem, which this thesis is concerned with, is the crisis in Ukraine and its effects on the US-Russia relations.

## Research Question

This research is an attempt to present the US-Russia relations in the post-Cold War era. In addition, it intends to reveal the hidden mechanism behind the contemporary crisis in Ukraine and to identify the extent by which the Ukraine crisis affects the Obama-Russia’s ‘reset.’ The impact of the crisis on Obama-Russia’s reset will be measured by presenting and analyzing the US response to the crisis and the extent to which the US and Russia are cooperating on other issues than that of Ukraine.

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<sup>15</sup>Angela Stent. “The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century.” *Princeton University Press*, 2014.

<sup>16</sup>Jeffrey Mankoff. “Russia's Latest Land Grab: How Putin Won Crimea and Lost Ukraine.” *Foreign Affairs*. May 2014. Vol. 93, Issue 3, Pp. 60-68.

## *Hypothesis*

Many political scholars argue that although signs of tension in the US-Russia relationship had appeared with the beginning of Obama's second term administration and Putin's return to Russia's presidency, the Ukraine crisis accelerated the deterioration in the relation. Analysts describe the Ukraine crisis as Obama's failed 'reset' with Russia. However, my hypothesis emphasizes that crisis in Ukraine should not be, casually, labeled as the end to Obama's 'reset' of undoing tensions with Russia. This is because the US and Russia have other mutual interests to unify them. In other words, although Russia appears to challenge the US-led global order through invading Eastern Ukraine and annexing Crimea, Obama remains keen to preserve the 'reset' of undoing tensions with Russia because the US is still in need of Russia's help on many other serious contemporary issues, such as stabilizing the situation in Syria and withdrawing US equipment from Afghanistan through Russian territory. In addition, although the Ukraine crisis has resulted in a suspension of several projects planned under the US-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission (BPC), the two countries have a lot of mutual security interests. They continue to collaborate on the issue of Iran's nuclear program and to cooperate with each other in their crack down on ISIS.

## Literature Review

This literature review explores the three dominant themes of the research problem, which are the US-Russia relations in the Post-Cold War era, Ukraine crisis, and Obama's 'reset' policy.

Angela Stent's book, "The Limits of Partnership: U.S-Russian Relations in the 21st Century," published in January 2014, presents a comprehensive background of the US-Russian relations since the end of Cold War till late 2013. Stent explains that the US-Russian relations have experienced four 'resets' since the end of Cold War. At every 'reset,' the US president seeks to maintain close ties with the Russian president, but such attempts eventually end in disappointment. At the beginning of the book, Stent raises a question of why "has it been so difficult to develop a productive and more predictable post-Cold War U.S.-Russia partnership?" Stent then proceeds to explain that despite being criticized for not supporting Russia economically, the first President Bush preferred to adopt a cautious 'reset.' The second 'reset' witnessed a wide range of cooperation between Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin and by the end of Clinton's term, "cooperation and competition coexisted [between the US and Russia], albeit in fluctuating proportions." The third 'reset' was initiated by the Russian President Putin, who called for US-Russian partnership on combating terrorism post 9/11. However, two years later, this cooperative relation witnessed a relapse. Concerning the current fourth 'reset,' Stent states that Obama, mistakenly, "decided from the beginning to take Medvedev at his word and act as if he was the de facto as well as the de jure leader of Russia, who wanted to make Russia a more modern society based on the rule of law." Thus, from the beginning of the reset, Obama announced to support Russian Civil Society; yet, this 'reset' failed to maintain a stable relationship and to unify their efforts in resolving the global challenges, such as the Syrian crisis. Stent concludes her book by declaring that, at every 'reset,' the US president seeks to find the key

which would unlock the door to better US-Russia relations, but “so far no one has found the key.” Thus, this research aims to find the lost key of Obama’s ‘reset’ with Russia.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, in his book entitled “The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its geostrategic Imperatives,” presents a geopolitical interpretation of the global challenges. Even though it has been published in 1997, Brzezinski’s book is considered a blueprint for the geopolitics of Europe and Central Asia. It explains why Ukraine is so important for the world’s Great powers. Throughout the book, readers realize that Russia and, to lesser extent, China are the two major potential rivals who can threaten the US global interests. If any of the two manage to gain regional superpower, it would not only restrict the US interests in Central Asia, but also endanger the US oil interests in the Persian Gulf. Brzezinski divides the world into two factions; namely, the geopolitical players and geostrategic pivots. He defines these geopolitical players as states that pursue their interests beyond their borders and may be rightly considered as potential US rivals, such as Russia and China. Brzezinski, also, mentions the ‘geostrategic pivots,’ referring to states that have no influence at the global order nonetheless they play a crucial role in the rise of these geopolitical players. These geostrategic pivots are “states whose importance is derived not from their power and motivation but rather from their sensitive location and from the consequences of their potentially vulnerable condition for the behavior of geostrategic players.”<sup>17</sup> Ukraine is one of these states listed among these geostrategic pivots, which play a pivotal role in the emergence of Russia as a regional superpower. Brzezinski states, “Ukraine, a new and important space on the Eurasian chessboard, is a geopolitical pivot because its very existence as an independent country helps to transform Russia. Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire.” “However, if Moscow regains control over Ukraine, with its 52 million people

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<sup>17</sup>Zbigniew Brzeziński. “The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives.” *Basic Books*, 1997.

and major resources as well as access to the Black Sea, Russia will automatically regain the wherewithal to become a powerful imperial state, spanning Europe and Asia.” Through this book, this research tries to analyze why the contemporary crisis in Ukraine is considered as a major challenge to Obama-Russia’s ‘reset’ and to reveal the hidden mechanism behind today’s US-Russia tension in Eastern Europe.

Andrew Wilson’s book, “Ukraine Crisis: what it means for the West,” published in 2014, is another good reference, which offers a comprehensive overview on the 2013 Ukraine revolution. From Wilson’s point of view, Vladimir Putin and Viktor Yanukovych are the two main instigators of the Ukraine’s crisis. He argues that the Ukraine crisis erupted in reaction to Yanukovych’s violation to all the formal and informal rules of the Ukrainian politics, in order to maximize his personal power and wealth.<sup>18</sup> In addition, Wilson considers Putin’s annexation of Crimea as a political opportunism rather than an outcome of a long-term strategy. He explains that the revolution in Ukraine threatened the stability of Putin’s own rule. Consequently, Putin invaded Eastern Ukraine and annexed Crimea in order to ensure his own political survival. However, Wilson seems to disregard the wave of protests spreading to the regions. He is more concerned with the domestic factors of the crisis than with the international ones and treats Ukraine as an independent state isolated from international influence. Thus, Wilson’s book is useful for this research in order to present the domestic level of analysis of the crisis.

Colin Dueck’s book, entitled “The Obama Doctrine: American Grand Strategy Today,” is one of the most recently published work that describes how Obama’s doctrine was built and formulated. Dueck argues that although Obama’s doctrine was often ambiguous, its major objective is more concerned with the domestic realm than with the international realm.<sup>19</sup> Dueck

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<sup>18</sup>Andrew Wilson. “Ukraine Crisis: what it means for the West.” *Yale University Press*, 2014.

<sup>19</sup>Colin Dueck. “The Obama Doctrine: American Grand Strategy Today.” *Oxford University Press*, 2015.

adds that Obama's doctrine aims to decrease American international military intervention in order to avoid detracting money, time, and focus from his very ambitious domestic reform agenda. Although Dueck praises Obama's achievements and considers him one of the greatest American presidents, he criticizes his approach of disengagement, especially on nuclear and terrorist issues. He argues that, on a global scale, his disengagement approach is viewed as a mark of weakness. On one hand, this book is adopted in order to assess Obama's 'reset' and to identify the goals of his administration. On the other hand, this research analyzes Obama's response to Russia's aggression in Ukraine in relation to the major objectives of Obama's doctrine.

The major themes introduced in the reviewed literature are mostly concerned with describing the rise and fall of the US-Russia relations and the reasons behind the failure of US presidents to maintain friendly ties with Russia in the post-Cold War era. The themes, also, present narratives of the Ukraine crisis and Obama's doctrine. However, this research reveals some contemporary concerns that may induce US-Russia cooperation and may assess the durability of the Obama-Russia 'reset' despite the tension in Ukraine.

## Theoretical Framework

This research applies the theory of **structural realism**, including the offensive and the defensive approaches, in order to analyze state behavior at the global level. Theory of structural realism would also help us understand the contemporary US-Russia tension and analyze the US and Russia's responses to the 2013 Ukraine crisis. Structural realists argue that states are concerned about the balance of power and hence compete over gaining or maintaining power. For structural realists, it is the structure of the international system that forces states to seek power. It does not matter whether a state is democratic or autocratic; structural realists treat states as 'black boxes.' In other words, all states are alike but differ in the amount of power they possess.<sup>20</sup> Structural realism presents five major assumptions that explain why states pursue power, which are;

1. Great powers are the major actors, operating in an anarchic system.
2. All states possess some offensive military capability; thus, each state has the capability to inflict some damage to its neighbors. This capability varies and changes over time.
3. State can never be certain about other states intentions. States cannot determine whether other states are *revisionist* states, which would use force to alter balance of power or *status quo* states, which are satisfied with the balance of power and unwilling to change it.
4. Survival is state's ultimate goal. States seek to maintain their survival through maintaining their territorial integrity and the independence of their domestic politics.
5. States are rational actors, aware of the external environment.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Timothy Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith. "International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity." *Oxford University Press*, 2007. Pp. 72-86.

<sup>21</sup>John Mearsheimer. "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics." *Norton*, 2001.



In other words, structural realism emphasizes that states, as unitary rational actors, fear each other and understand that they operate in a self-help world. In addition, states cannot be certain about other states' present and future intentions; thus, they realize that the best way to maintain their own survival is to maintain a certain level of power. Therefore, security dilemma emerges. This means that an increase in one state's security often takes at the expense of other state's security. Moreover, structural realists assume that states are concerned with *relative* gains rather than *absolute* gains.<sup>22</sup> In other words, states that pursue *absolute* gains are indifferent to other states, whereas states that pursue *relative* gains are concerned with maintaining a high level of capability relative to the others; consequently, cooperation is hard to attain especially among states that are aiming to improve their relative position.

Through applying structural realism to the contemporary US-Russia tension in Ukraine, we may notice some sources of security dilemma in the US-Russia relations. In other words, based on a structural realism perspective, the US and Russia are considered as two unitary rational actors competing in an anarchic world. We can also assume that because Russia possesses offensive military capabilities, it intervened in Eastern Ukraine and annexed Crimea. Thus, security dilemma emerges because Russia's expansion in Eastern Ukraine would increase its influence on Russia's near abroad and would decrease the US influence. In addition, Russia's invasion to Eastern Ukraine and annexation of Crimea present a challenge to existing global order. Although analysts cannot determine whether Russia is a *revisionist* or a *status quo* state, yet it could be argued that the US is a *status quo* state seeking to maintain its global position against Russia's rising power. Besides, regardless of the EU involvement in the conflict, the US, as a superpower operating in an anarchic world, remains to be the major actor responding to Russia's aggression in Eastern Europe. Moreover, even though cooperation between the US and

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<sup>22</sup>Paul Viotti, and Mark Kauppi. "International Relations Theory." (4th ed.). *New York: Longman*, 2010. Pp. 59-65.

