The Russian Annexation of Crimea: The Securitization of Political Identity

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I hereby declare that this thesis, “The Russian Annexation of Crimea: The Securitization of Political Identity”, is my own work and by my own effort and that it has not been accepted anywhere else for the award of any other degree or diploma. Where sources of information have been used, they have been acknowledged.

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Abstract: The Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 was marked by the securitization of the political identity of Russian speakers living in Crimea. Discourse from Russian President Vladimir Putin as well as other important Russian political actors all framed the situation in Crimea as one that required exceptional and emergency measures from the Russian state. How did this happen? This thesis aims to examine how Russia securitized political identity by using methodology and discourse analysis from the Copenhagen School of Security Studies. Beyond simply a discourse analysis, this research also aims to determine what the actual reasons were for the annexation. In doing so, the thesis conducts a historical and cultural analysis of Russian-Ukrainian relations, examines the international, domestic, and local factors of the annexation, summarizes the Russian explanation for their actions, thoroughly analyzes the relevant discourse on the subject, asks what the actual reasons for annexation may have been, examines a similar case study of South Ossetia and asks what the implications of this securitizing move will be. Particularly interesting is that the role of political identity as a tool to be securitized will most likely remain geopolitical in nature. Further, the thesis overall makes a claim that abstract ideas that are securitized do not need to be present objective threats to the state. They simply need to be presented as such, The framing of the narrative surrounding the Crimean annexation is not only interesting due to its manipulation of facts, but to its ultimate circling of the question of whether Russia and Ukraine share a common historical memory, as the Russian explanation would have observers believe.

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I. Introduction

Framing an issue and creating a narrative to support policy and military actions is one of, if not the most important, parts of how any country rationalizes their actions to their domestic and international audiences. Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 was one of those moments where the framing in question very much mattered. Russia’s rationale was the potential mistreatment of Russian speakers living in the Crimean Peninsula. Discourse from President of Russia Vladimir Putin hinted at deeper historic ties between Crimea and Russia and the illegitimacy of the Euromaidan protests. Ostentatiously for this purpose, the conflict centered around Ukrainian nationalists trying to trample on the rights of a Russian speaking minority. In other words, Russia securitized the political identity of Russian speakers living in Crimea and used this emergency situation to justify the exceptional action of annexing Crimea. However, this securitization did not tell the whole story. In fact, much of what was said does not reflect the true reason of why, as a securitizing actor, Russia annexed Crimea.

Like any international issue that involves years of history, this one securitized issue of political identity does not tell the whole story. Part of what makes Russian discourse on the matter so interesting is that in creating an environment to securitize this one particular factor of identity, Russia mostly uses factual information, picking and choosing what is relevant rather than taking into account the complex and fragmented history of Crimea. The explanation for their actions, regardless, relies on both concrete arguments as well a narrative that employs history for the purpose of supporting those arguments.

This thesis aims to both ask the question of how Russia used the political identity of Russian speakers as their main rationale for annexation as well as determine the actual reasons for doing so. In other words, there is more to the annexation than purely political identity. Rather, in looking at the annexation, it is important to examine what role the natural resources in the Black Sea play as well as access to the Sevastopol naval base. Furthermore, it is critical to also take into account Russia’s regional expansionist urges, its distaste of European enlargement as well as the diversionary factor that this annexation played in Russian domestic politics. In short, what is said and what actions are taken can be radically diverse.

In examining how the annexation can be looked through the lens of securitization, the Copenhagen’s School’s theory on securitization and discourse analysis will be used to scrutinize speeches and commentary given by the Russian President, the Permanent Representative from Russia to the United Nations Security Council, and remarks made on television and online concerning the crisis. Further, this research will illustrate that while Russia may have securitized political identity – it was not the primary reason for Crimea’s annexation. Rather, the annexation is inextricably related to the huge natural gas reserves in the Black Sea as well as a newfound strategic advantage in the Black Sea itself. Furthermore,
Russia aims to maintain the status quo between itself and Ukraine, a state it considers to be in its orbit of influence. Moreover, this plays into traditional Russian expansionist behavior and deflects domestic attention away from internal problems such as economic stagnation. In other words, while the securitization of political identity was surely how they justified it, it was not the main reason why. One noteworthy theoretical observation is that securitization does not imply an objective threat. As the securitizing actor, Russia could simply use it as a tool and tactic. In looking at Crimea in particular, it is evident that for Russia, securitizing political identity was an effective tool to sow confusion amongst the international community.

The methodology of the research will primarily be that of discourse and policy analysis. The research will begin with a review of literature in both securitization and identity politics and then turn to a historical and cultural background of Ukraine and Russia. This is necessary in order to understand why there is such a diversity of opinion of whether or not Ukraine and Russia share a common historical memory. These two parts will act as structural background for the reader to gain a more nuanced understanding of the Russian and Ukrainian relationship. In doing so, the annexation will be examined on an international, domestic and local Crimean level to analyze the different factors that impacted Russian decision-making. The next section will analyze the Russian explanation on a concrete level, taking four main arguments used by Russia and laying them out for analysis. This methodological choice was made in order to differentiate these general lines of argument from the more narrative explanation of why they said they did it.

The main function of this thesis is to build a differentiation between why Russia claimed to act in the way they did versus why they actually took the actions they did. In examining why they said they did it, this thesis conducts a discourse analysis on speeches and commentary from important Russian political actors as well as remarks made on different media outlets and examine how Russia securitized political identity. One such limitation that exists in conducting this discourse analysis is that the majority, if not all, of this speech was conducted in Russian and this thesis thus reports on the official English translation. In addition, the question of how this has been done in the past will be examined using the result of the Georgia–Russian war of 2008 and subsequent occupation of South Ossetia. This example case exists to illustrate a past discrepancy in rhetoric versus action.

From there, the thesis will discuss the actual reasons why Russia felt it necessary to annex Crimea and examine some of the implications that follow. Particularly interesting is that the role of political identity as a tool to be securitized will most likely remain geopolitical in nature. It does not serve Russia’s foreign policy to universally decide that every Russian-speaking diaspora is suddenly under attack and requires Russian aid. Rather, it is a tool to be used at Putin’s discretion and at any time – bringing with it some degree of uncertainty. This is relevant because this kind of rationale come up often and seeing how it was used to provoke more military action from Russia is interesting from a historic and predictive
perspective. Interestingly, the unique case of Ukraine and Russia illustrates that it is because of the fragmented nature of Crimea’s history that it makes it an easy target for Russian operationalization. However, in doing so, Russia’s simplistic argument exposes it for what it is: a narrative. In asking the question whether this narrative tactic will be used again, its twofold success rate would suggest that yes – it will be.

II. Chapter 1: Literature Review

Securitization

Securitization and the study of security in international relations is nothing new. Scholars such as Joseph Nye and Jaap de Wilde have long debated whether policymakers ought to take narrow or wide views of what constitutes security, asking what qualifies as a national security threat. Similarly, the concept of securitization is not a foreign concept. The usage of the term was coined by the Copenhagen School of security studies, and is particularly connected with the scholars Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde. In their work *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, they define their approach as a constructivist methodology that seeks to differentiate securitization from politicization in its level of intensity. In this vein of thought, they argue for a broader understanding of security in the wake of the end of the Cold War, particularly paying mind to the decline of significance placed on a purely military-political understanding of security.

When an object or idea is securitized, it means “the issue is presented as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure.” In other words, when an idea becomes securitized, everything else is irrelevant until this one particular issue is solved. In doing so, it becomes easy to justify political and military actions on behalf of this concept. An interesting phenomenon exists here. The concept itself does not have to be an existential threat, it just needs to be perceived as one. However, by treating the issue as inextricably linked to survival, the state presents and creates the threat to security in one action, known as a “self-referential practice.”

Buzan et al. specifically define securitization as:

“…constituted by the intersubjective establishment of an existential threat with a saliency sufficient to have substantial political effects.”

Although the definition is straightforward, the defining feature of securitization is not in the discourse itself. Rather, the creation of a securitized concept is critically linked to the

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2 Ibid. p. 24
3 Ibid. p. 25
audience that accepts the concept as a security threat. With the consent of the audience, the breaking of rules by states taken to maintain their survival becomes legitimate. Hence securitization has three components that need to succeed in order for a concept to be successfully securitized: a) the concept must be understood to be an existential threat and require action to ensure survival of the state, b) illustrate emergency action by the actor that break rules and c) be represented in the relations between actors due to the breaking of these norms.4 Interestingly, this implies that analyzing a concept as being securitized or not does not have to do with objectively weighing what endangers the state. Instead, the analysis is based on investigating the processes of “constructing a shared understanding of what it is to be considered and collectively responded to as a threat.”5

When analyzing the speech-act approach that would define a securitization act, there exists three objects within security analysis as defined by Buzan et al.: a) Referent Objects – the thing that is under existential threat, and whose continued existence is linked to the survival of the state (i.e. military, environment, economics, identity, etc.), b) Securitizing Actors – these actors that securitize the Referent Object (i.e. governments, political actors, etc.) and c) Functional Actors – any actor that influences decisions or play a significant role in the specific role of security.6

Why is all of this relevant? At the onset of any analysis, the discussion of which actors do which action or which object is being referred to may seem pointless. Why bother pointing out which concepts are being securitized at all? In actuality, the securitization of abstract ideas is extremely significant in understanding why governments or other actors act and further, why certain ideas are prioritized and explain the actions that are taken in response to them. Take 9/11 and the War on Terror. The continued footage of the events on television meant that the event was constantly played over and over again for Americans, reinforcing the terror of the event itself. The 9/11 Commission also drew attention to the fact that other than Japan’s bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, American territory was, to an extent, considered beyond the field of war. Hence when the bombers brought ‘terrorism’ into the American consciousness, it created a new kind of precedent for emergency actions. Not only emergency actions were enacted, but also new institutions were created to address the new threats facing the United States, namely the Department of Homeland Security.7 President Bush gave an address to the nation that clearly denoted the security threat:

“On September the 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country. Americans have known wars—but for the past 136 years, they have been wars on foreign soil, except for one Sunday in 1941… Our response involves far more than instant retaliation and

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5 Ibid. p. 26  
6 Ibid. p. 36  
isolated strikes. Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have seen. It may include dramatic strikes, visible on TV, and covert operations, secret even in success ... And we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are against us.”

Here, the securitization of terrorism is used as justification for any number of actions that are beyond what is considered normal. Plainly, the discourse created a new environment where the survival of the state was at risk and went beyond any other priority in the US government. The creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is a hallmark of how the security is understood and how the US interacts with its partners abroad. In addressing security, the DHS as well as the US Patriot Act are key illustrations of how the US securitized terrorism overseas and at home. The implications of this are still underway to this day. Consider the changed relationship between military-civilian sectors of government, and the intense scrutiny that the US government has placed on its own civilians. Using the framework of the Copenhagen School, clearly these two changed behaviors are a result of the effective securitizing move by the Bush Administration beginning with 9/11 that brought the concept of terrorism to the forefront of all other governmental issues.

When making theoretical frameworks for analysis, inevitably some ontological choices are made to sustain the framework itself. The Copenhagen School’s understanding of security acknowledges this, and primarily distinguishes itself from other post-positivist security studies by not emphasizing the possibility of change. Because security is socially constituted, many other post-positivists argue that this means that change within security is possible. Instead of this approach, the Copenhagen School maintains that these socially constructed norms become stable and that analysis therefore must be based on their continued existence. In this vein, this understanding of security and securitization does not pay much mind to actual security threats. Rather, an emphasis is placed on how security is understood and what triggers the securitization of a concept.