Russia over resolving the crisis in Ukraine may be hard to predict because Russia seeks to increase its *relative* gains in the region, while the US is determined to maintain its foothold in Eastern Europe, it is nevertheless plausible to believe that cooperation between Russia and the US may still be inevitable in their collaborative fight against ISIS terrorist groups.<sup>23</sup>

In general, there is a disagreement among structural realists about how much power is enough. On one hand, offensive realists argue that states pursue ‘maximization of power’ and its ultimate goal is to be a hegemon. On another hand, defensive realists contend that states should only seek ‘appropriate amount of power.’

#### *Offensive Realism: John Mearsheimer*

Offensive realists emphasize that any state tends to pursue maximization of power till it achieves hegemony. State, as a rational actor, realizes that in order to maintain its survival, it should be the strongest. Aiming for regional hegemony, states rival one another in order to maintain a tight grip on the region. Mearsheimer assumes that the best way for a state to ensure its survival, in an anarchical international system, is to gain power at the expenses of other states. For him, maximization of power is not just a means to achieve state’s survival but it is an end in itself. In addition, states cannot foretell how much power is needed to secure their goals now or in the future, since states’ capabilities change over time. Realizing this fact, states become keen about achieving hegemony today and each state adopts the same logic; consequently, security dilemma and power struggles emerge. Moreover, Mearsheimer argues that states usually prefer *buck passing* than balancing coalition. This means that states prefer to get other states to bear the burden of checking the opponent, while they remain on the sidelines rather than form a balancing coalition with them.

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<sup>23</sup>David Stuart. "US and Russia: Possible Cooperation Over the ISIL Threat." *New Eastern Outlook*, September 3, 2014. Available on <<http://journal-neo.org/>>. Retrieved on February 26, 2015.

It could be assumed that Russia has been acting in the same way that offensive realists predict. It is obvious that under the Russian president Vladimir Putin, Russia has progressively turned to be more assertive at the global level. Mearsheimer argues that Putin, readily, intervened in Eastern Ukraine, specifically in the Crimean peninsula, “a peninsula he feared would host a NATO naval base, and worked to destabilize Ukraine until it abandoned its efforts to join the West.”<sup>24</sup> Ukraine’s alignment with the EU and NATO is considered as a direct threat to Russia’s security. In other words, EU’s expansion and NATO enlargement means an increase in the US influence and dominance in the region at the expense of Russia’s influence. Thus, unsurprisingly, Putin in his own turn intervened in Eastern Ukraine, seeking maximization of power and regional hegemony.

*Defensive Realism: Kenneth Waltz*

Defensive realists argue that states can only seek ‘appropriate amount of power’ not maximization of power due to three major reasons.<sup>25</sup> First, defensive realists assume that if any state becomes too powerful, balancing will occur. In other words, even though states, as unitary actors, would use their capabilities in order to improve their positions in a competitive international system, such attempts are likely to be countered by other states that are similarly motivated. When one state appears to be a potential hegemon, other states would ally, forming a balancing coalition against this potential hegemon, leaving it less secure or even destroy it. Second, defensive realists argue that there is always an “*offence-defense balance*,” which determines the possibility and capability of conquering a territory or defeating a defender. Waltz emphasizes that it always ends in the favor of the defenders’ side. To illustrate, States care too much about their *status quo* and about the balance of power in the global system. As a result,

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<sup>24</sup>John Mearsheimer. “Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West’s Fault: The Liberal Delusions that Provoked Putin.” *Foreign Affairs*. September 2014. Vol. 93, Issue 5.

<sup>25</sup>Kenneth Waltz. “Theory of International Politics.” *Newbery Award Records*, 1979.

they recognize that an offender's attack would lead to a shift in powers and so intervene to support the defender side in order to maintain their *status quo*. Third, defensive realists assume that the conquest is the loser due to nationalism. That is to say, after an offender conquers a state, it remains faces popular resistance; thus, its losses would far outweigh its gains.

The US response to Russia's aggression in Ukraine may be sufficiently based on a defensive realism perspective. To illustrate, Obama's administration tends to prefer forming a balancing coalition with the EU to resolve the Ukraine crisis than to escalate direct military confrontation with Russia. Based on a defensive viewpoint, the US might be more concerned with maintaining its global *status quo* than with maximizing its power. In addition, we can hardly predict US military intervention in Eastern Europe because it would face pro-Russian and anti-American population resistance. Thus, Obama may have recognized that the benefits of maintaining the *status quo* of his 'reset,' of undoing tensions with Russia, far outweigh its loss.

Furthermore, both offensive and defensive realists agree that nuclear power has little utility for offensive purposes, except if one side in the conflict possesses it. This is because when both sides of the conflict have it, neither benefit from striking first. Accordingly, we may assume that even though direct military confrontation between the US and Russia is possible in Ukraine, it is not likely because both of them possess nuclear weapons and both would be reluctant to escalate confrontation to a nuclear level.

To sum up, applying the structural realist perspective enables us to assume that Russia adopted an offensive approach in order to maintain its influence in the region while the US in turn responded defensively in order to maintain its 'reset' of undoing tension with Russia and its pragmatic interests.

### **Significance of the Study**

- This research attempts to present a broad explanation of the rise and fall of the US-Russia relations in the post-Cold War era.
- It seeks to discover the origin of the contemporary crisis in Ukraine and to analyze the US and Russia approaches toward the crisis.
- It reveals the reasons behind the contemporary US-Russia tension in Ukraine.
- It examines and identifies the consequences of the Ukraine crisis on Obama's 'reset' with Russia.

## Chapter II: US-Russia Relations in the Post-Cold War Era

Close ties between the United States and Russia could be observed prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union in their joint opposition to Saddam Hussein invasion to Kuwait. Both states announced the destruction of all their tactical battlefield of nuclear weapons, which indicated a collapse of the Soviet Union and the birth of cooperative threat reduction relations. In fact, many political scholars and analysts expected that the collapse of the Soviet Union, in 1991, would provide the United States and Russia with new opportunities to establish a cooperative relationship. Indeed, after the fall of the Soviet Union, the US and Russia engaged in what many scholars refer to as a 'necessary partnership.'<sup>26</sup> However, they still competed over reshaping the world politics. The fall of the Soviet Union made the US perceive itself as the only unchallenged superpower, while Russia perceived itself as the winner of the Cold War because it succeeded in removing the threat of nuclear war.

In the Post-Cold War period, during both the Bush and Clinton administrations, the US policy toward Russia tended to integrate Russia into the Western-based international system. In other words, the US administration perceived Russia's integration, with its geographical location and demographical capacity, into the Western world as a catalyst to the internal reform of the Post-Soviet states. It would also unify Russia's interests with those of the Western leading states. Simultaneously, Russia appeared to be willing to liberate itself from the Soviet ideology, to establish a democratic political system, and a free market economy (but this did not happen and remained to be a lost opportunity in US-Russia relations). Nevertheless, the post-Cold War years have witnessed the rise and fall of the US-Russia relations. Indeed, the US-Russia relations cycled twice, during Bush and Clinton administrations, between hopefulness and despair.

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<sup>26</sup>Michael Cox. "The Necessary Partnership? the Clinton Presidency and Post-Soviet Russia." *Royal Institute of International Affairs*, October 1994. Vol. 70, No. 4, Pp. 635-658.

## **Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin**

In 1993, Clinton took office and sought to establish a friendly relationship with Russia. Not only did Clinton like Yeltsin, but he also supported his policies. Both US President Clinton and Russia President Yeltsin showed their interests in creating an effective US-Russia partnership. Transforming Russia into a market democracy and ensuring arms control can be considered as the major objectives of Clinton's administration. The friendly ties initiated by Clinton and welcomed by Yeltsin, were paved by the US support to Yeltsin's commitment to modernize the Russian state and economy and transform Russia into a market democracy. In April 1993, at a summit meeting in Vancouver, "President Clinton promised the Yeltsin government \$1.6 billion in new grants and loans."<sup>27</sup> In July 1993, the US announced additional \$1.8 billion economic assistance for Russia and the former Soviet republics. Clinton-Yeltsin cooperation, also, included issues other than economic matters. For example, in June 1994, the US and Russia signed a Cooperation on Space Station that provided Russia with participation in International Space Station activities.<sup>28</sup>

In addition, nuclear nonproliferation and arm control could be considered as another major concern for both Clinton and Yeltsin especially after the dismantling of the Soviet Union. This is because Russia was no longer the only state that had control over the whole Soviet nuclear inventory. The Moscow summit of January 1994 emphasized issues of arms control and nonproliferation of nuclear weapons. Both Clinton and Yeltsin agreed to cooperate to prevent nuclear proliferation and to halt the spread of weapons of mass destruction, particularly on the Korean peninsula and the Middle East. In fact, in November 1994, after almost two years of negotiations, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan finally agreed to adhere to the

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<sup>27</sup>Karen LaFollette. "Soft Assistance for Hard Russian Reform." *Cato Institute*, June 1993. Available on <[www.cato.org/pubs/fpbriefs/](http://www.cato.org/pubs/fpbriefs/)>. Retrieved on March 15, 2015.

<sup>28</sup>Yuri Y. Karash. "Soviet/Russian-American Space Cooperation." *ProQuest LLC*, 2009. Pp. 294.

Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF). The following month, the four countries formally ratified 'START I.'<sup>29</sup>

By the beginning of 1995, and despite the publicized cooperative relationship, disagreements between Clinton and Yeltsin erupted. Clinton opposed Russia's aggression in Chechnya and Russia's nuclear sales to Iran. Similarly, Yeltsin opposed US intervention in Bosnia and NATO enlargement.<sup>30</sup> Clinton-Yeltsin friendly relation soon deteriorated as the US planned to expand NATO into Central Europe. In other words, in a Post-Cold War world, Russia perceived NATO as an inefficient alliance as long as the Warsaw Pact collapsed with the fall of the Soviet Union; nevertheless, NATO continued to expand and integrate Post-Soviet states. In 1994, Clinton approved NATO enlargement in Prague, which induced Yeltsin to warn of a 'Cold Peace.'<sup>31</sup> As Rutland and Dubinsky explain, the US wanted NATO enlargement as an insurance policy in case Russia 'Went bad.' Although the US supported the NATO-Russia Founding Act, which created a Permanent Joint Council in Brussels, in 1997, and although the US agreed on Yeltsin's invitation to attend the Group of Seven (G-7) annual meeting, Russia remained offended by NATO enlargement. Yeltsin was disappointed by Clinton's approval on NATO expansion in former Warsaw Pact states, especially, after Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, joined NATO in 1999. In fact, deterioration in the US-Russia relation intensified after the US decision to use military force against Yugoslavia, which Russia considered as unjustified use of force that serves the US interest of reinforcing its influence in Central Europe and exposing Russia's inability to face US military might.

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<sup>29</sup>Haralambos Athanasopoulos. "Nuclear Disarmament in International Law." *McFarland*, 2000. Pp. 116-117.

\*\* **START I** was first proposed in the early 1980s by President Ronald Reagan, requiring the United States and the Soviet Union to reduce their deployed strategic arsenals. The agreement's entry into force was delayed for several years and finally signed in July 1991. START I reductions were completed in December 2001 and the treaty expired on December 5th, 2009.

<sup>30</sup>Andrew Felkay. "Yeltsin's Russia and the West." *Greenwood Publishing Group*, 2002. Pp. 220-224.

<sup>31</sup>Johanna Granville. "After Kosovo: The Impact of NATO Expansion on Russian Political Parties." *Demokratizatsiya*, Winter 2000. Issue 8, No. 1, Pp. 24.



## **George Bush and Vladimir Putin**

By the end of Clinton's administration, planned reform failed in Russia, Russia's economy faced financial crash in 1998, and US-Russia relations turned from bad to worse. Condoleezza Rice, Bush foreign policy and national security advisor, accused the Clinton administration of wasting the IMF funds on Russia without evidence of reform, claiming that the US should concentrate on security rather than economic and political issues in Russia. She argued that the US security is ensured by Russia strengths not weaknesses. She states, "American security is threatened less by Russia's strength than by its weakness and incoherence."<sup>32</sup>

Regarding the first few years of Bush's presidency, the US and Russia stayed on reasonably cooperative terms. Yet, much improvement in the relations was not witnessed until Bush and Putin's meeting in Slovenia in June 2001, where Bush declared his intention to re-build a relationship with Russia that is based on mutual respect and pledged to support Russia's entry in the World Trade Organization (WTO). Simultaneously, Putin announced that both presidents established a relationship based on mutual trust. He referred to the US president as a 'partner' and described Bush as "a nice person to talk to."<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, the 9/11 attacks represented another turning point in the US-Russia friendly relationship. Post 9/11 attack, Putin was the first president to Call Bush and offers his condolences, severely condemning terrorism. During this period of time, Putin was still involved in the Chechen war and perceived 9/11 attacks as a solid evidence for his repeated warnings against the threat of radical Islamism. He, also, supported the US campaign against the Taliban

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<sup>32</sup>Condoleezza Rice and January From. "Campaign 2000: Promoting the National Interest." *World*, 2006. Available on <<http://foreignaffairs.org>>. Retrieved on March 15, 2015.

<sup>33</sup>Peter Baker, Susan Glasser 'Kremlin Rising: Vladimir Putin's Russia and the End of Revolution.'" *Simon and Schuster*, 2005. Pp. 129.

Regime in Afghanistan.<sup>34</sup> In November 2001, both presidents released a joint statement declaring that, in the Post-Cold War legacy “neither country regards the other as an enemy or threat.”<sup>35</sup> With this new cooperative spirit, in May 2002, Bush signed the Strategic Offensive Weapons Reduction Treaty in Moscow, which “mandated that the United States and Russia reduce their strategic nuclear weapons to between 1,700 and 2,200 warheads by December 31, 2012.”<sup>36</sup> Moreover, in April 2002, “a joint US-Russian Energy Working Group” met in Washington, where Russian producers sought access to the US markets.<sup>37</sup>

However, 2003 marked a setback in the US-Russia relations. Such deterioration appeared in Putin’s opposition to the US war in Iraq in addition to Putin’s disappointment by the ‘color revolutions’ in Ukraine and Georgia, which he considered as a US product. The US invasion to Iraq, despite the repeated warnings from the international community, induced Russia to consider the US as an unreliable ally. In addition, the “US-backed opposition movement swept Mikheil Saakashvili to power in Georgia’s ‘Rose Revolution’” in 2003 followed by the “Orange revolution” in Ukraine in 2004, and “Tulip Revolution” in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 were all seen by Russia as part of the US plan to weaken Russia’s influence on the post-Soviet states and surround Russia’s borders with pro-Western states.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, by the beginning of year 2007, Putin intensely escalated his rhetoric after the US revealed plans to establish antimissile bases in Poland and the Czech Republic. He warned to withdraw from the Conventional Armed Forces in

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<sup>34</sup>Andrei P. Tsygankov. "US-Russia Relations in the Post-Western World." *Springer New York*, 2012. Pp. 35-50.

<sup>35</sup>Wade L. Huntley, Mitsuru Kurosawa, and Kazumi Mizumoto. *Nuclear Disarmament in the Twenty-first Century Hiroshima Peace Institute*, 2004. Pp. 130.

<sup>36</sup>Amy Woolf. “Nuclear Arms Control: The Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty.” *CRS Report for Congress*, February 2011. Available on <<https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/>>. Retrieved on March 15, 2015.

<sup>37</sup>Jeronim Perovic, Robert Orttung, and Andreas Wenger. “Russian Energy Power and Foreign Relations: Implications for Conflict and Cooperation.” *Routledge*, 2009. Pp. 193.

<sup>38</sup>Michael Cox and Doug Stokes. “US Foreign Policy.” *Oxford University Press*, 2012. Pp. 251.

Europe (CFE) Treaty and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.<sup>39</sup> By late 2008, the US-Russia tension escalated and was exacerbated by the US strong opposition to the Russia-Georgia conflict and by the US intervention to support Georgia against Russia's aggression.<sup>40</sup> By the end of Bush administration, US-Russia relations shrunk and mutual distrust prevailed. The United States abrogated the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and Russia suspended the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty.<sup>41</sup>

Generally speaking, "during the eight years of the post-Cold War period (during both the Bush and Clinton administrations), the US policy toward Russia was based on the premise that Russia could be integrated into the Western-based international system."<sup>42</sup> On one hand, the US perceived that Russia's integration in the Western world would lead to Russia's internal reform and would eventually stimulate transition in the post-Soviet states. In addition, integrating Russia in the Western world was presumed to unify Russia's interests with those of the Western world and establish friendly ties with the Western leading states. On the other hand, international political and economic cooperation in addition to political integration in managing the international system and accessing international markets were all good incentives for Russian political, economic, and social actors.

However, both Clinton and Bush administrations failed to maintain an efficient long-term friendly relationship with Russia. They failed to meet the promises of the post-Cold War relations. The US policy of NATO enlargement was always ambiguous. In other words, NATO's role in Eastern Europe was never clear enough especially since the collapse of the Warsaw Pact.

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<sup>39</sup>Vladimir Putin. "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy." February 10, 2007. Available on <<http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/>>. Retrieved on July 11, 2015.

<sup>40</sup>Jim Nichol. "Russia-Georgia Conflict in August 2008: Context and Implications for U.S. Interests." *CRS Report for Congress*, March 2009. Available on <<https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/>>. Retrieved on March 25, 2015.

<sup>41</sup>Wade Boese. "Russia Suspends CFE Treaty Implementation." *Arms Control Association*, January 25, 2008. Available on <<https://www.armscontrol.org/>>. Retrieved July 14, 2015.

<sup>42</sup>Celeste Wallander. "Russian-US Relations in the Post Post-Cold War World." *PONARS*, October 1999.

Besides, NATO's enlargement contradicts the US basic premise of Russia's political integration in Western world. NATO enlargement inflamed the feelings of Russian nationalism and Russia does not seem to give up its great power *status quo*.

## Obama's 'Reset' with Russia

By the end of the Bush administration, “the US-Russia relations reached a nadir unprecedented in the Post-Cold War era.”<sup>43</sup> However, in 2009, Obama came to office determined to ‘reset’ relations with Russia. The main idea behind Obama’s ‘reset’ with Russia is to leave all the former disagreements behind, eradicate the Cold War mentality, and re-establish a new mutual friendly relationship. Obama emphasized his intention to establish an engagement with the Russian government through pursuing common interests in addition to establishing a direct engagement with the Russian society and facilitate broader contacts between American and Russian business leaders and civil society organizations. The purpose is to promote economic interests, enhance mutual understanding between the two nations, and advance universal values.<sup>44</sup> There are several interests of the Obama administration in improving ties with Russia, which was first described by US Vice President Joe Biden, at the February 2009 Munich Security Conference, as “pressing the reset button.” These interests are principally driven by three goals which are heightened urgency of resolving the Iranian nuclear question, the need of additional transport routes into Afghanistan to support US larger military presence and a return to a more multilateral approach to ensure nuclear security and to strengthen nonproliferation regime.<sup>45</sup>

Other broader administration’s objectives, such as climate change challenge, energy security, and health, also, requires US improvement ties with Russia. Between 2009 and 2011, the Obama administration claimed a number of significant successes in improved cooperation

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<sup>43</sup>Artemy Kalinosky. "Simply Press the Button? The Reality of Resetting with Russia." *London School of Economics and Political Science*, 2010. Pp. 25-27. Available on <<http://www.lse.ac.uk/>>. Retrieved on April 16, 2015.

<sup>44</sup>White House, “U.S.-Russia Relations: ‘Reset’ Fact Sheet”, Office of the Press Secretary. June 24, 2010. Available on <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/us-russia-relations-reset-fact-sheet>>. Retrieved on July 1, 2015.

<sup>45</sup>Piotr Dutkiewicz and Dmitriï Trenin. “Russia: The Challenges of Transformation.” *New York University Press*, 2011. Pp. 337-338.

with Russia, not only on the international security level, but also on the economic and social level. Such cooperation was observed in the establishment of the Bilateral Presidential Commission (BPC), which handled both states economic and social cooperation.

However, by the beginning of Obama's second term, in 2012, the US-Russia relations have intensely deteriorated. Crisis in Ukraine was the main factor that triggered a new rivalry though not the primary cause of the deterioration in Obama's 'reset' with Russia. In fact, differences between Obama and Putin over Libya, Syria, and Georgia had emerged much earlier than did the Ukraine crisis.

#### *Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev*

During the first term of Obama's administration, improvement in the US–Russia relations was publically demonstrated. In the first two years of the Obama administration, relations between Obama and Medvedev were significantly warmer than they had been between Bush and Putin. Obama's 'reset' with Russia stimulated improvements in concrete cooperation and mutual rhetoric. A number of significant achievements of Obama's 'reset' with Russia were acknowledged in terms of international security as well as economic and social issues. The US-Russian agreement on a greater cooperation in Afghanistan, in 2009, by allowing land and air transit for the US military through Russia is one of Obama's achievements. The signing of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), in April 2010, was also considered a major success of Obama's 'reset.'<sup>46</sup> Russian officials pointed out that the so-called "New START" treaty "reflects a new level of trust between Moscow and Washington," which would

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<sup>46</sup>Ruth Deyermond. "Assessing the Reset: Successes and Failures in the Obama Administration's Russia Policy, 2009-2012." *European Security*. December 2013. Vol. 22, Issue 4, Pp. 500-523.

lead to a higher level of cooperation between both countries.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Russian President Medvedev described the treaty as a “win-win situation,” where there are no winners and no losers and agreed that it leads to a new level of bilateral cooperation based on mutual respect and predictability.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, building strategic partnership on the issue of Iranian nuclear programme and Russian support for additional sanctions against North Korea nuclear test, established through UN Security Council, have been considered as other significant achievements of the Obama ‘reset’ with Russia.<sup>49</sup>

Although security was one of the major concerns of the Obama ‘reset’ with Russia, other areas were addressed on equal footing. These included civil nuclear cooperation, through the signing of the US–Russia 123 Agreement. It also included economic issues, such as giving Russia access to the World Trade Organization (WTO). These accomplishments complemented by the Bilateral Presidential Commission (BPC), the coordinating group for bilateral cooperation between the two governments, announced in Moscow in July 2009. They reflect the interests of each side and the shared experience of the two administrations in organizing the business of the two countries.<sup>50</sup> In a brief analysis, the success of the ‘reset’ seemed “more the result of a desire by both leaders to shed past ideological disagreements in favor of a more pragmatic approach to relations, based upon mutual benefit.”<sup>51</sup> Neither Medvedev made promises about Russian

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<sup>47</sup>Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, quoted in “Russia Lauds Nuclear Pact—But Reserves Right to Withdraw,” AFP, April 6, 2010; and Presidential National Security Aide Sergei Prikhodko in “Kremlin Views Arms Treaty as Move to Greater Cooperation with USA—Aide” Interfax, April 6, 2010.

<sup>48</sup>“Joint News Conference With U.S. President Barack Obama.” Prague, April 8, 2010. Available on <[www.kremlin.ru](http://www.kremlin.ru)>. Retrieved on June 28, 2015.