Securitization reaches into a variety of different fields, from the more common aspects of energy to the more abstract concepts of identity politics. Buzan, Waever and de Wilde focus their analysis of securitization on the military, environment, economic, societal and political sectors. The abstract notion of identity is included in Buzan’s description of societal politics, which he names ‘identity security.’ He categorizes this kind of security as that which “refers... to the level of collective identities and action taken to defend such we identities.” These identity-based communities are by nature ambiguous, because they are self-constructed and rely upon an individual’s concept of their belonging. This implies that the securitization

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8 Bush (2001)
9 Mabee (2007)
10 Mabee (2007) p. 36
11 Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde (1998) p. 120
of identity is by default also ambiguous and subject to how a particular state views its \textit{we identity}. By another definition, societal security refers to the capability of an identity community to survive. It refers to “the sustainability, within acceptable conditions for evolution, of traditional patterns of language, culture, association, and religious and national identity and custom in a given society”.\textsuperscript{12} According to Buzan, there are four common issues that represent a threat to identity security. These include migration, horizontal competition (i.e. overriding influence from a neighboring country), vertical competition (i.e. integration or regionalist projects that pull a population’s identity away from their original identity), and depopulation.\textsuperscript{13}

Using the speech-act theory from the Copenhagen School particularly to discuss identity security, it is the most often the nation that is the Referent Object in identity security. In the case of Crimea and Russia, the political identity of the Russian speakers in Crimea is being used as the Referent Object, which the Russian government is securitizing. Buzan et al. discusses this directly, stating that “the former Soviet region is probably still the most complex case for regional analysis. It is unclear into which regions this territory should be divided: Where does Europe end, where does Asia end? Is there a Russia-centered sphere…”\textsuperscript{14} Newer states such as Ukraine are still fragile, and the question of identity is a fluid one, but the analysis of identity as something that can be securitized is something interesting that the Copenhagen Schools addresses.

However, as is the case with theoretical frameworks, there are detractors that question certain aspects of the framework. Dr. Tobias Theiler, Professor at University College Dublin, brings attention to the most relevant portion of the Copenhagen School’s study of securitization for this thesis, namely societal security. He criticizes how the Copenhagen School defines the concept of a society as being stable, when in fact societies are constantly changing. Further, he claims that the framework oscillates between treating societies as analytical units to be examined and solely as discursive Referent Objects. Moving to identity, Theiler also criticizes the Copenhagen School for depicting identity as something that people possess, rather than a concept of self. An additional problem that Theiler notes is the lack of explanation as to why groups want to protect their identity. However, within the same criticism – he explains some key aspects of social identity such as categorization based on self-perception and interaction that prove useful in further unraveling how securitization and political identity come together.\textsuperscript{15}

What creates a group identity (i.e. behavioral conformity) comes from two main aspects of sociology: the will of humans to categorize themselves and social comparison. Once this group identity has been established, social identity theory claims that humans generally wish

\begin{enumerate}
\item Buzan Barry, Ole Waever, Morten Kelstrup, and Pierre Lemaître. \textit{Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe}. p. 23
\item Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde (1998) p. 120
\item Ibid. p 136
\end{enumerate}
to maintain and preserve it. How? Generally external practices become internalized, reproducing and encouraging a stronger group dynamic to form as is evident in the formation of ethnic groups and nations. Theiler explains how the Copenhagen School and social identity theory work together:

“The logic of societal security as postulated by the Copenhagen school must be understood in light of this dialectic. Individuals seek to defend their group boundaries because, as social identity theory postulates, group belonging satisfies basic cognitive and emotional needs. Sparked by securitization processes discussed earlier, this can lead to attempts to ward off a perceived threat to the group by, say, building a fence to keep out immigrants or fighting a war to defend the group's 'way of life'. But the very act of defending the group (through fences, wars or whatever) is itself a group-signifying and group-affirming one. By engaging in it, people externalize and affirm the existence of the group and their membership.”

Political Identity

While social identity theory plays a role in better explaining how identity can be understood through a securitization context, Christine Agius and Dean Keen further tell the story through the lens of political identity. Beyond purely identifying how groups are formed, political identity scholars ask the questions of how identity is performed in politics, and how language shapes meanings and identities over time. Particularly as borders open, technologies ease communication and globalization seeps into everyday life, identity is changing and developing in unforeseen ways. Similar to social identity theory, studies of political identity focus on two aspects: categorization based on self-perception and interaction with the world. Identity therefore is co-constitutive, explaining the behavior of actors and understanding the interests of those same actors. Further, political identity is not static, rather it is formed through discourse that create not only a social reality, but also memory and classifications of what constitutes an insider and an outsider.

Identity as a political concept is particularly relevant when discussing memory, as Christine Agius and Rosamond Bergman do so in their analysis of Swedish military intervention. While the role of identity may not be immediately apparent, it is the key player in understanding Sweden’s transformation from a neutral country to one that actively engages in military exercises to promote international security. How? It all comes down to identity and the formation of memory. Collective identity is merely that which is formed by a society experiencing memories together. These new experiences and memories normalize different kinds of behavior and when societies have these kinds of shared understandings of the past, it is possible for a new narrative to be formed. In the case of Sweden, while there is no cohesive

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17 Ibid. p. 264
18 Agius, Christine and Dean Keen. The politics of identity: making and disrupting identity. The Politics of Identity: Place, Space and Discourse
military narrative to support the policy shift of the nation – there is a narrative supported by Sweden’s Social Democratic Party that supports active internationalism. The history of neutrality for Sweden is then reinterpreted to support active military missions in Afghanistan to support global peace and human rights abroad. Chiefly, it has to do with discourse.\(^{19}\) Collective memory of a society is after all formed through discourse. In other words, how a society uses language in different scenarios to construct a reality will create a certain understanding of it. Agius and Bergman use these suppositions to further the idea that discourses, “are systems of representation that produce and reproduce social relations and understandings. Discourses construct the stories we tell about ourselves and govern how the story is told by others.”\(^{20}\) Further, discourse does more than construct the past, it guides how a society will act in the future. Memories and the concept of political identity can be used as a platform to morally justify future actions. Agius and Bergman take the example of Sweden using UN peacekeeping in the Cold War era as a justification for militarily intervening in other conflicts in the post 9/11 era. This thesis examines how the Russian government utilizes the identity of Russian speakers in Crimea and other similar historical examples of helping a minority political identity achieve independence as moral justification for intervention in Ukraine.

How memories and identity are narrated generally has to do with what is useful at the time. Ricoeur calls this a “retroactive realignment of the past,” where the meaning of history is determined by what is relevant at the present moment.\(^{21}\) Essentially, political identity has to do with the reproduction of certain narratives. Discourse then takes that narrative along with memory to create a story. Which story that is depends on what is useful at the time.\(^{22}\) What is interesting about this process is that identity, particularly collective identity, is not static. Rather it is an active enterprise. Said claims that “collective memory is not an inert and passive thing, but a field of activity in which past events are selected, reconstructed, maintained, modified, and endowed with political meaning.”\(^{23}\)

Relevance

Understanding how securitization and political identity can work in tandem is essential to investigating how the Russian government was able to rationalize their annexation of Crimea. By looking at how discourse appealed to the political identity of Russian speakers in Ukraine, it becomes easier to understand the reality that Russia created. Rationales such as protecting the Russian minority and harkening to arguments of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and the Badinter principle make more sense if imagined as the discourse used to create a

\(^{19}\) Agius, Christine and Rosamond Bergman. Sweden, Military Intervention and the Loss of Memory. *The Politics of Identity: Place, Space and Discourse.*

\(^{20}\) Agius (2018), Location 3806 Note: This source was accessed on an e-reader device and therefore, Location 3806 is the sourced page reference


\(^{22}\) Ibid

\(^{23}\) Said, E.W. (2000) *Invention, Memory, and Place* *Critical Inquiry* 26:2, p. 177
collective memory for Russians that justifies annexing Crimea. Language shapes meaning and identities over time. When a country takes that language to create a history and reality that maintains their rightness or position of power, it is significant to study how it is happening, why it is happening, and what it says about the countries in question.

Russia and Ukraine share a vast history between their two nations, often overlapping with competing narratives. Seizing control of that narrative is a strategy to gain the power of history and memory. As a securitizing actor, Russia is attempting to make the question of identity, and therefore the question of memory, one that represents an existential threat if violated. Interestingly, the usage of political identity as a Referent Object to be securitized seems to imply that protecting the existence of this we-identity is an issue of survival rather than one of politics. However, in practice Russia has executed this strategy of protection in a select number of scenarios, rather than all of them. In doing so, Russia is making geopolitical choices in what it securitizes rather than seizing on one concept such as identity and applying it to every case. Choosing to securitize political identity is no mistake. It comes with a number of test cases such as Yugoslavia where other Western countries supported the identities of minorities to gain independence. In using this tactic to annex Crimea, Russia uses the discourse of political identity to shape Crimea’s history and collective memory while using the very same language to securitize the situation at large to justify its own military actions. In essence, this special type of discourse creates a social reality that supports the Russian narrative from two separate but related concepts: securitization and political identity.

III. Chapter 2: Dimensions of the Annexation

a. History and Culture

Understanding history is one of the ways that states build a national identity; hence it is often politicized or seized upon by states to reinforce their policy objectives. In particular, a shared memory helps states to define themselves in opposition to their neighbors. Interestingly, this is one of the issues that plays into the annexation of Crimea. Both Ukraine and Russia have different understandings of their historical narratives – the question lies in whether or not the two countries share “not only a common history, but also a common memory.”24 The answer? It depends who you ask. To many living in Ukraine, the two countries do not share a common memory, while to many living in Russia – the shared historical memory is what ought to be driving closer relations between the two. Among the issues of Kievan Rus and Holodomor, the status of Crimea is a place where Russians and Ukrainians have dramatically different competing historical narratives. This chapter will attempt to illustrate the historical and cultural dimension of the annexation without either of these biases. Further it will address the international, domestic and Crimean political narratives having to do with the annexation.

24 Kappeler, Andreas (2014) Ukraine and Russia: Legacies of the imperial past and competing memories Journal of Eurasian Studies 5, p. 112
Ukraine and Russia share a vast amount of history and culture. Although Ukrainian and Russian nationalists would argue otherwise, the two states are closely linked, and have been “forged organically through millions of human contacts over hundreds of years resulting in very important aspects of common psychology, religion, culture, language, and historical identification.”25 Kievian Rus represents one of the key focal points of disagreement between Ukrainians and Russians. While Ukrainians argue that they alone are descended from the original Kievian Rus, Russians claim that their heritage also stems from Kievian Rus, further noting that Muscovy was the legitimate descendent of Kievian Rus. In doing so, some Russians follow the old belief of imperial Russia that Ukrainians are merely ‘Little Russians.’ Later, the Soviet Union adapted this belief as an appeal towards Ukraine and Belarus to act as brother nations and shared descendants of Kievian Rus.26

Questions of heritage extend further than the large question of Kievian Rus. In relation to Crimea, however, there is significant historical data that points to Crimea’s heritage being neither Russia nor Ukrainian – instead it was originally home to the Crimean Tartars up until 1783. While originally given leave to rule, the Tartars were deported by Stalin in the wake of World War II after, according to Stalin, evidence supposedly surfaced of their collaboration with the Nazi Germans. This evidence is not necessarily objective, rather that Stalin perceived it as true and deported the Tartars because of it. After Stalin’s death, they were not allowed to return to Crimea. It was only recently in 1989 that this ethnic group was allowed to come back to their homeland. Even upon their return, however, their lands and houses were occupied by Russians and Ukrainians and continue to be so. Many still live in Crimea today in “virtual shantytowns.”27 Since returning, the Tartars have engaged in a variety of violent demonstrations in response to the Ukrainian government not providing aid to them. Despite this, the majority of Tartars are also anti-Russian, as explained by Mustafa Cemiloglu, chairman of the Tartar Mejlis, stating “…we will never agree to join Russia… we lived under Russia for two hundred years and you see what this has brought us.”28 Both Ukrainians and Russians are wary, though, of the Crimean Tartars due to the fear of their land being given back to the Tartars or being forcibly returned.