<sup>49</sup>White House. “US-Russia Relations: ‘Reset’ Fact Sheet,” June 2010. Available on <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/us-russia-relations-reset-fact-sheet>>. Retrieved on June 29, 2015.

<sup>50</sup>James F. Collins and Matthew Rojansky. “An Enduring Approach to U.S.-Russian Cooperation.” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, July 2011.

<sup>51</sup>Kari Roberts. “Détente 2.0? The Meaning of Russia's “Reset” with the United States.” *International Studies Perspectives*, October 2012. Vol. 15, Issue 1, Pp. 1-18.

democratic reform nor did Obama appear to link the destiny of the US-Russia 'reset' to the Russian domestic politics.

### *Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin*

Obama 2<sup>nd</sup> term administration sought to maintain the 'reset' over the next four years. Obama claimed that the 'reset' produced unprecedented achievements referring to the 'New Start' treaty, the cooperation with Russia in Afghanistan and Iran, the 123 Agreement, the establishment of the BPC, and the Russian membership in the WTO after 19 years of negotiations; however, two major issues remained unsolved, namely, "the failure to reach an agreement on cooperation on missile defense and Congress's refusal to rescind the 1974 Jackson–Vanik Amendment and grant Russia permanent normal trading status as WTO rules demand."<sup>52</sup> In addition, Angela Stent, a senior fellow in Foreign Policy and director of the Center for Eurasian, Russian and East European Studies at Georgetown University, explained that Russia remained resentful because "the United States never took seriously the need to redesign Euro-Atlantic security structures after the Georgia War and largely ignored President Dmitry Medvedev's 2009 proposal to create a new, legally binding Euro-Atlantic super-treaty," which the US believed would restrict NATO's ability to operate effectively.

Moreover, by early 2012, with the beginning of Obama's second term administration and the return of Putin to the Russian Presidency, the US-Russian relations retreated ending the hopes of Obama's first term 'reset.' Many differences emerged between Obama and Putin on several issues, including missile defense plans, Libya, Syria, Georgia, and the role of NATO.<sup>53</sup> On one hand, the US sharply criticized Russia's violation of human rights and punished Russia

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<sup>52</sup>Angela Stent."US–Russia Relations in the Second Obama Administration." *Survival*, December 2012. Vol. 54, Issue 6, Pp. 123-138.

<sup>53</sup>Mark N. Katz "Can Russian-US Relations Improve?" *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, July 2014. Vol. 8, Issue 2.



by restricting the Russian access to the US visas and US business opportunities.<sup>54</sup> In addition, Obama canceled a planned bilateral summit with Putin in Moscow in September 2013 after Putin's decision to grant asylum to Snowden.<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, Russia did not renew the Nunn-Lugar cooperative threat reduction program, which targeted dismantling Russia's nuclear and chemical weapons. It, also, resisted the US intervention in Russia's internal affairs and cut back the cooperation with the US NGOs. Furthermore, the upheaval in Syria created further ideological division. The US felt responsible to protect and provide humanitarian intervention while Russia stressed on state sovereignty and non-intervention. Besides, Russian officials claimed that the United Nations had exceeded its mission in Libya. They criticized the way in which Libyan president Muammar Gadhafi was killed and were wary of the government that succeeded him. This reinforced Putin's refusal to take action against the Syrian regime.<sup>56</sup> By late 2013 and early 2014, the US -Russia relations reached its lowest threshold, where both governments accused each other of being responsible for the upheaval in Ukraine.

To sum up, unlike Clinton and Bush, Obama had nothing to do with Russia's internal reform. He dealt with a political and economic system that Russia had already developed for almost two decades earlier. After almost six years of US-Russia confrontation, Obama sought to establish a required 'reset' based on pragmatism and respect. The 'reset' was mainly built, during Obama's first term, around the personal friendly relationship between Obama and Medvedev. However, when Putin returned in office, during Obama's second term, the major element of the 'reset' had been devastated. The Obama administration might have been too short-sighted or too

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<sup>54</sup>Richard Weitz. "U.S.-Russian Relations Beyond Ukraine: Realities and Recommendations Moving Forward." *Center on Global Interests*, May 2015.

<sup>55</sup>Susan Heavey and Mark Felsenthal. "Obama Cancels Meeting with Russia's Putin over Snowden Decision." *Reuters*, August 7, 2013. Available on <<http://www.reuters.com/>>. Retrieved on July 2, 2015.

<sup>56</sup>Yevgeny Shestakov. "Russia: NATO has Overstepped UN Mandate on Libya." *Telegraph*, April 21, 2011. Available on <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/>>. Retrieved on June 30, 2015.

idealistic and placed a “clearly risky bet on Medvedev” while framing the ‘reset.’<sup>57</sup> However, for Obama’s administration, maintaining ‘reset’ with Russia is always a priority even after the return of Putin to the Russian presidency. Russia was considered a crucial potential partner on various grounds, from international security to global climate challenges. Both states may not share common goals, but they remain to share common threats, such as combating terrorism. Thus, Obama’s administration tried to separate issues and keep disputes from precluding cooperation on other areas.

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<sup>57</sup>Paul J. Saunders. “Why Obama’s ‘Reset’ With Russia is Failing.” *The Atlantic*, March 7, 2012. Available on <<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/>>. Retrieved on July 2, 2015.

### Chapter III: US-Russia Tension over Ukraine Crisis

The Ukraine crisis represents another major dilemma in the US-Russia relations since Russia-Georgia conflict in 2008. “Russia occupied Georgia, a NATO candidate, in 2008 and officially recognized two breakaway regions threatening Georgia's territorial integrity [and] five years later, Russia threatened the territorial integrity of Ukraine, another NATO candidate,... annexing Crimea and supporting separatists in the Eastern part of the country.”<sup>58</sup> In 2014, the US and its Western allies criticized Russia’s annexation of Crimea and intervention in Eastern Ukraine. They accused Russia of being responsible for the contemporary upheaval in Ukraine. Nevertheless, the US and its NATO alliance, to larger extent, may share the same responsibility for today’s upheaval in Ukraine as Russia. In other words, the US and NATO alliance have to admit that their response to Russia’s 2008 aggression in Georgia might have been too weak to deter Russia, today, from resisting and opposing the NATO alliance in Ukraine.

#### The Origin of the 2013 Ukraine Crisis

The major cause of the 2013 Ukraine crisis lies in the ongoing clash of interests between the Western world and Russia, which can be observed since the Russia-Georgia War in 2008. In other words, the Russia-Georgia War terminated the possibility of NATO expansion to include Georgia and Ukraine. On one hand, post Russia-Georgia War, the West sought to connect Ukraine economically and politically with the EU by establishing the Eastern Partnership program in 2009.<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, Russia tried to induce Ukraine and other post-Soviet states to join its flagship project of a customs union, which energized in 2009 leading to the

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<sup>58</sup>Safak Oguz. "NATO'S Mistakes that Paved the Way for Russia-Ukraine Crisis." *Journal of Black Sea Studies*. April 2015. Vol. 12, Issue 45, Pp.: 1-12.

<sup>59</sup>**Eastern Partnership Program** is a joint initiative of the EU and its Eastern European partners: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. <[http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/index_en.htm)>.

establishment of Eurasian Economic Union Treaty in 2014.<sup>60</sup> It was not a re-birth of the Soviet Union but rather an establishment of a Russia-led community that includes Ukraine. President Putin seemed committed to his major prospect of “Greater Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok,” which he first outlined in 2010 and considered Ukraine as a vital element in this geopolitical prospect.<sup>61</sup> However, for both the West and Russia, Ukraine has always seemed to be a ‘zero sum game’ that is hard to influence and to control. To illustrate, from 2010 to early 2014, Ukraine was ruled by President Viktor Yanukovich who manipulated between the West and Russia. In domestic affairs, Yanukovich brought hopes for the West. In November 2013, he abruptly suspended his political and economic association agreement with Russia and signed an agreement with the EU. However, in December 2013, he accepted a generous financial and economic package from Russia.<sup>62</sup>

In November 2013, the President suspension faced a mass protest in central Kiev, which soon turned into a public protest known as Maidan. The Maidan expanded and encompassed many western Ukrainians, who called for Ukrainian national identity and independence even from Russia and the post-Soviet legacy. By the end of November, Ukraine had witnessed an unprecedented violent protest. Ukrainian police moved and beat protesters. In addition, Ukrainian oligarchic groups, who were not inspired by Yanukovich and his cabinet, supported and financed the Maidan, targeting early presidential elections and the overthrow of Yanukovich. Shortly after President Yanukovich lost control over the western part of Ukraine, as police refused to disperse the protesters and local councils threatened a general strike.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Dmitry Trenin. "Ukraine and the New Divide." *Russia in Global Affairs*. August 22, 2014. Available on <<http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/book/>>. Retrieved on July 1, 2015.

<sup>61</sup>Dmitry Trenin. "From Greater Europe to Greater Asia? The Sino-Russian Entente." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, April 2015.

<sup>62</sup>Dmitry Trenin. "The Ukraine Crisis and the Resumption of Great-Power Rivalry." *Carnegie Moscow Center*, July 2014.

<sup>63</sup>"A New Revolution on Maidan Square; Ukraine's Protests." *The Economist*, December 2013. Vol. 409, No. 8865.

During this period of time, as Dmitry Trenin, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center explains, the US administration was not prepared for the Ukraine crisis. It was preoccupied by the upheaval in the Middle East and by other regional issues, such as the Iranian nuclear program. However, the US always supported pro-Western movements in Ukraine. It has always sought the establishment of a pro-Western government in Ukraine that served its ideological and geopolitical interests. Thus, the US usually resisted the establishment of any pro-Russian government in Ukraine.

Yet, by mid-February 2014, the crisis in Ukraine aggravated and reached its final scenario. Yanukovich police turned to face the Right Sector force, a group formed in 2013 and came under the single command of the group's leader, Dmitry Yarosh. The group was known for its radical actions and neo-Nazi ideology and vigorously took part in ousting Ukraine's President Viktor Yanukovich in February 2014. Yanukovich stopped his police advance and entered in negotiations with opposition leaders about potential governmental concessions. Yanukovich signed a deal, sponsored by French, German and Polish EU Foreign Ministers, with the opposition leaders, in which he vowed not to declare a state of emergency, and acceded to demands for a new coalition government and early presidential elections. However, the deal was rejected by the Maidan, who called for the president immediate resignation and resulted in President Yanukovich surrender on February 21, 2014.<sup>64</sup> Eventually, Yanukovich fled from Kiev, the police disappeared from the streets, and the Maidan celebrated victory.

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<sup>64</sup>Roman Olearchyk. "Ukraine Protesters Dig in Fearing Bigger Crackdown." *The Financial Times Ltd* 2015. January 19, 2014. Available on <<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/>>. Retrieved on July 15, 2015.

## Russia's Offensive Action

Russia used to perceive Ukraine as a fragile, unreliable, and, to some extent, a foreign state. Putin "considers Ukraine to be an artificial and inherently unstable geographic concoction whose future existence within its current borders is uncertain."<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the consequences of the Ukraine 2013 demonstrations and evolution were most traumatic for Russia. In other words, today, Ukraine turned to be a state led by Pro-Western nationalists, who threaten the Russian influence in the region, especially, if Ukraine sought NATO membership. Russia's relations with Ukraine were based on its interaction with the President Yanukovich; yet, after his downfall, such interaction was replaced by offensive retaliation. Putin in his own turn adopted offensive strategies in order to block Ukraine-NATO alignment and maintain Russia's influence on the region.

Putin's main objective from being offensive is to hinder Ukraine from joining NATO alliance and hence keep it in the Eurasian integration project, which has been one of the ultimate goals in Russia's agenda since the collapse of the Soviet Union. On March 1st, Mr. Putin demanded the upper house of Russia's parliament "to grant him the right to use military force in Ukraine."<sup>66</sup> Although no direct Russian military intervention took place or crossed the Ukrainian borders, Russia had put psychological pressures on the new government of Kiev and deterred any potential Western intervention. In addition, on March 18, 2014, a treaty was signed in Moscow to incorporate Crimea and the city of Sevastopol into Russia.<sup>67</sup> Putin sought annexation of Crimea in order to reinforce the pro-Russian population control over the local government

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<sup>65</sup>"Military Marches; Russia and Ukraine." *The Economist*, November 2014. Vol. 413, No. 8913, Pp. 54.

<sup>66</sup>"The End of the Beginning?" *The Economist*, March 8, 2014. *The Economist Newspaper Limited*. Available on <<http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/>>. Retrieved on July 1, 2015.

<sup>67</sup>John Balouziyeh. "Russia's Annexation of Crimea: An Analysis under the Principles of Jus Ad Bellum." *LexisNexis Legal Newsroom: International Law*, April 14, 2014. Available on <<http://www.lexisnexis.com/legalnewsroom/international-law/>>. Retrieved on July 12, 2015.

against the post-Yanukovych leaders. As Trenin clarifies, Putin annexed Crimea seeking the establishment of a new federal settlement in Ukraine, expecting a complete domination of the country by Kiev and Western Ukraine and, consequently, obstructing any potential NATO expansion.

Moreover, in the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, during early May 2014, referendums were held declaring their own independent republics. Although he did not militarily intervene to support them or show his willingness to annex them to Russia like Crimea, Putin announced his support to these separatist groups in Donetsk and Luhansk.<sup>68</sup> However, the Donetsk and Luhansk attempts to break away from the new government in Kiev have not been materialized. In addition, the interim government of Kiev launched “Anti-Terrorist Operation” in response to the events in eastern Ukraine, including the so-called “Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR)” in Donetsk and Luhansk. This resulted in a large number of casualties on both sides and provoked a humanitarian crisis.<sup>69</sup> During this time, Moscow refused to recognize the new government in Kiev and described it as a “fascists” that threatens Russians in Ukraine. In contrast, the US and its Western allies publically demonstrated their support to the new government in Kiev.<sup>70</sup> Regardless of the diplomatic efforts between Putin and Obama over resolving the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, Moscow continued to support the pro-Russian separatists militarily.

On May 25, 2014, free and fair presidential elections were held in Ukraine, leading to the victory of Petro Poroshenko, one of the Ukrainian oligarchs who supported the Maidan protest.

Yet, the majority of voters in the Donetsk and Luhansk could not vote in their local voting

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<sup>68</sup>Kashmira Gander. "Ukraine Crisis: Russia Backs Results of Sunday's Referendums in Donetsk and Luhansk." *The Independent*, May 12, 2014. Available on <<http://www.independent.co.uk/>>. Retrieved on July 22, 2015.

<sup>69</sup>"Thematic Report: Findings on Formerly State-Financed Institutions in the Donetsk and Luhansk Regions." *Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE)*, March 30, 2015. Available on <<http://www.osce.org/ukraine>>. Retrieved on July 22, 2015.

<sup>70</sup>Tatiana Zhurzhenko. "Russia's Never-Ending War against "Fascism." Memory Politics in the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict." *Institute for Human Sciences*, May 8, 2015. Available on <<http://www.iwm.at/>>. Retrieved on July 23, 2015.

stations. Sooner or later, Putin could not ignore the Ukrainian presidential election, while resuming his relations with Kiev under the new circumstances.

Putin's attitude and reaction towards the Ukraine crisis seems to be properly based on offensive realism. He responded offensively to an attempt of Ukraine to join NATO. From an offensive realism perspective, Putin used his military capabilities across Russia's borders in order to tighten and maintain Russia's sphere of influence because it could not ensure other states' intentions. In other words, he did not trust the core reasons behind the Ukrainian revolution and feared potential EU or NATO enlargement. In addition, Putin militarily intervened in Ukraine to protect the pro-Russian population. Like offensive realists, he did not believe that international law would secure weaker states and so he would willingly violate other states' sovereignty if Russia's security interests were at stake. Russia could be also adequately described as a *revisionist state* which employs its force to change the Western international order. Russia's aggression in Ukraine was nothing but a resistance to the Western World. It did not target change in the outcomes, but a change in the rules of the game. Russia did not accept either the EU or the US rules, but it sought to impose new rules on the West.



## The US Defensive Response

Russia's aggression in Ukraine and its annexation of Crimea was met with instant condemnation by the US and its Western allies. The West perceived Russia as an invader and therefore excluded Russia from the G8 Group. The US and its Western allies restricted their relations with Russia and NATO limited its cooperation with Russia. In fact, "Western leaders suspended their bilateral summits with Putin, but they soon started to make exceptions."<sup>71</sup> The United Nations General Assembly voted on the Crimean referendum and the result was that 100 nations refused to recognize the outcome and only eleven approved.<sup>72</sup> The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) suspended activities related to the accession process of the Russian Federation to the OECD.<sup>73</sup>

The US rhetoric regarding Russia grew harsher. In his January 2015 State of the Union address, Obama declared that "today...Russia is isolated with its economy in tatters. That's how America leads—not with bluster, but with persistent, steady resolve."<sup>74</sup> The US National Security Strategy released in February 2015 was that "Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity—as well as its belligerent stance toward other neighboring countries—endangers international norms that have largely been taken for granted since the end of the Cold War."<sup>75</sup> In addition, the US and its Western allies imposed various levels of sanctions

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<sup>71</sup>Givi Gigitashvili. "Russia's Role in Crimea: Foreign Policy Analysis." *Beyond the EU*. March 17, 2015. Available on <<http://beyondthe.eu/>>. Retrieved on July 25, 2015.

<sup>72</sup>United Nations General Assembly, "Voting Record on Draft Resolution A/68/L.39 Territorial Integrity of Ukraine." March 27, 2014. Available on <<http://www.un.org/press/en/2014/ga11493.doc.htm>>. Retrieved on July 25, 2015.

<sup>73</sup>OECD, "Statement by the OECD Regarding the Status of the Accession Process with Russia & Co-Operation with Ukraine." March 13, 2014. Available on <<http://www.oecd.org/newsroom/statement-by-the-oecd-regarding-the-status-of-the-accession-process-with-russia-and-co-operation-with-ukraine.htm>>. Retrieved on July 25, 2015.

<sup>74</sup>White House Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President in State of the Union Address." January 20, 2015. Available on <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-pressoffice/2015/01/20/remarks-president-state-union-address-january-20-2015>>. Retrieved on July 29, 2015.

<sup>75</sup>White House, "U.S. National Security Strategy." February 2015. Available on <[https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015\\_national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf)>. Retrieved on July 29, 2015.

on Russian officials and on the industrial sector, targeting Russian cessation from Ukraine. A series of economic sanctions crashed the Russian stock market, devaluated the Russian currency, moved out huge capital, and turned off investors.<sup>76</sup> Concerning Energy relationships, Trenin explains that although Russia used to maintain a strong energy relationship with Europe, which was vital for the Western economies, the US with its European allies obtained energy diversifications away from Russia. Militarily, Trenin argues, Russia returned to be an adversary of the West and NATO returned to its Cold War mission of ‘Keeping the Russian’s out.’ Temporary deployment of Western troops seems to turn into a NATO permanent base and NATO’s ballistic missile defense is currently installed in Europe, targeting Russia’s nuclear forces.

Unlike Russia, the US responded defensively to the Ukraine crisis. In other words, the US response to Russia’s aggression in Ukraine may be, adequately, based on a defensive realism perspective. Obama’s administration was not willing to adopt any offensive military reaction in southern Ukraine against Russia anytime in the near future. It recognized that military intervention in Ukraine would have adverse consequences and that economic sanctions would inflict far more damage on Russia than military intervention. From a defensive viewpoint, the US might be more concerned with maintaining its global ‘*status-quo*’ than with maximizing its power. We can hardly predict US military intervention in Eastern Europe because it would face pro-Russian and anti-American population resistance. In addition, Obama’s administration considered that a balancing coalition in resolving the Ukraine crisis would be more effective than escalating direct military confrontation with Russia. It preferred working with allies like the EU and NATO who would collaborate to impose economic and military sanctions on Russia.

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<sup>76</sup>Ariel Cohen, Ivan Benovic, and James Roberts. "Russia’s Avoidable Economic Decline." *The Heritage Foundation*, September 17, 2014. Available on <<http://www.heritage.org/research/>>. Retrieved on July 25, 2015.

In a brief analysis, the current confrontation between Russia and the West was briefly experienced in Georgia, in 2008. Russia considered Georgia an integral part of its sphere of influence. However, NATO ignored Russia's interests in the region and underestimated Russia's ability to prevent the Georgians from joining NATO alliance.<sup>77</sup> Thus, NATO failed to reassure the Georgians and to provoke Russia. It failed to deter Russia to oppose the West in Georgia. Consequently, we may argue that NATO's failure during the Russia-Georgia crisis paved the way for the Ukraine crisis and induced Russia to oppose the West in Crimea. Today, within the framework of the Ukraine crisis, the world seems to be divided again into three parts, Russia in the East, south Caucasus and Ukraine in the Middle, the US and NATO member states in the West. Great power rivalry has re-appeared in form of economic sanctions instead of traditional political warfare.

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<sup>77</sup>Ronald Asmus. "A Little War that Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West." *St. Martin's Press*, 2010. Pg.: 138-139.

## Chapter IV: US-Russia Relations beyond Ukraine Crisis

In 2009, US President Barack Obama came to office, determined to improve relations with Russia. He enlisted Russia as a major ally in encountering global security threats. Therefore, Obama administration's 'reset' with Russia targeted certain key security issues, namely, arms control, gaining Russian support for U.S. pressure on Iran nuclear proliferation, and for the US effort in Afghanistan.<sup>78</sup> Apart from security concerns, Russian cooperation proved to be vibrant in issues other than security threats, such as energy security initiatives and the transport of US supplies and equipment from Afghanistan. Yet, the marked improvements in the relations between both states during Obama's first term witnessed a relapse since early 2014 due to tension in Ukraine. The Obama-Russia 'reset' was seriously questioned.

It has been generally presumed by International Relation analysts that it was mainly the US-Russia tension in Ukraine that brought an end to Obama-Russia 'reset.' Yet, both the US and Russia proved that they managed to accomplish some pragmatic bargains in pursuit of mutual interests regardless of their tension in Ukraine. This has been emphasized by the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov who declared that regardless of their tension in Ukraine, both the Russian President and the US President had a pragmatic discussion about specific issues that would necessitate cooperation and exchange of benefits. Lavrov with the US Secretary of State John Kerry had similar discussion on a larger scale, which he wouldn't call it "a new reset," but a "realization of the need for normalcy," Lavrov added.<sup>79</sup> Syria, ISIS, and Iran are three major areas that represented a cooperative relationship between the US and Russia and continuation of Obama's 'reset' post-Ukraine crisis.

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<sup>78</sup>Stephen Blank. "Beyond the Reset Policy: Current Dilemmas of U.S.–Russia Relations." *Comparative Strategy*, October 2010. Vol. 29, Issue 4, Pp. 333-367.