Beyond both arguments about heritage, however, the region itself was extremely fluid in terms of actual movement of people. In 1861, the Russian Empire gave Ukrainian peasants the option of moving to the steppes north of the Black Sea – facilitating further movement and assimilation of people.29 In later years when Ukraine was under Soviet rule, a large percentage of workers moved between Ukraine and Russia. In turn, many Ukrainians also

27 Ibid. p. 107
29 Lieven (1999) p. 26
moved to Central Asia and Russia to find more opportunities for farming.\textsuperscript{30} Overall, immigration between the two lands was very fluid.

Perhaps this fluidity of migration has to do with how many Ukrainians who live in Crimea are nostalgic for the Soviet Union. Generally, this nostalgia is however mostly to do with the declining economic situation, as Yuri Meshov, former President of Crimea in 1994, stated “What is happening in Crimea is... that people are losing everything they have worked for, and suffering from desperate shortages.”\textsuperscript{31} Three years later, reportedly Crimean industry declined around 50 percent. Much of this has to do with the lack of tourism, which in Soviet times was a booming industry in Crimea.\textsuperscript{32} Regardless, economic decline is not merely something experienced by Crimea. In 1993 and 1996, coal miners went on strike in the Donbas due to poor economic conditions and lack of representation.\textsuperscript{33} This anger at economic decline was something very obviously felt throughout eastern Ukraine, from the Donbas to Crimea, which also experienced multiple strikes throughout the 1990s. On the other hand, nostalgia for a Soviet economic boom were counterbalanced by a strong display of Ukrainian nationalism. To distance themselves from Russia, it was the tactic of many of these nationalists to blame the Russian people and the Russian state for all the crimes of the Soviet Union and Imperial Russia. Often, these attitudes are attached to those living in Western Ukraine and who do not have as much daily interaction with ordinary Russian citizens.\textsuperscript{34}

Interestingly, the diversity of opinions amongst Ukrainians, whether they live in Crimea or in another part of the country, has much to do with how Ukraine is formed, and how its identity was shaped. Before it became a part of the Soviet Union, Ukraine had a different historical identity and different boundaries. According to the Russians, instead of following historical territorial boundaries, the Soviets created Ukraine based on the “conscious destruction of the territorial communities that existed in the pre-Soviet period.”\textsuperscript{35} Eastern and central Ukraine was created as such to bring together the peasant populations of Ukraine and the Novorossiya industrial workers. In doing so, the Soviet Union aimed to make the country have a Soviet identity first and to discourage other regionalist movements. Since its independence in 1992, there has been a lack of integration within the country – leading to Ukraine’s diverse regionalization.\textsuperscript{36} This has been problematic especially given the many Ukrainian and Russian language disputes that have to do with the different regional languages spoken in Ukraine. During the Soviet Union, the Russian language was promoted as the main language spoken amongst citizens. However, in 1989, a Soviet Ukrainian language law was passed, making Ukrainian the only official language. Twenty-three years later, another bill was

\textsuperscript{30} Lieven (1999) p. 51
\textsuperscript{31} Interview between Anatol Lieven and Yuri Meshov Simferopol January 36, 1994, at Lieven (1999), p.114
\textsuperscript{32} Lieven (1999) p. 119
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid. p. 84-87
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid p. 157
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid. p 8
passed, titled “On the principles of the state language policy” (i.e. the law of Kivalov-Kolesnichenko) that gave minority languages more power if they had more than 10 percent of the region’s population, namely Russian, Romanian and Tartar. While many Ukrainian nationalists called this a threat to Ukrainian sovereignty, supporters of the bill claimed that it was a human right to be able to speak your native tongue as a minority. In 2018, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko signed a separate bill into law that required Ukrainian to be the spoken in all state schools from the fifth grade. Language, particularly when it is steeped in such a history of oppression is an important part of identity. Ukrainian and Russian speakers both innately connect their cultural and historic identity with that of their language.

Using MAPA: Digital Atlas of Ukraine program created by the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute offers up an interesting picture of how language and identity can vary so drastically across the country. MAPA uses Municipal Surveys that were conducted by Ratings Group Ukraine, targeting 800 respondents per city to ask the percentage of languages spoken at home in 2016. In the east of Ukraine in the city of Lviv, 89 percent of respondents said they spoke Ukrainian at home, 5 percent stating they spoke Ukrainian and Russian equally while only 6 percent claimed to speak solely Russian at home. Compared to a central Ukrainian city like Kirovohrad, there is already a drastic difference in those amounts. In Kirovohrad, only 18 percent of respondents spoke solely Ukrainian at home, 48 percent stating they spoke Ukrainian and Russian equally while 32 percent spoke only Russian. One final comparison is to the city of Sievierodonetsk, the de facto capital of the Luhansk oblast, where only 1 percent of respondents spoke only Ukrainian at home, 16 percent of respondents claimed to speak both Russian and Ukrainian while the majority, 82 percent spoke just Russian. Just from looking at these three municipal surveys, it is evident just how diverse language truly is in Ukraine.

The manner in which identity is formed through cultural and historical understandings and discourse is critical in understanding what happened in Crimea. The evolution of Ukraine’s identity has formed based not only through its own discourse about Kievan Rus, but also through its internal struggle concerning language and the reckoning with its shared past with the Soviet Union, and the Crimean Tartars. Particularly relevant to note is that until 1945, Crimea was an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR). How the people there see themselves as Russian, Ukrainian, Crimean or somewhere in-between is important because it changes whether or not they believe Ukraine and Russia possess a shared memory. Thinking back to Ricoeur’s “retroactive alignment of the past,” it is interesting to note how at different

points in Ukraine’s history – different historical narratives and languages have all had their
time in the sun.40 The annexation of Crimea can be framed through the lens of emancipating
Russian language speakers and economic mistreatment by the Ukrainian state. It can also be
understood by examining not only their cultural heritage, but also by an examination of the
international, state-level and Crimean dimensions of the conflict.

b. The Timeline of Events

The annexation of Crimea is inextricably connected to the Euromaidan protests that started
November 21, 2013. When former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych stated that he
would not sign the previously agreed upon European Union Association Agreement,
hundreds of student activists took to the streets and Kiev’s Independence Square to protest
with “political demands for changing (or rather returning) to European integration as the
nation’s foreign policy.”41 At the beginning of Euromaidan or as it is known in Ukraine “The
Revolution of Dignity,” the protesters were mostly students, however, this dynamic changed
throughout the evolution of Euromaidan. After the violent breakup of the student’s protest at
the end of November 2013, more radical activists took their place, this time demanding not
only European integration policies but also the resignation of Yanukovych and less
corruption in the Ukrainian government. This turn to radical and anti-government slogans
was met with a higher intensity of military action against these protestors, resulting in the
deaths of 88 protesters from February 18 to 21, 2014. Yanukovych fled the country on
February 21, 2014 after Euromaidan protesters stormed the Parliament. For this
unconstitutional act of abandoning his post, he was removed as president by the Parliament.42

However, while the final days of the Euromaidan protests raged through Ukraine, Russian
President Vladimir Putin ordered the execution of military drills at both Russia’s Black Sea
base near to Crimea and on the Ukrainian border. As these exercises took place, “armed men
in unmarked uniforms, most wearing masks, seized airports and regional government
buildings around Crimea.”43 It was not clear who these armed men were, some claiming to be
Russian and others stating they were part of local militias. Allegedly, Russian vehicles and
navy ships also blocked Ukrainian warships and roads throughout the peninsula. In the wake
of these developments, the Crimean government voted in new pro-Russian politicians who in
turn held a referendum on the independence of Crimea on March 16, 2014. While Crimea’s
independence urges are nothing new, what was extraordinary was Vladimir Putin and the
Russian parliament’s sending of troops to Crimea until the situation was resolved. As a
rationale, Putin claimed that the military action was “protecting the interests of Russian

41 Shveda, Yurii and Joung Ho Park (2016) Ukraine’s revolution of dignity: The Dynamics of Euromaidan
Journal of Eurasian Studies 6, p. 87
42 Ibid. p. 87-88
sanctions-us-eu-guide-explainer
citizens and compatriots.” Other politicians in Russia justified the invasion with concerns of genocide and ethnic-cleansing.

The results of the referendum came in, showing that 97 percent of the population voted to join Russia. These results naturally are under suspicion due to the environment and nature of the ballot. This referendum was only meant to reinforce the parliament’s vote to secede, and furthermore only had two options on the ballot: joining Russia or increasing Crimea’s independent status. Furthermore, “what little actual campaigning there’s been in Crimea has taken place under the often-menacing gaze of local militia forces, as well as the seemingly Russian military.” On March 18, 2014, Putin signed legislation annexing Crimea into Russia and spoke to the Russian Parliament, claiming that “in people’s hearts and minds, Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia… Crimea is our common historical legacy and a very important factor in regional stability. And this strategic territory should be part of a strong and stable sovereignty, which today can only be Russia.” In his defiant speech to Parliament, Putin also spoke to the protection of Russians abroad, claiming “millions of Russians and Russian-speaking people live in Ukraine and will continue to do so. Russia will always defend their interests using political, diplomatic and legal means.”

In short, these are the events that led up to the annexation of Crimea. Unsurprisingly, much has happened since the annexation – such as the crippling American and European sanctions regime as well as the information war conducted by the Russian state. However, much more lies beneath the surface of these events. On an international level, Ukrainian and Russian energy politics plays a role in the Russian reaction to Yanukovych’s removal from office as well as the reasons why Yanukovych refused to sign the Association Agreement. Ukraine’s domestic politics also add color the picture when considering the lack of power sharing in the 2014 transitional government and the language bill controversy. In Crimea itself, the history of its transition from the Soviet Union to Ukraine, its past attempted leaps of autonomy and the importance of Sevastopol as a military base are invaluable for understanding all the interlocking mechanisms that make up the annexation.

c. The International Level

Since the end of the Cold War, Ukraine has existed as a battlefield between European and Russian interests. Politically, the country is split “between its broadly pro-European western

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47 Ibid.
regions which demonstrate greater support for Ukraine’s attempt to attain membership of the European Union… and its broadly pro-Russian eastern regions which favor the retention of close relations with Russia.”

Although the historic and cultural connections between Russia and Ukraine may be strong, the European Union still offered their Eastern Partnership Program to Ukraine, as well as Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus – as a step to increase political and economic cooperation. Although Yanukovych declined this deal, the very existence of it illustrates the constant tug of war between East and West. In fact, joining the Eastern Partnership Program and in doing so, signing an Association Agreement with the European Union represented for Russia a troubling realignment of countries it considered within its sphere of influence. Putin even claimed that the EU was blackmailing Ukraine to sign the treaties, further noting that neither Ukrainian nor Russian economies were ready to open themselves to European goods. When Yanukovych refused the agreement, interestingly “the Russian government offered Kyiv a major finance and trade support package. In this context, it was agreed to reduce the gas import price from $402/mcm to $268.50/mcm for the first quarter of 2014, i.e. a 33% discount.”

What this says about the annexation is that the questions of gas supply and energy relations play a significant role, one that isn’t as represented in Russian discourse.