<sup>79</sup>Anderi Akulov. "US 2016 Presidential Race: Impact on America-Russia Bilateral Relations (II)." *Strategic Culture Foundation*, June 20, 2015. Available on <<http://www.strategic-culture.org/>>. Retrieved on September 22, 2015.

## **US-Russia Cooperation in Syria**

Cooperation between the US and Russia in Syria was one indicator of the continuation of the Obama-Russia ‘reset’ despite the Ukraine crisis. A significant point about Syria is its different response to the wave of Arab Spring. This difference could be traced back to the historical background of mutual distrust between Syria and the West.<sup>80</sup> In fact, Syria considered itself as the Arab protector who resisted the US support to Israel and sponsored terrorist movements, which targeted the removal of the state of Israel. In addition, Syria was always influenced by the former Soviet regime. Although the upheaval of the Arab Spring from Morocco to Yemen gave the Syrian street a cause to improve their situation, and to ask for more freedoms and for more political participation, yet, the Syrian authorities reacted brutally instead of accommodating the Pro-democracy protesters.

Another explanation for the different Syrian response to the Arab Spring is the international dimension. The Syrian regime was solidly backed up by powerful supporters, such as Russia. In fact, Russia maintained several interests in Syria that reinforced its control in the Middle East region and hence had no real motive to support pro-democracy movement in Syria and risk its interests. Consequently, Russia resisted any pressure from the UN Security Council against the Syrian regime. Furthermore, it has been alleged that the absence of the US and Western support led to the deterioration of the conflict in Syria. However, the US responses though often ambiguous, seen to reflect US interests in supporting the contemporary Syrian upheaval as part of the US plan to undermine El Assad regime that blocked US interests in the region.

On the other hand, the absence of the US support to the Syrian pro-democracy movement referred to as the ‘moderates,’ induced the Islamist groups, which are armed, trained, and

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<sup>80</sup>Henry Hogger. “Syria: Hope or Dispair?” *Asian Affairs*, February 2014, Vol. 45, Issue 1, Pp. 1-8.

financed by el Qaida and other private backers in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, to claim a leading role in the battleground, Moreover, the Syrian military use of the chemical weapons against civilians in August 2013, prompted an international diplomatic effort between the US and Russia. In fact, both the US and Russia had mutual interests in resolving the Syrian crisis because Syria turned to be a battlefield for terrorism and a threat to the West in general and to Russia in particular.

As a result, during 2014, the US sought the Russian support in order to exert pressure on El Assad regime to dismantle his chemical weapon arsenal. In fact, Russia preferred to exercise pressure on Bashar so as to avoid direct confrontation with the US military operations in Syria. In April 2014, backed by the US and Russia, the OPCW-UN Joint Mission confirmed “the delivery of a further shipment of chemical weapons material.”<sup>81</sup> The operation removed and destroyed up to 92.5% of chemical material in the country. Therefore, the shared interests of both the US and Russia to put Syria’s arsenal beyond use represented a new feature of US-Russia engagement in resolving the Syrian crisis regardless of their tension in Ukraine.

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<sup>81</sup>UN. “The OPCW-UN Joint Mission.” April 24, 2014. Available on <<http://opcw.unmissions.org/AboutOPCWUNJointMission/tabid/54/ctl/Details/mid/651/ItemID/313/>>. Retrieved on August 25, 2015.

## US-Russia Cooperation in Combating ISIS

ISIS was another issue of mutual concern between US and Russia, despite their tensed relations over Ukraine. In late 2014, the US and Russia renewed their security cooperation to combat the Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS) militant group.<sup>82</sup> The threat of ISIS made cooperation between the US and Russia indispensable because neither the US nor Russia could face ISIS unilaterally.

Later, during the annual meeting of the United Nations in 2015 disagreement over how to combat ISIS in Syria erupted between Obama and Putin. Obama called for the removal of Assad regime and the pursuit of 'managed transition,' while Putin cautioned against the removal of Assad regime, considering it a grave mistake. Putin declared that the power vacuum in Iraq and Syria has been filled by this terrorist group (ISIS) and combating it could only be achieved with the solid cooperation of El Assad regime.

However, despite their differences over Syria's leadership, both leaders regard ISIS a global threat that needs to be clogged because "If [they] do not go after ISIS, it will go after [them]."<sup>83</sup> They agree on the need for cooperation in order to defeat ISIS. By October 2015, the US and Russia signed a deal that would regulate the operations of both states' air forces in Syria.<sup>84</sup> The deal is known as "The Memorandum of Mutual Understanding between the Defense Ministries of Russia and the United States on preventing incidents and providing for aviation flights during operations in Syria." The agreement targeted minimizing the risk of incidents of

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<sup>82</sup>Reuters. "U.S and Russia Agree to Share Intelligence on Common Enemy: ISIS." *Newsweek*, October 15, 2014. Available on <<http://www.newsweek.com/>>. Retrieved on August 20, 2015.

<sup>83</sup>Natalia Bubnova. "Efforts in Syria against ISIS Won't Bring US, Russia Closer Together." *Russia Direct*, September 25, 2015. Available on <<http://www.russia-direct.org/>>. Retrieved on August 22, 2015.

<sup>84</sup>Julie Pace and Vladimir Isachenkov. "Obama, Putin Clash over Differences on Syria's Future." *Associated Press*, September 28, 2015. Available on <<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/fea74705419a46f29e2a22f7b19a05ec/obama-putin-confront-tensions-syria-ukraine>>. Retrieved on October 1, 2015.

both states' airstrikes in Syria.<sup>85</sup> As many officials declared, this deal could be evaluated as a step forward in the mutual cooperation between both states in their war against ISIS and in Syrian crisis. Thus, regardless of the current differences, Obama and Putin have been pushed to work together to deal with a common threat.

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<sup>85</sup>Kellan Howell. "Russia, U.S. Sign Deal to Minimize Risks in Syrian Airspace: Pentagon." *The Washington Times*, October 20, 2015. Available on <<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/oct/20/pentagon-russia-us-sign-deal-minimize-risks-syrian/>>. Retrieved on October 25, 2015.



## US-Russia Cooperation in Iran

Iran's nuclear proliferation was yet another mutual concern that required US and Russia's collaboration, despite the Ukraine crisis. For almost two decades the US enlisted Russia as key partner in encountering the global security threats, mainly the nuclear programs of North Korea and Iran. In fact, one of Obama's administration main objectives was to obtain Russian support for preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons in North Korea and Iran. On one hand, Russia's support seemed indispensable because all Iranian and North Korean missiles and nuclear materials were "either Russian missiles or depend on key components from Russia."<sup>86</sup> In addition, Russia maintained close ties with Iran and with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). Therefore, the US seeks to make use of Russian influence on North Korea and Iran in order to discourage the nuclear program of DPRK and Tehran.<sup>87</sup> On the other hand, Russia seeks the US global leadership role in the issue of nuclear non-proliferation because "it is not in Moscow's best interest to have nuclear weapons spread to its near abroad."<sup>88</sup> Indeed, Russia recognizes that Iranian or DPRK nuclear program represents a major threat to Russia's territory and its regional interests.

Thus, regardless of their tension in Ukraine, the US and Russia continue to share a common interest of preventing the nuclear program of North Korea and Iran. In fact, since President Hassan Rouhani took office in Iran in 2013, global effort has been made to reach a final deal on Iran's nuclear program. After almost 20 weeks of negotiations in Vienna July 2015,

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<sup>86</sup>Gustav Gressel. "Russia and Non-proliferation: A Concession That Never Was." *European Council on Foreign Relations*, November 25, 2014. Available on <[http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_russia\\_and\\_non\\_proliferation\\_a\\_concession\\_that\\_never\\_was361](http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_russia_and_non_proliferation_a_concession_that_never_was361)>. Retrieved on September 15, 2015.

<sup>87</sup>Linton F. Brooks. "A Vision for U.S.-Russian Cooperation on Nuclear Security." *Issues in Science and Technology*, Fall 2009. Vol. 26, No. 1.

<sup>88</sup>Siegfried S. Hecker and Peter E. Davis. "Why the U.S. Should Keep Cooperating with Russia on Nuclear Security – Perspectives on Peace and Security." *Perspectives on Peace and Security*. August 18, 2014. Available on <<http://perspectives.carnegie.org/us-russia/u-s-keep-cooperating-russia-nuclear-security/>>. Retrieved on September 9, 2015.

a final deal was reached between the group of six world powers (China, France, Russia, the UK, the US, and Germany) and Iran. This deal prevented Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. This deal could have never been reached without US-Russia cooperation. In an interview with The New York Times, Obama admitted that despite their conflicting interests in Ukraine, “Russia was a help on this [Iranian deal]” and this deal would not have been achieved “had it not been for Russia's willingness to stick with [the US] and the other P5-Plus members in insisting on a strong deal.”<sup>89</sup> Therefore, despite a division over the Ukraine crisis, the US and Russia remain to have a common interest of preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons.

While Obama-Putin cooperation gained momentum in Syria, ISIS, and Iran, it remained minimal in Ukraine, where Putin acted offensively while Obama responded defensively. In the following section, an international level of analysis is applied in order to illuminate the factors that play a role and influence the contemporary US-Russia relations.

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<sup>89</sup>Thomas Friedman. "Obama Makes His Case on Iran Nuclear Deal." *The New York Times*, July 14, 2015. Available on <<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/15/opinion/thomas-friedman-obama-makes-his-case-on-iran-nuclear-deal.html>>. Retrieved on August 22, 2015.

## **Analysis of Contemporary US-Russia Relations**

While Obama-Putin cooperation seems to be high in Syria, ISIS, and Iran, it remains to be low in Ukraine. This section presents an international level of analysis of the contemporary US-Russia relations. To a limited extent, domestic and individual levels of analysis are, also, applied in order to identify the role that Russia and US leadership and domestic pressures play in influencing each state behavior at the global level.

### *International Level of Analysis*

Although Obama-Putin cooperation is viable in some global issues, such as combatting ISIS in Syria and halting Iran nuclear program, US-Russia cooperation in Ukraine remains to be unpredictable in the near future. The US-Russia differences in Ukraine present a historical Russian resentment to a global order that imposed on it since the end of Cold War. To clarify, post WWII, the world was dominated by two major superpowers, namely the United States and the Soviet Union, therefore, creating a bipolar order. From late 1945 till early 1990s, the US has sponsored the creation of a liberal global order, which contained the expansion of the Soviet Union communist order. The US managed the establishment of multilateral cooperation, collective security alliances, such as NATO, and the implementation of the rules of liberal international institutions. During this period, the US-led liberal order prevented global wars and provided Western democracies with economic growth and development. This induced many Western non-democratic states to achieve democratic transition and to integrate themselves in the US liberal system that resulted in the collapse of the Communist system of the Soviet Union and the triumph of the US liberal order. The Post-Cold War era presented another turning point in the global order, a shift from bipolar to a new polycentric order led by the United States.

The end of the Cold War period also witnessed the emergence of a new European order, which is represented in “a highly developed system of mutual interference in each other’s domestic affairs as well as security based on openness and transparency in the context of the European Union (EU).”<sup>90</sup> This EU context rejects the notion of sovereignty and military intervention to resolve state conflicts while promotes economic interdependence in Europe. Though, Putin’s annexation of Crimea indicates his refusal of the European order. To illustrate, in the Post-Cold War period, it was the Soviet Union and not Russia that pursued integration with the EU. Ivan Krastev, a Bulgarian political scientist, explains that “unlike the Soviet Union, post-Soviet Russia was a separatist project, which explains Moscow’s strong defence of sovereignty. Russia’s understanding of sovereignty is a rather narrow one, according to which sovereignty is not so much a right as a consequence of power. Only great powers can be really sovereign. Sovereignty does not mean a seat in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) ... [but] economic independence, military strength and cultural identity.” He adds, “Russia’s foreign policy in the first two decades after the end of the Cold War was a strange mix of conservatism and resentment.” Russia views itself as a *status quo* power because it was a superpower during the Cold War period and maintained a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in the post-Cold War period. Therefore, Russia is resentful because the post-Cold War European order is built in the Western institutions, such as NATO and the EU.