Ukrainian and Russian energy relations are close and extremely divisive. Around 80 percent of Russia’s natural gas is transited through Ukraine to Europe. Further, Ukraine heavily relies on Russian gas, which namely comes from Gazprom. This close connection is further deepened by the 11-year contract between Russian Gazprom and Ukrainian Naftogaz signed in 2009. As the transit country for the majority of European gas, Ukraine also plays an important role in the security of supply concerns of the European Union. Despite this weight, Ukraine and Gazprom have had a number of past disputes concerning gas supplies. In 2006, Ukraine was accused by Russia of stealing $25 million USD of gas. This occurred in the wake of a pricing row between Ukraine and Gazprom, where Russia raised the price from $50 to $230 per 1,000 cubic meters. When negotiations concerning the gas price failed, the gas was cut off for a brief period. While this issue was resolved, just one year later, a further dispute erupted between Ukraine and Gazprom, where Gazprom demanded that Ukraine paid their $1.3 billion USD debt. If they did not pay it within the month, Gazprom

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said they would shut off gas supplies entirely. Negotiations resulted in an agreement, but again – the solution was only temporary. Gas supplies were again cut off in 2009, due to disagreements on Ukraine’s siphoning of gas and a failure to reach accord on gas supplies and prices. These years of upheaval were halted at the end of 2009 and beginning of 2010, when an agreement was reached between Ukraine and Russia that critically discounted Russian gas for Ukraine in exchange for an extension of a lease for the Russian Black Sea fleet in Ukraine. The energy relationship between Ukraine and Russia is characterized above all by turbulence. It is notable that energy politics, however, extends beyond purely the Gazprom and Ukrainian disarray.

Another factor to consider about energy politics and the Crimean annexation is the vast Black Sea reserves. In the seizure of Crimea, Ukraine lost an opportunity to move towards further energy independence “potentially worth trillions of dollars.” Two years earlier, Russia had attempted to obtain access to developing these reserves – but failed. While Putin has claimed there was “no connection” between the potential vast reserves and annexation, Gilles Lericolais, Director of French-based Affaires Européennes et Internationales called the link “so obvious.” Even in the treaty of annexation itself, Article 4 Paragraph 3 states, “The delimitation of the maritime areas of the Black and Azov Seas is carried out on the basis of international treaties of the Russian Federation, norms and principles of international law.” In doing so, Russia gained sovereignty over an additional 360,000 more square miles of maritime territory, much of it containing unexplored and underdeveloped gas fields. Not only did Russia gain a vast amount of new territory and potential gas resources, seizing this territory also provided a new pathway for the a new alternative to the South Stream pipeline, a potential new tool to deliver gas to Europe. These benefits may be part of the untold reason why annexation was such a boon to Russia. Pulling back the curtain on some of the questions on energy and the relationship between Russia and Ukraine is useful because it helps to uncover motivations for the annexation that weren’t as marketed in either Ukrainian,

Western or Russian media. Beyond the international picture, however, looking at the annexation through the lens of the domestic can provide more insight.

d. The Domestic Level

When studying Ukraine on a domestic level, the most relevant element to consider is the regionalization of the country. Domestic politics are “marked by a conflict between regional identities… where ethnic Ukrainians tend to live in the western and central oblasts, while ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians are more heavily represented in the eastern and south-eastern regions.”62 This dichotomy between the two groups tends to lend itself towards a confrontational political environment. Generally, industrial decline has been focused on the south and eastern oblasts, meaning that unemployment and poverty was significantly felt more in these regions.63 As mentioned earlier, economic decline is part of the reason that many residents of eastern Ukraine carry some degree of nostalgia for the Soviet Union. During the reign of the Soviet Union, Crimea was known as a tourism base for wealthy Russian and Soviet elites.

This difference in oblasts is further reflected in the reaction of eastern Ukrainians to the 2014 transitional government in the wake of the Euromaidan protests. In the Agreement on the Settlement of Crisis in Ukraine, the signatories agreed that Yanukovych would allow an investigation into the events that had ended in the deaths of Euromaidan protestors. On that same day, however, Yanukovych fled the country. In doing so, the guarantees that had been agreed upon the day prior did not go into effect. On February 22, 2014 the Ukrainian Parliament expelled members of the Party of Regions, a party that represented the concerns of south and eastern Ukrainians. A day later on February 23, 2014, the parliament also repealed the law that protected the rights of minority languages. As mentioned earlier, this language had given Russian the status of official language in some eastern oblasts. Although this repeal was in turn vetoed on February 28, 2014 by Acting President Oleksandr Turchynov – the sentiment of rejecting all things Russian remained. Between February 25-27, 2014, a new government was formed. However, instead of allowing all parties to join in, Yanukovych’s Party of Regions was left out. Furthermore, “the transitional cabinet also included members of the radical right-wing party All-Ukrainian Union Svoboda, a move that further increased fear and resentment among ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians.”64 Throughout Ukraine, Svoboda was known for its aggressive promotion of the Ukrainian language. As earlier stated, language is incredibly significant when considering identity. Hence, when eastern Ukrainians saw this government being formed without their voice, and actually calling for a restriction in their mother tongue – the perception of a threat began to form. In other words,

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63 Ibid. p. 7-8
64 Ibid. p. 15
waiting and watching was no longer an option. Not acting might result “in the transitional
government… gain[ing] full control of Ukrainian territory and their governing institutions.”

Remarkably, the lack of a power-sharing agreement amongst the transition government acted
as yet another reason why the perception of Russian minorities not receiving a voice was
believable. Why? In the wake of revolutions, drastic measures may be taken to enforce
nationality and patriotism. Particularly in a country that has the combative history with
Russia that it does, this action directly plays into Russia’s narrative to increase fears and
concerns that Eastern Ukrainians may have had that a new government might infringe upon
their rights. The formation of the transition government happened in tandem with the first
steps towards the annexation of Crimea. In this case, it’s easy to see how Russian dialogue
takes a sub-section of reality and creates a picture that fits into the story it’s trying to tell.
Unsurprisingly, more depth and detail come to the forefront of our understanding of the
annexation when approached from the local Crimean level.

e. The Crimean Level

The transfer of Crimea from the Soviet Union to the Ukrainian SSR in 1954 explains not only
the particular ethnic makeup of the territory, but also explains some of the latent feelings
towards the Ukrainian government. On February 19, 1954, the Presidium of the USSR
Supreme Soviet met to discuss the possibility of transferring the Crimean Oblast. In advance,
the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) met to
create a document stating it was “advisable to transfer the Crimean Oblast from the RSFSR
To the UkSSR” (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic). At the meeting on February 19 of the
Presidium, however, justification for the transfer was given by Comrade Tarasov who
claimed that “the economy of the Crimean Oblast is closely tied to the economy of the
Ukrainian SSR… [and] the transfer of the Crimean Oblast' to the Ukrainian Republic meets
the interests of strengthening the friendship of the peoples of the great Soviet Union.” In
response, Comrade Korotchenko of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of Ukraine agreed,
stating “the transfer of Crimea to the Ukrainian SSR, considering the commonality of
economic development, the territorial proximity, and the growing economic and cultural ties
between the Ukrainian Republic and the Crimean Oblast' is completely advisable.” At the
end of this meeting, the proposal was in fact adopted and Crimea was transferred to

65 Strasheim, Julia (2016) p. 16
Ministers Concerning the Transfer of the Crimean Oblast from the RSFSR to the UKSSR 5 February 1954” 5
February 1954 Wilson Center Digital Archive Accessed 26 April 2018
http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119634
67 Wilson Center Digital Archive (1954) “Meeting of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Union of
Soviet Socialist Republics” 19 February 1954 Wilson Center Digital Archive Accessed 26 April 2018
http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119638
68 Wilson Center Digital Archive (1954) “Meeting of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Union of
Soviet Socialist Republics” 19 February 1954 Wilson Center Digital Archive Accessed 26 April 2018
http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119638
Ukrainian SSR. These reason of bringing together two culturally and economically similar regions as well as strengthening Ukrainian-Russian relations however don’t particularly make sense. In 1954, Crimea’s population was 75 percent ethnic Russian and hence closer to Russia than it was to Ukraine at that time. Instead, the reasons for this shift were primarily internal and political in nature. Nikita Khrushchev had just been made the CPSU First Secretary in September 1953 and needed to both consolidate his power as well as better establish control over the Soviet territories. By transferring Ukraine and referring to the friendship between the Ukrainian and Russian people, he killed two birds with one stone. He confirmed power over Ukraine and aimed to gain support amongst his colleagues to oust Soviet Prime Minister Georgii Malenkov from power.\(^{69}\) As is evident by the documentation, the neither the Crimean people nor the Ukrainian people were consulted about this. It was purely a political action that did not reflect the actual situation on the ground. In fact, this sequence of events is a large part of what has contributed to the “belief that the eastern and southern parts of Ukraine (“New Russia”) are historically part of Russia and not Ukraine; then the belief that Khrushchev’s transfer of Crimea to Ukraine was unjust, and that Crimea legally still belongs to Russia.”\(^{70}\)

This belief gives rise to the question of Sevastopol, a city and Russian naval base. In 2010 as part of a deal with Gazprom, Yanukovych extended a lease for the “Sevastopol naval base to Russia for 25 years, plus an automatic prolongation of five years.”\(^{71}\) This was meant to act as an assurance of sorts to Russia, showing that Russia could continue to rely on Ukraine as a geopolitical safeguard between Russia and the West. When the annexation took place four years later, Russia solidified its control over Sevastopol, taking away any uncertainty that they would lose access to their warm water port. In doing so, Russia was able to maintain its position as the most powerful navy in the Black Sea and increased its reach abroad. Russian uncertainty about Sevastopol may have been warranted. Although Yanukovych’s deal in 2010 allowed the Russian navy to lease the base for another 25 years past 2017, there was virtually no support for this deal in the opposition. Given his departure from power in 2014, there is reason to suspect that Russians would have been concerned that any legislation with his name attached would not be honored. In addition, the deal itself was not particularly positive for the Russians, because it “prevented any expansion of the Black Sea Fleet by allowing Russia only to replace old naval craft with similar ones. So, Russia could not add new types of ships or naval aviation.”\(^{72}\) After the annexation, Russia could legally lay claim to not only to a rent-free Sevastopol but also to the Ukrainian bases of “Novoozerne and Myrnyi (Donuzlav Lake), Saky, Balaklava and a marine infantry base at Feodosiya.”\(^{73}\)


\(^{70}\) Lieven (1999)p. 107

\(^{71}\) Allison, Roy. (2014) Russian ‘deniable’ intervention in Ukraine: how and why Russia broke the rules International Affairs 90:6, p. 1271

\(^{72}\) Ibid. p. 1276

\(^{73}\) Ibid.
Moreover, Russia took control of many ships from the Ukrainian Navy. None of these reasons were included in the official Russian reasons for the annexation, instead they are treated as unexpected perks. Instead, the annexation is tied to the Crimean ethnic makeup as well as past attempts at autonomy in the region.

Indeed, there is a history of autonomous leaps that Crimeans have attempted to take since being incorporated into Ukraine. In January 1991, a Crimean referendum was held to ask whether the Crimeans wanted to become a full union republic. With an 80 percent turnout, 93 percent of the vote was for yes. Two constitutions establishing a president and parliament were formed. However, in the wake of the breakup of the Soviet Union, this result got lost. Crimea was merely lumped into Ukraine rather than receiving its own independence. In the next four years, economic crisis and strong anti-Russian rhetoric began to spread across Ukraine. The January 1994 Crimean presidential elections brought Yuri Meshkov to power. He ran on promises of joining with Russia and escaping the economic suffering. His popularity faded when it became clear that Russia would not support Crimean succession. In March 1994, Ukrainian president Leonid Kravchuk declared sovereignty declarations by the Crimean Parliament illegal. Even the next Ukrainian president Leonid Kuchma’s parliament, whom many Crimeans had supported, continued to veto Crimean laws that did not follow Ukrainian constitutional law. Even more dramatic, the Crimean 1992 constitution was abolished as well as the office of the Crimean president – placing Crimea under the direct control of the Ukrainian government. Although attempts were made by Meshkov to regain control, there was generally a lack of protest over the takeover.\(^{74}\) This lack of mobilization is interesting, particularly given the high ethnic majority of Russians in Crimea at the time. In 1989, Russians were 66 percent of the population.\(^{75}\) Intriguingly, one the reasons that this mobilization failed was the outright lack of Russian assistance. Due to the outbreak of the Chechnya War and Russia’s attempt to form stronger relations with Ukraine, it was not politically savvy to support Crimean succession in 1995. What that tells about the will of the Crimean people, perhaps, is that the people wanted autonomy – but that it was a known fact that this wish was not possible without outside assistance.

However, looking beyond the headlines and simple ethnic explanations offered by Russian media, the Crimean people are not, in fact, one unitary body. In her work on identity in Moldova and Crimea, Dr. Eleanor Knott of the London School of Economics and Political Science, demonstrated that there are different types of people living in Crimea. In particular, she differentiated between Discriminated Russians, Ethnic Russians, Political Ukrainians, Crimeans and Ethnic Ukrainians.\(^{76}\) In other words, the story that is being told about a purely ethnic Russian majority that favors union with Russia is too simplified to possibly reflect

\(^{74}\) Lieven (1999) p. 113  
\(^{76}\) Knott, Eleanor (2015) What does it mean to be a Kin Majority? Analyzing Romanian Identity in Moldova and Russian Identity in Crimea *Social Science Quarterly* 96:3, p. 838
reality. Further, her research showed “a tragic irony to the evidence from [her] respondents which demonstrates the lack of support for secession and annexation.”\textsuperscript{77} Most supported the autonomous status quo that already existed while others preferred peaceful relations rather than the potential for war that a secessionist movement would bring. Attempting to square this with what Russian discourse has said to the contrary leaves much to be desired.

Relevance

In short, there is nothing simple about the Crimean annexation. It is both a complex and fragmented region that has more one competing narrative about identity, political origin and historical memory. Depending on who you ask, different factors are given more weight in telling the story. Whether or not Russia and Ukraine share a common memory is ultimately the question that the annexation subtly circles. What is relevant about examining the annexation from an international, domestic, and Crimean context as well as explaining the historical background is that it becomes easier to tell how the annexation is manipulated by Russia. Acting as the securitizing actor, Russia took the choice the securitize aspects of the story, namely political identity, as the Referent Object – but did not tell the whole story. A clear and simple story naturally is not as difficult to digest and appeals to many not only within Russia but also plays better on an international scale. However, Crimea is not simple. The region is complicated and the identities amongst those who live there even more so. How Russia creates the reality they wish to share with the world relies on facts, just not all of them. As is noted in the following section, their explanation nudges and points the audience in one direction to create an environment ripe for a successful securitizing move.

IV. Chapter 3: The Russian Explanation

What is particularly interesting about the Russian rationale for their actions in Crimea is that there is not just one argument, there are, in fact, several. Russian government officials claimed that the Euromaidan protests and overthrow of the government was illegal and illegitimate, further claiming that this new government would suppress Russian-speaking minorities. This argument is linked to the concept of Russia protecting the Russian speakers in historic Russian regions. Beyond this statement, Russia also claimed that it was merely supporting the Crimean referendum and that its interference, if any, was welcomed for by the illegally ousted Yanukovych. As referenced in the chapter on the historical dimensions of the annexation, interestingly, no mention of energy nor access to warm water ports were mentioned in the Russian discourse. These four explanations represent the main concrete lines of arguments that Russia illustrated throughout their securitization discourse. This

chapter aims to briefly examine these four strains of thought in short before diving into the underlying reasons.

Illegitimacy of Euromaidan

On 1 March 2014, Vitaly Churkin, Russia’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations began to set the stage for the Russian explanation, asking rhetorically about the conditions that brought about the Euromaidan protests, namely Yanukovych’s choice to not sign the association agreement with the European Union. At the 7124th meeting of the Security Council (UNSC), he asked “Why did that problem need to result in street demonstrations? Why do those street demonstrations need to be encouraged from abroad by members of the European Union? Why did the representatives of several countries of the European Union need to appear at those meetings, which were ignited by protests against a decision taken by the Ukrainian leadership? Why did some officials need to talk about stirring up the public and opposition leaders? Why did there have to be such crude interventions in the internal affairs of a sovereign State?” Immediately he began to question the origins of the protests themselves, placing blame at the feet of other European leaders who are riling up Ukrainian protestors against a completely legitimate decision by Ukrainian leadership. By asking all of these questions, he was essentially stating that Euromaidan is not legitimate because it is fomented through outside forces.

Continuing, he again asked “Why continue to whip up the situation? Why are some of our Western colleagues trying to prolong the confrontation?” Here, Churkin explicitly was claiming that it was only purely through outside intervention that the Euromaidan protests were continuing for as long as they had been. He further pointed to a lack of implementation of the agreement between Yanukovych and the opposition as reason that there was no good will on behalf of the opposition to work with the allegedly democratically elected Yanukovych. Even as early as March 1, Churkin also brought the issue of Russian minorities to the table. He asked why a law, which had given Russian speakers the right to speak their own language, was revoked as soon as Yanukovych fled the country and a new Ukrainian government had taken power. It was due to these conditions, he argued, that many in Crimea were concerned that this wave of radicalization will also come to them, particularly given their Russian identity.

This trend of using illegitimacy is also used when discussing the new government in Ukraine. According to Russians, this government was illegitimate “since it violently usurped power in a coup d’état.” Although the Euromaidan protests led to Yanukovych leaving Ukraine,

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78 Churkin, Vitaly, UNSC 7124th Meeting Minutes, 1 March 2014 4.15pm S/PV.7124, p. 4
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
81 Allison, Roy (2014) Russian ‘deniable’ intervention in Ukraine: how and why Russia broke the rules International Affairs 90:6, p. 1261
Putin claimed that Yanukovych was the legitimate president of Ukraine because his impeachment was conducted poorly. 82

**Suppression of Russian-speaking minorities**

One of the more important reasons that Russia claimed as an explanation for interference was the lack of security for Russian speakers in the region. Although the United States claimed there was no evidence to support this, Russia claimed that the new Ukrainian government was intent on an activist nationalist trend, one that would be detrimental to the human rights of Russian speakers living in Ukraine. Particularly telling is article 61, paragraph 2 of the Russian constitution, which states that the Russian Federation guarantees its citizens the right of patronage beyond its territorial boundaries. Russian speakers in this case are considered to be citizens of the Russian Federation, and therefore – the suppression of Russian speakers is a direct threat to Russian citizens.83 Ignoring these statements by the United States that Russians were not in fact under threat, Churkin stated at a separate UNSC meeting on 3 March that “extremists in Ukraine must be prevented from taking control of the situation through illegitimate means, the use of violence and open terror.”84 This claim was again to reiterate the concern that Russian citizens and speakers would be targeted by a Ukrainian government and population intent on overzealous nationalism. To back up this claim, another argument that was used by Russia was an impending humanitarian refugee catastrophe. Russia claimed that between January and February 2014, around 675,000 Russian speakers had fled into Russia out of fear for their safety.85 These kinds of statements begin to invoke the necessity of a humanitarian intervention and set the stage for the securitization of political identity. By linking the security and safety of its own citizens to their political identity, Russia established a connection that the two are inextricably linked.

In another line of argument concerning the safety of Russian speakers, Churkin pointed towards whom was elected in the new illegitimate Ukrainian government – namely the Freedom Party (Svoboda). This party, he claimed, was not only “anti-Russian, anti-Semitic, xenophobic, and counter to the fundamental values of the European Union,” but it also represented a risk to Russian speakers throughout Crimea and Ukraine who might have their rights taken away from them.86 Examples of this, according to Churkin, were demands to criminalize the usage of the Russian language, dissolution of the Constitutional Court, and limiting certain political parties because of their Russian association.

82 Allison, Roy (2014) p. 1261
83 Ibid. p. 1262 - 1264
84 Churkin, Vitaly, UNSC 7125th Meeting Minutes, 3 March 2014 3:30pm S/PV.7125, p. 2
86 Churkin, Vitaly, UNSC 7134th Meeting Minutes, 13 March 2014 3pm S/PV.7134, p. 15
Respect of Crimean Referendum

Once the referendum in Crimea was upheld, the next stage of the Russian explanation began to take a legal turn. Respecting the wishes of a minority population was, as Russia claimed, a precedent established by Kosovo and the Badinter principle. The Badinter principle was essentially created in Kosovo, advocating for “the separation of territoriality and self-determination from the ethnic principle.”87 In the past, the Soviet Union had used it to separate territories based on language, culture and ethnic differences – giving more autonomy to these regions, namely to destabilize the satellite countries they were located in. With these regions under de-facto Russian control, even though the Soviet Union ceased to exist, Russia continued to have some sway in policy in these regions, including, for example, South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia. Looking at the referendum in Crimea through this lens allows its legality in the same way that Kosovo’s declaration of independence was not illegal according to the ICJ.88 In other words, Russia was attempting to borrow a legal precedent set by the ICJ to invoke the spirit of self-determination to support Crimea’s referendum and decision to join with Russia.

Churkin noted in a UNSC meeting that it was an extraordinary step to seek “the achievement of the right to self-determination in the form of separation from an existing state.”89 Regardless of this, he also claimed that this step is only being taken because of the violent coup d’état in Kiev and that these nationalist leaders in Ukraine were threatening the Crimean people’s right to self-determination. In this sense, he already was using the Badinter principle and subtly making reference to the idea that ethnically – Crimea did not belong with a nationalist Ukraine. Churkin also explicitly mentioned the Kosovo situation and that referendums are not new. In that train of thought, why should Crimea be not allowed to hold a referendum as many other countries have done so?

In the wake of the referendum, Churkin again spoke at the UNSC congratulating the reunification of Crimea and Russia, claiming it was both “in compliance with international law and democratic procedure, without outside interference and through a free referendum.”90 In other words, international election monitors had been present at the referendum, which was in line with international law. These statements back up the argument made before the referendum, reaffirming the Badinter principle and precedent set by Kosovo.

87 Navari, Cornelia (2014) Territoriality, self-determination and Crimea after Badinter International Affairs 90:6, p. 1301
88 Ibid. p. 1315
89 Churkin, Vitaly, UNSC 7134th Meeting Minutes, 13 March 2014 3pm S/PV.7134, p. 15
90 Churkin, Vitaly, UNSC 7144th Meeting Minutes, 19 March 2014 3pm S/PV.7144, p. 8
Good Neighbor Argument

In the UNSC meeting on 1 March 2014, Churkin read out a statement from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Russia, stating, “On the night of 1 March, unknown armed people sent from Kiev attempted to storm the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea…these developments confirm the aspirations of certain well-known political circles in Kiev to destabilize the situation on the peninsula. It is very irresponsible to stir up tensions in the Crimea, which is already very tense.” In stating this, Churkin already began to set up an argument that Crimea felt its own autonomy was in jeopardy. This concern was further magnified and solidified when Sergei Aksyonov, the Prime Minister of Crimea, as Churkin claimed, came to Putin with a “request for assistance to restore peace in Crimea… the appeal was supported by Mr. Yanukovych, whose removal from office, we believe, was illegal.” According to these statements, it seemed rational for Russia to interfere on behalf of their fraternal country, acting as a good neighbor. Particularly telling in this train of thought was a request that Aksyonov sent to the Russian government:

“With respect to the extraordinary situation in Ukraine and threats against the lives of Russian citizens, out compatriots, and members of the military contingent of the armed forces of the Russian Federation deployed in conformity with international agreement on the territory of Ukraine, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea – in accordance with paragraph (g) of part 1 of article 102 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation – has requested the deployment of the armed forces of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine until the civic and political situation in Ukraine can be normalized.”