Another point worth noting is that since the end of the Cold War, the US has adopted a policy of containment towards Russia. The US has relied on NATO to balance the power with Russia in Europe. In 2009, Obama revealed a new missile defense system, known as the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA). The US claims that the NATO missile defense

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<sup>90</sup>Riccardo Alcaro (Ed.) "West-Russia Relations in Light of the Ukraine Crisis." *Edizioni Nuova Cultura*, 2015. Pp.17-31.

shield targets the protection of the US and its allies from missile attacks by Iran and North Korea.<sup>91</sup> However, NATO's US-led missile defense system has always been considered as a major threat to Russia. "The Kremlin has always disliked the NATO missile defense system because it is perceived as a means to strengthen Western political control over Russia's backyard."<sup>92</sup>

In fact, over the recent years, Putin declared his resentment towards deployment of NATO's missile defense system on Russia's borders. He considered it a US plan to undermine Russia in order to be a world hegemon. Moreover, Putin warned that Russia would response to the US-NATO missile defense system. In an interview to the Swiss media recorded on July 25, 2015 in St. Petersburg, Putin said that since the US withdrew from the ballistic missile defense treaty and began to create a missile defense system, "we immediately said: we will be obligated to take reciprocal steps to maintain a strategic balance of power," adding that "we are doing this for ourselves, to ensure the security of the Russian Federation, but we are also doing it for the rest of the world, because this strategic stability ensures the balance of power."<sup>93</sup> This statement sufficiently explains Putin's logic behind being offensive in Ukraine, which is precluding Ukraine's integration in NATO's missile defense system and challenging the European order while broadening Russia's influence at the regional level and creating a balance of power with the US, in turn.

On the other hand, Obama responds defensively to Russia's aggression in Ukraine, maintains his 'reset' of undoing tension with Russia, and pursues Russian integration in other

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<sup>91</sup>Jonathan Masters. "Ballistic Missile Defense." *Council on Foreign Relations*, 2014. Available on <<http://www.cfr.org/missile-defense/ballistic-missile-defense/p30607>>. Retrieved on August 15, 2015.

<sup>92</sup>Azriel Bermant. "Missile Defense Is Not the Answer to Putin's Aggression." *E-International Relations*, April 3, 2014. Available on <<http://www.e-ir.info/2014/04/03/missile-defense-is-not-the-answer-to-putins-aggression/>>. Retrieved on August 20, 2015.

<sup>93</sup>Vladimir Putin Interview to Swiss media, July 25, 2015. St Petersburg. Available on <[http://argentina.mid.ru/es\\_ES/web/arg/-/entrevista-del-presidente-de-rusia-vladimir-putin-a-los-medios-suizos?redirect=http://argentina.mid.ru/es\\_ES/web/arg/inicio](http://argentina.mid.ru/es_ES/web/arg/-/entrevista-del-presidente-de-rusia-vladimir-putin-a-los-medios-suizos?redirect=http://argentina.mid.ru/es_ES/web/arg/inicio)>. Retrieved on August 25, 2015.

areas than Ukraine in order to preclude Russia's close relationship with other rising powers, such as China. In other words, today, Russia represents a threat to the US and Europe. Russia is moving away from Western democratic transformation while reinforcing authoritarianism. Putin abandons Western integration and moves eastward to form coalitions with non-democracies, such as China. Russia is moving eastward forming stronger ties with China and other Eurasian states to undermine the impact of the Western economic sanctions. The establishment of BRICS and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which entered into force on January 2015, represent a new multipolar power operating at a global level and threaten the Western order, in turn.<sup>94</sup>

In addition, isolating Russia economically proved to be ineffective. This is because Russia plays a crucial role in the global economy and is a major producer of oil and natural gas. "Russia is economically important to Europe, supplying the EU with about one-third of its oil imports and more than 40% of its natural gas imports"<sup>95</sup> In fact, the US and EU economic sanctions on Russia does more harm than good to the European economies without really deterring Russia. On the contrary, rather than being deterred, Putin retaliates and restricts Russia's imports of food and agricultural products from the US and other Western states that impose sanctions on Russia.<sup>96</sup> Many EU politicians criticized such policy of economic sanctions, considering it a futile policy from the beginning. They ascertain that economic sanctions on Russia endanger the EU more than it does to Russia itself. Andrejus Stancikas, the head of Lithuanian Chamber of Agriculture, argues that Moscow's embargo, provoked by the US and the

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<sup>94</sup>**BRICS** an acronym was initially formulated in 2001 by economist Jim O'Neill, of Goldman Sachs, in a report on growth prospects for the economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China which together represented a significant share of the world's production and population. Available on <<http://brics.itamaraty.gov.br/about-brics/information-about-brics>>. Retrieved on November 5, 2015.

The Eurasian Economic Union (**EAEU**) is an international economic union of countries located in Northern Eurasia. Available on <<http://globoedge.msu.edu/trade-blocs/eaau>>. Retrieved on November 5, 2015.

<sup>95</sup>Rebecca M. Nelson. "U.S.-Russia Economic Relations." *CRS Insights*, August 1, 2014.

<sup>96</sup>Jennifer Rankin. "Russia Bans Agricultural Imports from West in Tit-for-tat Sanctions Move." *The Guardian*, August 6, 2014. Available on <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/>>. Retrieved on October 5, 2015.

EU broader economic sanctions imposed on Russia, slaughters the EU dairy, poultry, and vegetables producers. He states that it is very dangerous because “it would be difficult for producers to redirect their exports toward the West because markets there are already awash with their own local goods that are now not going to Russia.”<sup>97</sup> Consequently, Obama responds defensively to Russia’s aggression in Ukraine, maintains his ‘reset’ of undoing tension with Russia, and pursues Russia’s integration in other areas than Ukraine because neither policy of containment, which the US used to adopt since the end of Cold War in order to undermine Russia, nor Russia’s economic isolation are in the West’s best interest in today’s world.

### *Domestic Level of Analysis*

Another aspect worth analyzing is domestic concerns. The US-Russia conflict over Ukraine serves rather than opposes Putin’s domestic interests. In other words, many Russians consider Crimea as a part of Russia. As declared by Putin, “in people's hearts and minds, Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia.”<sup>98</sup> Russians and many Ukrainians view annexation of Crimea as a long awaited rectification of a historical mistake. According to Levada figures, almost 70% of Russians support Putin’s foreign policy towards Ukraine and 87% support the annexation of Crimea.<sup>99</sup> In fact, Putin’s leadership popularity rose from 65% in 2013 to 85% post-annexation of Crimea in 2014. Therefore, Putin regime’s popularity and legitimacy largely rests on how well he conducts Russia’s foreign policy.

Although the Western sanctions have an adverse impact on the Russian economy, in the long term it serves Putin’s interests. To illustrate, since Putin took office in 2011, he declared his tendency to deliver economic statist policies, represented in state control over the market and the

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<sup>97</sup> Alexander Panin. "Putin's Food Ban Splits EU on Wisdom of Russia Sanctions." *The Moscow Times*, August 17, 2014. Available on <<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/>>. Retrieved on October 5, 2015.

<sup>98</sup>President of Russia. "Address By President Of the Russian Federation," March 18, 2014. Available on <<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>>. Retrieved on June 28, 2015.

<sup>99</sup>Indexes | Levada-Center. Available on <<http://www.levada.ru/eng/indexes-0>>. Retrieved on July 2, 2015.

energy industry. This tendency “has grown stronger in recent years as Putin has emphasized state-driven economic modernization over a trust in the market ... [and] committed enormous sums to increasing defence spending, large infrastructure projects, and a revival of plans to develop Russia’s Far East.”<sup>100</sup> Thus, as Richard Connolly, a senior lecturer in Political Economy at University of Birmingham, argues, Western sanctions have induced Putin to reinforce his statist policies. Russia’s economic policies have turned to be more statist and nationalistic, favoring an increase in military spending and a decrease in the projections of liberal economic reform paralleled by an increase in domestic production and a decrease of Western economic integration. Consequently, the US economic sanction on Russia, instigated by Putin’s foreign policy of annexing Crimea, helps Putin to gain legitimacy over his economic policies.

Unlike the case in Russia, American public opinion encourages Obama to maintain his ‘reset’ of undoing tension with Russia. Although the majority of the republicans criticize Obama’s foreign policy of ‘leading from behind’ towards Ukraine and call it ‘feckless,’ most of the American public agree with Obama’s cautious and pragmatic policies especially in terms of military interventions.<sup>101</sup> Recent surveys show that the percentages of Americans who favor non-military intervention far outweigh those who believe in US military intervention in global crisis.<sup>102</sup> According to Chicago Council on Global Affairs surveys, there were dramatic decline in public support of war in Afghanistan and Iraq from 2006 to 2014 especially among

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<sup>100</sup>Richard Conolly. "The Effects of the Ukraine Crisis on the Russian Economy." *European Leadership Network*, June 30, 2014. Available on <[http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/the-effects-of-the-ukraine-crisis-on-the-russian-economy\\_1581.html](http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/the-effects-of-the-ukraine-crisis-on-the-russian-economy_1581.html)>. Retrieved on August 26, 2015.

<sup>101</sup>David Nakamura. "At AIPAC, John McCain Blames Obama's 'feckless' Foreign Policy for Ukraine Crisis." *The Washington Post*, March 3, 2014. Available on <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/in-aipac-speech-mccain-blames-obamas-feckless-foreign-policy-for-ukraine-crisis/>>. Retrieved on August 22, 2015.

<sup>102</sup>Dina Smiltz, Ivo Daalder, and Craig Kafura. "Foreign Policy in the Age of Retrenchment." Chicago Council Surveys. *The Chicago Council on Global Affairs*, 2014. Available on <[http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/sites/default/files/2014\\_CCS\\_Report\\_1](http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/sites/default/files/2014_CCS_Report_1)>. Retrieved on September 27, 2015.



republicans. Moreover, the percentage of people who believe in the increase of defence spending has dropped from 42% in 1974 to 28% in 2014.

In terms of the US economy, although the unemployment rate has declined since Obama came to office in 2009, the employment rate and improvement in the standard of living remain to be relatively low.<sup>103</sup> Most Americans had more expectations of Obama and so do not feel much improvement since Obama took office in 2009. Besides, the US economic assistance is now considered a waste of money by many Americans. Evidently, it is recognized that the US military intervention in Ukraine would cost a lot and the US economic assistance to Ukraine puts more burden on the US economy. Therefore, Obama seeks maintaining his 'reset' of undoing tension with Russia and resolving the Ukraine crisis through negotiation in order to avoid being detracted from his economic reform agenda.