By publicizing this statement by Crimea, Churkin claimed that interference on Russia’s behalf was actually asked for by the Crimean government. Although unwritten, intervention by invitation is generally assumed to be a legal use of force. “Putin extended the geographical remit of Russian protection, claiming that, in the context of Yanukovych’s official request, if the people of the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine were to ‘ask us for help … we retain the right to use all available means to protect those people’” All of this continues to uphold the good neighbor argument, and reiterate the concept that a Russian explanation relies on legal international action on the behalf of self-determination, support for minorities and against the allegedly illegitimate government in Ukraine.

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91 Churkin, Vitaly, UNSC 7124th Meeting Minutes, 1 March 2014 4.15pm S/PV.7124, p. 5
92 Ibid.
93 Churkin, Vitaly, UNSC 7124th Meeting Minutes, 1 March 2014 4.15pm S/PV.7124, p. 5
94 Allison (2014) p. 1264
Relevance

The narratives that Russia tells about the Crimean annexation do not tell all of the sides of the story. In fact, it explicitly takes certain parts and leaves out the others. By prioritizing the illegitimacy of Euromaidan, lack of protection for Russian speaking minorities, respect for the referendum and good neighbor argument, Russia is creating the environment necessary for the securitization of political identity as the Referent Object. In the Copenhagen School’s understanding of securitization, the audience accepting the securitizing move is one of the most important parts of the whole process. Unless the audience believes that the situation warrants exceptional behavior, then the securitization has not been successful. Hence, the environment created by these explanations for why the annexation is problematic matters. It sets the stage for the audience accepting why Russia, the securitizing actor, needed to annex Crimea. While this past section has served to outline the four main lines of argument that Russia took in addressing the narrative on the world stage, this next chapter will go beyond that.

V. Chapter 4: Why They Said They Did It

Having provided a brief overview of the complex history of Crimea as well as some of the explicit reasons by Russia for their annexation of it, what comes next is a more detailed discourse analysis of Russian sources. In other words, this chapter will not examine the explicit arguments as the previous chapter did, but rather the underlying ones. It will answer the question: how was the political identity of Russian speakers in Ukraine securitized by Russia? In doing so, it will go in-depth with an eye towards the discourse actually used in different environments and remark on its notable coherency and consistency. Securitization is the process of transforming concepts into matters of security that represent a clear and present threat and require emergency measures outside the bounds of normality. In doing so, a successful securitization process will have created a new ‘normal’ where the subject that was being threatened (i.e. Referent Object) is now no longer threatened and the audience accepts that the securitization was warranted.

Within Russia the main source of information for Russians is state-controlled television as well as statements from Putin himself. In other words, discourse supporting the annexation either comes from television or from Putin himself, his “declarations and state-controlled television broadcasting compris[ing] the most important components of Russian social political discourse.”95 As such, the analyzed discourse originates mainly from Putin’s speeches and interviews, Churkin’s statement at the UNSC or Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov’s interviews and additionally from Russian state news outlets. A further issue that must be addressed before the analysis is that of the analyzed speeches and commentary,

much was conducted in Russian. This research, however, relies on the official English translation, for example, of Putin’s March 2014 Crimean Speech. This aspect of translation may have an impact on the discourse analysis. Regardless, due to the translations being official – it can be assumed that the message from the Kremlin is essentially the same, if not strongly geared towards supporting the securitization of political identity argument.

Putin’s March 2014 Crimean Speech

On 18 March 2014, Putin delivered a speech about Crimea to both chambers of Russia’s Federal Assembly. Arguably, this speech is one of the most significant concerning Crimea as it was just after the referendum and creates an environment that allows for the securitization of political identity. In it, he outlined many different arguments for why it was important that Crimea is now a part of Russia, but specifically he discussed actions taken by the new governing forces in Ukraine that threatened Russian speakers and the clear and present threat that this in turn entailed for Russia. When he talked about the people who were behind Euromaidan, he described them as characters who “resorted to terror, murder and riots. Nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes and anti-Semites executed this coup. They continue to set the tone in Ukraine to this day.”

With these kinds of actors behind Euromaidan, he immediately set the stage for something that could affect Crimeans and Russian speakers in Crimea, namely pointing out:

“Those who opposed the coup were immediately threatened with repression. Naturally, the first in line here was Crimea, the Russian-speaking Crimea. In view of this, the residents of Crimea and Sevastopol turned to Russia for help in defending their rights and lives, in preventing the events that were unfolding and are still underway in Kiev, Donetsk, Kharkov and other Ukrainian cities.”

As he created this image of a Russian speaking minority in desperate need of help, Putin had already combined together a threat against Crimea with violence and terror of western Ukraine. He further added the piece of Russia itself to the puzzle, stating “naturally, we could not leave this plea unheeded; we could not abandon Crimea and its residents in distress. This would have been betrayal on our part.” The usage of the word ‘betrayal’ automatically implies that it would be possible to retreat on this front and in fact, Putin later said exactly that, claiming “Russia found itself in a position it could not retreat from. If you compress the spring all the way to its limit, it will snap back hard.” These two statements together already are stating that the situation in Crimea demanded exceptional actions on behalf of the Russian Government.

97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
When later, Putin explained why the securitizing act (i.e. annexing Crimea) was warranted, he discussed public opinion surveys that conducted in Russia itself, stating that:

“The most recent public opinion surveys conducted here in Russia show that 95 percent of people think that Russia should protect the interests of Russians and members of other ethnic groups living in Crimea – 95 percent of our citizens. More than 83 percent think that Russia should do this even if it will complicate our relations with some other countries. A total of 86 percent of our people see Crimea as still being Russian territory and part of our country’s lands. And one particularly important figure, which corresponds exactly with the result in Crimea’s referendum: almost 92 percent of our people support Crimea’s reunification with Russia.”

Whether or not these numbers are accurate does not matter as much as the fact that it shows that Putin himself is claiming that the securitizing measure was already accepted, and de-facto normalized by his domestic audience. One of the more important parts of securitization is the acceptance of the audience and by preempting that, Putin illustrated that he not only believed he had the support but would act as though he had it regardless. He also pointed to the West’s tendency to brush Russia aside as though it was an unimportant power, ominously stating, “They are constantly trying to sweep us into a corner because we have an independent position, because we maintain it and because we call things like they are and do not engage in hypocrisy. But there is a limit to everything.”

Perhaps the two most important parts of his speech however were his comments concerning historical memory and of what Russia was willing to do. He claimed, “time and time again attempts were made to deprive Russians of their historical memory, even of their language and to subject them to forced assimilation.” This calls back to the historical complexity inherent in Crimea and Ukraine itself, where Putin is very clearly taking a side and picking up the shared history of Ukraine and Russia only insofar as it has to do with the two countries being close culturally and ignoring Holodomor and other incidents in history that have further brought animosity. Lastly and perhaps most essentially, Putin noted the “millions of Russians and Russian-speaking people live in Ukraine and will continue to do so. Russia will always defend their interests using political, diplomatic and legal means.” This is potentially the strongest statement throughout this critical speech. Now that the environment has been created that links the situation in Crimea to a clear and present threat, Putin is going beyond that – stating that any and all exceptional actions, whether they be political, diplomatic and

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101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
legal, would be taken to defend the Russian speakers there because to him and Russia, Russians and the Russian speakers in Crimea are one and the same.

Churkin’s Comments at the United Nations Security Council

Churkin was instrumental in creating a narrative that supports not only the annexation of Crimea, but also one that has securitized it. In particular, he read aloud a statement from Vladimir Putin during a meeting on March 1, 2014 stating:

“With respect to the extraordinary situation in Ukraine and threats against the lives of Russian citizens, our compatriots, and members of the military contingent of the armed forces of the Russian Federation deployed in conformity with international agreement on the territory of Ukraine, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea – in accordance with paragraph (g) of part I of article 102 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation – has requested the deployment of the armed forces of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine until the civic and political situation in Ukraine can be normalized.”

Simply by reading this statement, Churkin was conveying to the other members of the security council that the situation in Ukraine was ‘extraordinary’ and it required measures out of the ordinary from Russia itself. In doing so, he spoke to create the same impression on an international stage – that Russia saw the Euromaidan protests that aimed for a stronger loyalty towards Europe as threatening to its own security the point where it would act to protect itself. Naturally, that was not the argument used. By using the political identity argument with markers such as ‘compatriots’ and ‘Russian citizens,’ Churkin is attempting to build an argument that it is these Russians who are at risk of danger. He further stated at a meeting on March 19, 2014 that “one simply cannot claim that there has been no politically motivated killing or mass torture; no kidnapping of individuals, no attacks on journalists and human rights defenders; no political detentions. One cannot claim that… there are no chilling racist incidents with anti-Russian and anti-Semitic undercurrents, backed or at least passed over in silence by those who have seized power in Kyiv.”

Notably, this statement cannot be fact-checked as it most likely is true. Like most of the Russian narrative and securitization strategy, the pieces of the story are all true – but they are weaved together in a way that supports their narrative and theirs alone. In other words, all of the pieces of the puzzle are true. A very small segment of Euromaidan did come from anti-Semitic and anti-Russian overtones, but not to the extent that Churkin claims. However, the whole story woven together by these truths constructs a false narrative. Furthermore, by bringing up killings of journalists and human rights defenders, Churkin was slyly bringing the issues such as freedom of the press to the forefront of the discussion. Why? Because he knew that many of

104 Churkin, Vitaly, UNSC 7124th Meeting Minutes, 1 March 2014 4.15pm S/PV.7124, p. 5
105 Churkin, Vitaly, UNSC 7144th Meeting Minutes, 19 March 2014 3pm S/PV.7144, p. 9
his counterparts also supported these ideals and would have more difficulty speaking up against him.

What is particularly interesting about the securitizing process in Russia concerning political identity is that it does not end simply with the annexation or simply on the dates surrounding the annexation. In fact, the rationale and continued explanations using this argument continue for some time. This was primarily due to the fighting in the Donbass after allegedly popular referendums also swept through Luhansk and Donetsk. As such, the issue of Ukraine’s security was still relevant to the UNSC. As late as August 28, 2014, Churkin still discussed the situation in Ukraine with his UNSC colleagues. He brought up the behavior of the armed forces and linked them with the security of citizens, particularly Russian ones, claiming:

“The Ukrainian armed forces, without consideration for any standard of international humanitarian law or simple moral precepts, have been indiscriminately attacking cities, residential neighborhoods and infrastructure targets. They are using artillery, machine guns and air attacks, using phosphorous explosives banned under international conventions and ballistic rockets. In the so-called anti-terrorist operations area there are 4 million people. Hundreds of thousands of them have been sitting in cellars without water or electricity for weeks, and food and medicines are practically unobtainable. The overall number of deaths now exceeds 2,000, and it is growing exponentially. The number of people, including refugees, who have moved from Ukraine to Russia is now more than 814,000.”

This claim of refugees is notable because it again speaks to the political identity of Russian speakers and the very clear and present threat that the Ukrainian armed forces are presenting against them. At this point, the annexation of Crimea is over and done with. Churkin is here instead describing the situation in the Donbass, however, what Churkin was aiming to do was further solidify the new normal environment. In other words, although the situation and securitizing move itself had passed, Churkin and Russia had a vested interest in continuing to maintain their explanation as the only one that ought to be believed. In the context of the Donbass, this meant continuing the narrative that had begun in Crimea and exploiting its natural extension to the Donbass. Potentially this was also to sow confusion. Bringing in the issue of refugees and civilian casualties makes the environment more serious and prone to potentially more securitizing actions.

Social Media and Remarks

Beyond the speech that Putin delivered in March 14, 2014 and Churkin’s comments to the UNSC, Russian controlled Russia Today as well as other outlets such as press conferences and social media networks played a role in securitizing the political identity of Russian speakers. As early as the 12th of March 2014, Putin answered questions from journalists about

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106 Churkin, Vitaly, UNSC 7253th Meeting Minutes, 28 August 2014 2pm S/PV.7253, p. 12
the situation in Ukraine, pointing to the “rampage of reactionary forces, nationalist and anti-Semitic forces” as well as the prospect of “uncontrolled crime” spreading throughout Ukraine.\footnote{President of Russia (2014) “Vladimir Putin answered journalists’ questions on the situation in Ukraine” 4 March 2014 The Kremlin Accessed 12 May 2018 http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20366} He further brings an element of necessity into his answers when he claims that “we retain the right to use all available means to protect these people… we cannot remain indifferent if we see that they are being persecuted, destroyed and humiliated.”\footnote{Ibid.} There is almost no clearer way of stating that the issue of Crimea is one intrinsically linked to the Russian security complex and that if it requires emergency measures, Russia is more than willing to act on them.

Sergei Lavrov also spoke to the state-controlled press, Russia Today, in March 2014 and backed up comments made by Putin. Russia Today speaks to an international audience as its main language is English – therefore showing that this message was meant for the world, rather than Russian speaking citizens. When asked whether Russia had considered the ramifications of its actions in Crimea, he responded, “In this case, it was not an act of diplomacy; it was a fundamental step of national importance. Besides that, this issue could not be held dependent on a negative, positive or any other sort of reaction from other countries that had nothing to do with it. After the Crimean referendum made it absolutely clear that the people of Crimea want to be with the Russian Federation, we had no choice. Frankly, the Russian leadership in general and the president in particular did not have any other choice. We could not betray ethnic Russians and Crimeans after they made their choice through an extremely democratic and transparent procedure.”\footnote{Russia Today (2014) “Lavrov: If West accepts coup-appointed Kiev govt, it must accept a Russian Crimea” 30 March 2014 Russia Today Accessed 12 May 2018 https://www.rt.com/news/lavrov-crimea-ukraine-west-181/} Notably he uses that same word ‘betrayed’ as Putin did in his speech to the Federal Assembly. In doing so, he not only was reiterating his President, he was also affirming the image internationally to the media as Putin was delivering to the government. This sync of speeches is interesting and lends credence to the idea that securitizing the identity of the Russian speakers in Crimea was no accident. It was the chosen narrative of Russia as they could argue from a legal standpoint that the situation was legally similar to that of Kosovo. Additionally, because the citizens in question were Russian, the annexation itself was necessary and therefore securitized for Russia itself as there was no other option.

Further, the securitizing itself didn’t just take place through speeches and interviews. It also took place on social media. This misinformation war, as it was framed by the West, was waged “through the manipulation of information, i.e., using real information on in a way to create false impressions, disinformation, including the dissemination of manipulated or fabricated (false) information, lobbying, blackmail and the extortion of desired
As noted, it is a common tactic of the Russian narrative to simplify and distort the facts to fit a particular story. Obviously, this is not purely a Russian tactic. When any one state decides to create a narrative, they leave pieces out and misrepresent others to support their actions. In this particular case with Russia, however, it is notable because all of the information is generally real, which means it becomes harder to discredit.

**Russian State Television**

In evaluating Russian state television resources, it is important to note that although it is portrayed as such, it does not operate freely. Although the constitution technically allows for this freedom, Russian law is stringent and strict in how it dictates what extremism is. By enforcing this, most of Russian television is, if not directly, indirectly state controlled. Legislation has been enacted in Russia that denies media the right to discuss military casualties both in peacetime and in wartime. Furthermore, the Russian government controls “either directly or through proxies, all five of the major national television networks, as well as national radio networks, important national newspapers, and national news agencies. The state also controls more than 60 percent of the country’s estimated 45,000 regional and local newspapers and other periodicals.” In other words, the source of news for the majority of Russians in the country is controlled by the Russian government. What this means is that television networks may look different superficially, ultimately the message that they spin is the same – and that is the propaganda from the Kremlin.

Spoken discourse on Russian state television also played an essential role in creating a ‘new normal’ environment where Crimea was an indispensable part of Russia itself. News hosts such as Pyotr Tolstoy on Politika comforted their viewers with the fact that Russia would protect Russian speakers in Crimea. Words such as ‘protect’ and ‘save’ were often used when discussing the Russian speakers as though they had somehow been estranged from Russia and needed to be rescued from Ukraine. For the most part, Tolstoy reacted in this way in response to statements made by Sergey Mironov, the head of political party, A Just Russia, and United Russia representative, Sergey Zheleznyak. In particular, his broadcasting remarks on February 24, 2014 ended with the affirmation that Russians “do not desert their own people [svoikh] at war.” The phrase ‘at war’ is interesting and relevant to the case for securitization because it implies that not only are the Russian speakers in Ukraine under threat from the general chaos of Euromaidan, but they are specifically at war with them – a situation that often requires, if not necessitates exceptional emergency measures.

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110 Szwed, Robert (2016) “Framing of the Ukraine-Russia conflict in Online and Social Media” NATO Strategy Communications Centre of Excellence, p. 20
Dmitriy Kisilyov, the host of Vesti Nedeli, also gave a broadcast on March 2, 2014, in which he claimed that Russia had the right to protect its own interests as well as the interests of Russian speakers no matter what. He echoed Tolstoy in stating that “We don’t surrender our people [svoikh].” These kinds of phrases such as ‘surrender’ and ‘war’ summon up fears of fighting and war-like gestures. Is it any surprise that the issue of the Russian speakers in Crimea was securitized so quickly? When written media, television and government sanctioned statements all work in tandem, the effect is tremendously amplified. On that same day on a separate show, Voskresnoye Vremya, Valentina Matvienko, the chairman of Russia’s Federal Council provided an explanation specifically having to do with the Russian speakers:

“Ukraine is home to millions of Russkiye, Russian-speakers, our Ukrainian brothers, whose lives are now in real danger. Russia cannot stand aside, it cannot remain indifferent ... If a serious threat to the life and safety of those residing in Crimea remains, and as you know, more than 60% of them are Russkiye, and there are not only ethnic-Russians there... So, we have every reason, responsibility and obligation [to act]. Russia now has a special mission to protect the Russian-speaking population.”

As with the other statements sanctioned by the Kremlin, Matvienko outlines the clear and present threat that the Russian speakers in Ukraine are facing. He even uses the phrase ‘in real danger,’ which suggests not only that action need be taken, but that said action needs to happen very soon. The next phrases further illustrate that there is no other option, that Russia objectively cannot do nothing and must act to protect the identity of its diaspora community in Crimea. Particularly interesting is his usage of the triad ‘reason, responsibility and obligation,’ which in some ways covers the different elements of securitization. Russia has clearly outlined the reason for this emergency measure, has taken responsibility for it as necessity and simply must annex Crimea. Naturally these issues are not objectively securitizing, but that is what is special about securitization as a theoretical concept – the threat to the Referent Object does not have to be objectively in danger, it just must be perceived as such. In Russia, where all forms of media are to an extent spouting the same message – there is only one perception of the Crimean annexation, and it is the one that the Kremlin wants to broadcast.

The Audience

In securitization theory, one of the important factors as part of a securitizing act is that the audience accepts it as necessary. In this case, it is interesting to note given Putin’s extensive control over the Russian media and government – to what audience would he be talking to? Because it is an annexation, the answer might be the Russian people and government. One

113 Yuri Teper (2016) p. 385
114 Ibid.
clear example of this is Putin sending a letter to the upper house of Parliament, the Federation Council to ask whether or not he could send the Russian Armed Forces to Ukraine. Not only was this measure approved, but “earlier in the day, the Federation Council asked Putin to take “exhaustive measures” to protect Russians in Ukraine.” Further, the Russian Federation Council affirmed the treaty on Crimea’s entry into Russia with a unanimous vote. This vote showed that the audience within Russia not only accepted the securitizing move of the annexation, but also already perceived it as the new normal. Even two years later, Russian Federation Council member Valentina Matvienco affirmed the annexation, claiming it was “the biggest, in the full sense of the word, historical event not only for Crimea and its residents, not only for Russia but for the entire world.”

Within Russia domestically, the Russian Public Opinion Research Centre conducted a poll in 2015 that stated two-thirds of Russians see benefits from the reunification of Russia and Crimea. The respondents stated that Russians benefited due to “free stationing of the Black Sea Fleet naval bases… additional resort territories, as well as restoration of historical justice – the return of formerly owned territories.” Interestingly, the poll did not ask about the safety of the Russian speakers in Crimea. However, the poll results do illustrate that the securitizing move does have the support of the domestic Russian audience. Granted, polls conducted by the Russian Public Opinion Research Centre may not be entirely accurate given the subject matter and considering that it was published by TASS, the Russian News Agency, which is a propaganda arm of the Russian government.

Another audience that must be considered is the international one. As populist parties have gained power across Europe, there has been a remarkable trend of Russian funding that has followed it. For example, right-wing French party Front National was granted a 9 million EUR loan by the First Czech-Russian Bank. In fact, Putin “widely suspected of being behind an extraordinary Russian cash and charm offensive that is reported to be trying to woo Europe’s far-right populist parties in order to strengthen the Kremlin’s political influence within the European Union.” Essentially, this means that he is attempting to buy an international audience that supports Russian moves in the Ukraine. These right-wing politicians of various countries that have supported Putin generally come from parties who have received funding.

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While perhaps it isn’t realistic for Russia to expect that every country will legitimize its annexation of Crimea, the fact that some European politicians have in fact accepted the annexation is an unexpected perk for Russia. It means that not only is the exceptional measure considered warranted, its end results are also validated. As late as 2016, Heinz Christian Strache, the leader of the Austrian Freedom Party signed an agreement with United Russia calling for a lifting of sanctions over Russia’s annexation of Ukraine.  

Just over a year later, Marine Le Pen announced that she believed the annexation of Crimea was not illegal. Not only did Le Pen state she saw Crimea as a part of Russia, but that she saw no reason to question the referendum. That same year, Martin Schulz of Germany’s Social Democratic Party also gave a statement concerning Crimea, “the way I see the situation, Russians have turned it into an accomplished fact and they will insist on it.” Other than Martin Schulz, it is relevant to note that of the international politicians that have recognized Crimea’s status as Russia sees it – the majority are extremely right-wing. Despite this, it still validates Russia’s securitizing move.

The last and logical audience to observe is the Crimean audience itself. This presents some difficulties as dissenting voices against the annexation are not publicly voiced and if they are, they are quickly silenced. There are three generally observed groups of people in Crimea: pro-Ukrainians, pro-Russians and the Crimean Tartars. Pro-Ukrainians in the region left early in the conflict, not wanting to be trapped in a Russian-controlled Crimea. The Crimean Tartars are being systemically portrayed as extremists by Russian controlled media. In fact, many of the Crimean Tartars who could have spoken against it have gone missing. Tartar media has been shut down while Tartar activists have been harassed. The Mejlis, the Crimean Tartar representative body, was also shut down in 2016 due to their ‘extremist activities.’ Unfortunately it remains difficult to analyze statements made in Crimea against the Russian annexation as these voices are not publicly stated or they are shut down too quickly. This means there is one audience left to publically acknowledge their support for the Russian annexation: the Russians.