#### *Individual Level of Analysis*

On the individual level, leaders' personality traits, political ideology, and doctrine need to be analyzed. Putin's recent aggression in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea brought the question of who is Putin and what is '*Putinism*.' Many scholars describe Putin as a 'statist.'<sup>104</sup> From a statist perspective, individuals exist to serve the state's interests. In addition, since Putin entered the Kremlin, his major goal was to strengthen the Russian state through promoting Russia's essential values and through reviving the Russian Orthodox Church, while abandoning the Western values. Other scholars describe Putin's ideology, sometimes called *Putinism*, as "a special type of post-totalitarian authoritarianism in which the political police wields power on

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<sup>103</sup>Edward W. Walker. "US Policy toward Ukraine in the Remaining Years of the Obama Presidency." *Eurasian Geopolitics*, October 25, 2014. Available on <<http://eurasiangeopolitics.com/2014/10/25/us-policy-toward-ukraine-in-the-remaining-years-of-the-obama-presidency/>>. Retrieved on October 31, 2015.

<sup>104</sup>Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy. "Putin Personality Disorder." *The Brookings Institution*. February 15, 2013. Available on <<http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2013/02/15-putin-personality-hill-gaddy>>. Retrieved on September 4, 2015.

behalf of the private interests of bureaucratic clans or corporations.”<sup>105</sup> Putin might be considered a politician whose ideology is based on his political interests. He believes that state interests and ambitions should transcend any ideology and the major threat to any political power comes from clashing ideologies.<sup>106</sup> Therefore, as a statist, Putin considers the revolution in Ukraine as a major threat to the Russian state. He perceives Ukraine’s revolution as a US attempt to integrate Ukraine with the EU to expand its NATO alliance, thereby undermining the Russian state. In addition, preventing a new upheaval in Russia is one of Putin’s major concerns. The revolution in Ukraine threatened the stability of Putin’s own rule. Thus, Putin invaded Eastern Ukraine and annexed Crimea in order to ensure his own political survival. In other words, Putin fears the contagions effect of the Ukraine revolution. In fact, Ukraine’s integration with the EU would stimulate Russians to adopt the Western democratic model and hence transcend the Russian model. Therefore, the US-Russia cooperation in Ukraine is minimal because US ambitions in Ukraine challenge Putin’s statism and authoritarian ideology.

Regardless of the US-Putin clash of interests in Ukraine, cooperation remains to be possible in other issues that serve Putin’s doctrine. Putin’s doctrine is based on maintaining three major imperatives, which are basically: Russia’s nuclear superpower, Russia’s major role at the international level, and Russia’s regional hegemony.<sup>107</sup> Firstly, Putin seeks to maintain strategic parity with the only other nuclear superpower and rejects all what might weaken this strategic parity. Iranian nuclear proliferation is not in Putin’s best interest. Therefore, Putin would collaborate with the US to establish the Iranian nuclear deal so as to maintain Russia’s nuclear

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<sup>105</sup>*Putinism* is an expression widely used to describe the ruling style of Russia’s current president Vladimir Putin. See Lev Gudkov. “The Nature of “Putinism.” *Russian Politics & Law*, 2011. Vol. 49, Issue 2, Pp. 7-33.

<sup>106</sup>Vladimir Shlapentokh. “Expediency always Wins Over Ideology: Putin’s Attitudes Toward the Russian Communist Party.” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, March 2011. Vol. 44, Issue1, Pp. 33-40.

<sup>107</sup>Leon Aron. “The Putin Doctrine.” *Foreign Affairs*, March 11, 2013. Available on <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2013-03-08/putin-doctrine>>. Retrieved on August 15, 2015.

superpower status. Secondly, in terms of maintaining its posture as a major actor at the international level and as a regional hegemon, under Putin, the West has turned from a model to an equal partner. Cooperation on ISIS is an opportunity for Putin to present Russia as a major participant in global crises. In addition, the contemporary crisis in Syria is another opportunity for Putin to consolidate Russia's regional position by eliminating all reasons or justifications for any potential US military intervention.

Obama's, personality, ideology, and doctrine also need to be analyzed. Unlike Putin's statist personality, Obama is described as being high in openness. In other words, he seems open to his opponents' points of view and often debates them.<sup>108</sup> Obama is, also, described as a 'confident conciliator,' who prefers settling disputes through mediation and compromise than through force or coercion.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, unlike Putin's authoritarian ideology, Obama adopts an ideology of pragmatic liberalism, which is based on realities and promotes liberal ideas, such as diplomacy in resolving conflicts. Applying such analysis on Ukraine crisis, Obama remains open to Putin and pursues solving the Ukraine crisis through negotiation with Russia and diplomacy rather than through direct military confrontation.

Concerning Obama's doctrine, its major objective is more concerned with the domestic realm than with the international realm. This signifies that the American resources would be shifted from national security spending to domestic, social, and economic spending.<sup>110</sup> In addition, Obama's doctrine is more oriented towards shared interests that transcend sovereign

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<sup>108</sup>David G. Winter "Philosopher-King or Polarizing Politician? A Personality Profile of Barack Obama." *Political Psychology*, 2011. Vol. 32, No. 6, Pp. 1059-1081.

<sup>109</sup>Aubrey Immelman. "The Political Personality of U.S. President Barack Obama," July 2008. Paper presented at the 33rd Annual Scientific Meeting of the International Society of Political Psychology, San Francisco, CA, July 7-10, 2010.

<sup>110</sup>Colin Dueck. "The Accommodator: Obama's Foreign Policy." *Policy Review*. Oct/Nov 2011. Issue 169, Pp. 13-28.

national interests.<sup>111</sup> Henry Nau, a Political Science and International Affairs scholar at Elliott School of International Affairs argues that, unlike Bush's doctrine of democracy promotion and unilateral leadership, Obama's doctrine is more concerned with issues that integrate the world, such as stability, disarmament, regulations, and diplomacy. It targets security not democracy, retrenchment not unilateral interventions, and diplomacy not force. Therefore, Obama adopts a defensive approach towards the crisis in Ukraine and seeks to maintain his 'reset' of undoing tension with Russia in order to avoid detracting money and effort from his very ambitious domestic reform agenda. Regardless of Russia's democratic or autocratic values, Obama pursues cooperation with Russia where both states can benefit, as in the case of nuclear disarmament.

In the final analysis, we can say that no single level of analysis can entirely explain the contemporary US-Russia relations. However, a comprehensive framework of the contemporary US-Russia relations<sup>111</sup> could be visualized on the basis of the three aforementioned levels of analysis. In other words, in order to understand the constant shift and change in the degree of US and Russia's collaboration, we must do character analyses of the leaders who navigate their countries in the rough and turbulent world of politics. We must, also, consider domestic factors, such as public opinion and economy that shape the state's decisions as well as the international environment that influences state behavior and state interaction with each other. The recent Ukraine crisis witnessed antagonism between the US and Russia. Although Obama maintains his 'reset' of undoing tension with Russia and responds defensively to Putin's annexation of Crimea, the extent of hostility or cooperation between both states over the Ukraine crisis is, largely, based on Putin's objectives and goals. Russians still views the world from a Cold War lens. It considers US intervention in Ukraine as interference in Russia's sphere of influence. Domestically, instead of being deterred, Putin exploited the US and EU economic sanctions to gain legitimacy on his

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<sup>111</sup>Henry R. Nau. "Obama's Foreign Policy." *Policy Review*. April/May 2010. Issue 160, Pp. 27-47.

statist and nationalistic policies in addition to consolidating his authoritarian regime. At a more global scale, Putin's annexation of Crimea indicates Putin's resentment to an order that the US and EU imposed on Russia since the end of the Cold War.

## Chapter V: Conclusion

This research answers the question of did the Ukraine crisis mark the end of Obama's 'reset' with Russia. This research reveals that some elements of Obama 'reset' with Russia remained to exist after the Ukraine crisis. The US and Russia continued to maintain cooperative relations on the issues of Syrian crisis, combatting ISIS, and the Iranian Nuclear program regardless of their differences in Ukraine.

Through examining the dynamics of the US-Russia relations in the post-Cold War period, this research reveals that both Clinton and Bush administrations failed to maintain an efficient long-term relationship with Russia because they failed to meet the post-Cold War promises of Russia's internal reform. In addition, the US policy of NATO enlargement was always ambiguous. NATO enlargement always inflamed the feelings of Russian nationalism and Russia did not seem to give up its great power *status quo*. Unlike Clinton and Bush, Obama succeeded to maintain his 'reset' with Russia because his administration had neither something to do with Russia's internal reform nor prioritized NATO enlargement. In other words, Obama dealt with a political and economic system that Russia had already developed for almost two decades earlier. After few years of US-Russia confrontation, Obama sought to establish a required 'reset' based on pragmatism and respect. The 'reset' was mainly built, during Obama's first term, around the personal friendly relationship between Obama and Medvedev. Although the major element of the 'reset' had been devastated when Putin returned in office, during Obama's second term, for Obama's administration, maintaining 'reset' with Russia was always a priority even after the return of Putin to the Russian presidency. Russia was considered a crucial potential partner on various grounds, from international security to global climate change. Both states did not share common goals, but they remained to share common threats, such as combating terrorism. Thus,

Obama's administration tried to separate issues and keep disputes from precluding cooperation on other areas.

The current confrontation between Russia and the US in Ukraine was briefly experienced in Georgia, in 2008. Russia considered Georgia an integral part of its sphere of influence. Yet, NATO ignored Russia's interests in the region and underestimated Russia's ability to prevent the Georgians from joining NATO alliance. NATO failed to reassure the Georgians and to provoke Russia. It failed to deter Russia to oppose the West in Georgia. Today, Russia opposes again the West in Ukraine, a geostrategic pivot that plays a pivotal role in the emergence of Russia as a regional superpower. Like offensive realists, Putin did not believe that international law would secure weaker states and so he would willingly violate other states' sovereignty if Russia's security interests were at stake. Russia could be also adequately described as a *revisionist state*, which employs its force to change the Western international order. Russia's aggression in Ukraine was nothing but a resistance to the Western World. It did not target change in the outcomes, but a change in the rules of the game. Russia did not accept either the EU or the US rules, but it sought to impose new rules on the West. However, Obama responded defensively to Russia's aggression in Ukraine by forming a balancing coalition with the EU to impose economic sanctions on Russia rather than by escalating direct military confrontation with Russia in order to maintain his 'reset' of undoing tension with Russia and pursue his pragmatic interests. Thus, great power rivalry has re-appeared in form of economic sanctions instead of traditional political warfare.

Consequently, it has been generally presumed by International Relation analysts that it was mainly the US-Russia tension in Ukraine that brought an end to Obama-Russia 'reset.' Yet, both the US and Russia proved that they still managed to accomplish some pragmatic bargains in

pursuit of mutual interests regardless of their tension in Ukraine. In 2014, the shared interest of both the US and Russia to put Syria's arsenal beyond use represented a new feature of US-Russia engagement in resolving the Syrian crisis regardless of their tension in Ukraine. In 2015, both the US and Russia had mutual interests in resolving the Syrian crisis because Syria turned to be a battlefield for terrorism and a threat to the West in general and to Russia in particular. Regardless of differences between both states on Syria leadership, they agreed on the necessity for cooperation over defeating ISIS. The threat of ISIS made cooperation between the US and Russia indispensable because neither the US nor Russia could face ISIS unilaterally. Also, regardless of their tension in Ukraine, the US and Russia continued to share a common interest of preventing the nuclear program of North Korea and Iran.

Last though not least, although differences between Putin and Obama will continue to escalate in Ukraine, today's global challenges stimulate Putin and Obama to collaborate rather than compete. Both of them face common security threats, such as ISIS. Global challenges turned to be broader and more complicated. In today's world, threats do not come from state actors only, but also from non-state actors and the environment. Today's threats, such as climate change and global terrorism, affect every region in the world and every state regardless of its ideology or power capability. Neither the US nor Russia or any other state has been able to develop a comprehensive strategy to tackle all of these global threats.



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