On the pro-Russian side of the annexation, there are many online outpourings of support for the annexation from the Russian Community of Crimea, an extremely influential pro-Russian

122 TASS (2017) “German politician admits Crimea being part of Russia is fact of life” 1 September 2017 TASS Russian News Agency Accessed 12 May 2018 http://tass.com/world/963148
organization that is located in Crimea. It is led by Sergei Tsekov, who is currently a member of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation and who used to be the First Deputy Speaker of the Crimean Parliament.\textsuperscript{124} They publish content online that was not only accepting of the Russian narrative and intervention, but practically asked for it. On January 1, 2014, the Russian Unity Party using the Russian Community of Crimea’s platform announced that “Our country, our people are on the verge of an unconstitutional coup d’état, which, in fact, is being carried out exclusively by force… Ukraine needs to accelerate the process of accession to the Customs Union.”\textsuperscript{125} This plays exactly into the narrative that Russia is selling. The tension was further ratcheted up when Sergei Tsekov announced on February 3, 2014 at a meeting of the Supreme Council of the ARC that only Russia could protect Crimea, where he “called on the Presidium and the Supreme Council of the Crimea to prepare an appropriate appeal to the Russian Federation on support, assistance and protection.”\textsuperscript{126} These two responses to the upcoming securitization move by Russia suggest that the audience in Crimea was ripe to respond positively and actively towards Russia. In a perfect world, all three audiences would be able to respond and actively support or dissent against the Russian annexation. However, that is not possible. The Tartars have been prosecuted while Ukrainians have left the region entirely. What is intentionally left is the pro-Russians, which is what Putin and Russia want – because it gives them justification for the securitizing move.

Relevance

An interesting conundrum in analyzing the Russian annexation of Crimea in the framework of securitization is problematizing the question: does the audience matter? Securitization theory in general would claim that the audience accepting the securitizing move is one of the most important parts of seeing whether or not a securitization was successful. However, in a country such as Russia where the media and government are not entirely free, is it even possible to determine whether or not a securitizing move is accepted by the population? As the securitizing actor, Russia, technically must have an audience that is accepting of this securitizing move. In other words, the theoretical audience would agree that the political identity of Russian speakers in Crimea (i.e. the Referent Object) is a matter of existential threat. Taking Crimea into account provokes a problem with this. In a small region where the media and culture are under tight control – can one really determine the full acceptance or not of the securitizing move. Then again, does it really matter? If the securitizing move is continually legitimized by media and government and there is only one narrative of events – acceptance or at least apathy may set in. This creates a new normal, this same new

\textsuperscript{125} Russian Community of Crimea (2014) “Russian Unity” declares its mobilization to install checkpoints at the entrance to the Crimea and create detachments of people’s squads” 1 January 2014 Russian Community of Crimea Accessed 12 May 2018 http://www.ruscimea.ru/news.php?point=3373
environment of security that has been discussed earlier where the annexation of Crimea becomes normal and the rationale of protecting Russian speakers becomes fact. It matters because it reinforces the Russian narrative again and again from different angles and in different places. On an international level, it is less realistic to assume that all countries will believe the story told by Russia. However, it may be enough to create chaos and cause confusion. This uncertainty could “limit punitive western responses, as well as perhaps to gather support among certain traditionally friendly CIS states.” In other words, it is enough to sow confusion by composing a narrative that has a basis in reality.

Whether or not the claim that protecting Russian speakers in Crimea was the main reason for annexing Crimea doesn’t actually matter. While it is interesting to analyze the extent to which this narrative complies with fact, securitization does not rely on objectivity. It is based on whether or not the population accepts it as such. The rhetoric and narrative that Russia, as the securitizing actor, uses in its justification of the annexation is primarily aimed at “persuading Russian domestic audiences of the legitimacy of these actions.” In other words, the annexation was framed in such a way to appeal to domestic political cohesion. The legitimacy of these claims is not as important as their mass appeal to the Russian public. As far as polls show, the audience is reacting well to the annexation. In fact, “Moscow’s choice to identify with ethnic Russians, Russian-speakers and Russian ‘compatriots’ in the crisis was useful in generating domestic support for coercive action in Ukraine.” The usage of Russian speakers (i.e. the Russkiye mir) abroad is neither, however, new nor is it used universally. While it has turned up in situations such as South Ossetia, it was not used nor addressed in the 1991 push for independence in Crimea. In other words, the usage of political identity as a Referent Object for the Russians is not total in its scope. It is used geopolitically and in cases that benefit Russia. When Russia, for example, wants to keep some semblance of control over former Soviet countries – this tactic is often used. In Poroshenko and Ukraine’s push towards Europe, it makes sense that Russia would maintain some form of control over the country if a certain part of it were annexed. Similarly, in the case of South Ossetia, the argument of protecting Russian speakers was used and to this day, Russia maintains an impression of control over Georgia’s foreign policy due to its claim of protection of South Ossetia.

VI. Chapter 5: South Ossetia Test Case

Analogously, the Russian arguments for intervention in South Ossetia are framed as having to do with the safety of Russian citizens abroad. Some even see Georgia in 2008 as a test run for Ukraine in 2014. Although the circumstances were very different, the argument and corresponding securitization of political identity is the same. At the time, Dmitri Medvedev

127 Allison, Roy (2014) Russian ‘deniable’ intervention in Ukraine: how and why Russia broke the rules
International Affairs 90:6, p. 1259
128 Allison (2014) p. 1282
129 Allison (2014) p. 1296
was the President of Russia. On September 8, 2008, Georgian troops launched a preemptory attack on Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia. To Medvedev, this date represents a comparable attack to what the United States experienced on 11 September 2001. While the origin of the Georgia-Russia conflict concerning South Ossetia is quite old in nature, it can be traced back to a conflict in interests in 1991. Russian peacekeepers were sent to South Ossetia as well as Abkhazia, autonomous regions of Georgia, to protect Russian speakers when it was believed that Georgia was not able to neutrally solve the conflict.130

In speaking about securitization, Medvedev gave an interview with Television Channels Channel One where he stated, “we were left with no choice but to respond to this absolutely insolent and brazen attack, return things to normal and protect the lives and dignity of South Ossetia’s people.”131 This phrase is strikingly similar to the wording and sentiment behind the Crimean rhetoric where there is no other choice for Russia than to intervene, despite its own wishes. In that same interview, Medvedev asserts that “protecting the lives and dignity of our citizens, wherever they may be, is an unquestionable priority for our country.”132 Again, this focus on Russians living abroad comes up as a source of necessity. The political identity of Russian citizens is being used here as a rationale for launching a large-scale attack into Georgia.133

Particularly interesting is the fact that Medvedev uses an argument of a historic nature, claiming “Russia has historically been a guarantor for the security of the peoples of the Caucasus and this remains true today.”134 While the situation and historical context of the Georgia-Russia relationship is very different from the Ukraine-Russia one, it is interesting that again the argument sounds similar. In a conversation with the Valdai Discussion Club, Medvedev is clearer, stating “our neighbors are without any doubt states that are traditionally close to us and they represent the traditional sphere of interests of the Russian Federation.”135 This is potentially as clear as the situation is outlined. Georgia lies within the geographical area that Russia considers to be in its sphere of interest and when they want to turn West towards a more European orientation, that is unacceptable to the Russians. However,
Medvedev does not explicitly state that this is the reason for the invasion. In fact, he is very clear in that same interview session that Russia’s reaction was about “protecting the lives and dignity of Russian citizens, wherever they are… [which is the] raison d’être of the Russian state.”

Stating that the safety of Russian citizens is the reason for the existence of the Russian state implies that the Referent Object of this securitizing move is the Russian speakers abroad. While Georgians would argue that the intervention was a coercive measure to persuade them not to move towards Europe, the battle continues to be a discursive one.

If the Russian narrative sounds similar to the Crimea case, that is because both narratives are based upon the Kosovo precedent and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine. In creating the environment that would better serve the securitizing move, “Russia’s intervention in South Ossetia/Georgia not only draws on the blurring of sovereignty accomplished by the NATO powers in 1999, but also reinforces it and discursively shapes customary international law, which is fundamentally discursive through its production of, and constitution through, international ‘norms.’” In other words, by using the same legal framework that created international norms for the humanitarian intervention in Kosovo, Russia legitimized its own use of force through discourse. By describing the attack on Tskhinvali as ‘treacherous’ to not only the South Ossetian civilians but also to Russian peacekeepers, Russia created a situation where it required emergency measures by Russia to protect those with the Russian political identity. Furthermore, the actions by the Georgian military were discussed in terms of ‘genocide,’ Lavrov arguing “more specifically that the Russian constitution and Russian laws made it unavoidable for us to exercise responsibility to protect.”

While R2P is no longer as popular or common in discourse, the methodological choices made by Russia in constructing their arguments for intervention are the same.

The Result

Unlike Crimea, the case of South Ossetia and securitizing move taken by Russia are a bit further back in history, so the impacts of the securitization can be felt. However, similarly to Crimea – the narrative that Russia created about protecting peacekeepers and South Ossetians was not the whole story. Instead, the creation of protectorates such as South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia was militarily beneficial to Georgia as “Moscow can now arrange the permanent deployment of troops on their [Georgia’s] territory, in coordination with the local authorities, in whatever quantity it wishes through interstate legal treaties.”

Essentially, this means that Russian troops can now be deployed further away than they otherwise would be and further implies that Georgia will continually be aware of its territory being occupied and act in such a way that defers to Russian interests. Furthermore, in occupying certain parts

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136 Transcript of the Meeting with the Participants in the International Club Valdai (2008)
137 Dittmer, Jason and Parr, David (2011) p. 131
139 Ibid. p. 1152
140 Ibid. p. 1162
of Georgia, Russia “diminished decisively the attractiveness for NATO states of offering Georgia a Membership Action Plan (MAP), with a closer relationship with NATO this brings, or indeed taking any other major steps towards Georgian accession to NATO.”

This all plays into the narrative that Russia is not telling.

More often than not, Russia’s own explanation for their behavior is not the whole story. The usage of the trope ‘Russian speakers’ has been used in several contexts, but it is most evident in the South Ossetian and the Crimean case. The South Ossetian case was a test of sorts to see what the international world would do if Russia simply invaded a sovereign nation under these auspices of the Badinter principle and the Kosovo precedent. In short, the response of the Western world was to do nothing. Georgia is still neither a member of the European Union nor NATO. Whether this has to do solely with the standing Russian peacekeepers on their territory or not is probably not realistic – but it certainly plays a significant role. The state exists in a new normal where it is acknowledged fact that South Ossetia will remain a frozen conflict and that territory will not be returned to Georgia. In other words, the audience of the securitizing move, both domestically and internationally, has accepted the securitizing action as valid. It is not seen as warranted by many, but even the usage of the term ‘frozen conflict’ suggests that the situation is not going to change.

Relevance

Perhaps one of the interesting takeaways from exploring the discourse of using identity politics as the Referent Object in Russia’s securitizing move is that the strategy is not universal, rather it’s geopolitically situated. The rhetoric that is used to discuss Russian speakers abroad is “mainly guided by considerations of political necessity rather than dictated by some national or ideological vision.”

So, when asking the question: why did the Russians say they annexed Crimea – an analysis of discourse surrounding the topic pulls back the curtain. The narrative that is told is one that ignores the complex history of Crimea and prefers to rely on the argument for the protection of Russian speaking minorities of Crimea. However, if that were the case, surely this same argument would be in usage across the globe were any Russian diaspora was in existence. Instead, it pops up irregularly and where it serves Russian geopolitical interests such as in South Ossetia. As has been mentioned, securitization does not rely on objective fact. Instead, it is about the perception of what represents an immediate threat to security. Securitizing the political identity of Russian speakers gives the securitizing actor, Russia, a safe argument to fall back on with the precedent of Kosovo and other humanitarian interventions all across the world. It also serves to hide the other reasons for provoking conflict. In the case of South Ossetia, those reasons were territorial in nature. However, Russia’s distaste for Georgia joining NATO and the EU somehow doesn’t make it into their official discourse on the matter. Why? Because it’s more

141 Allison (2008) p. 1165
142 Teper (2016) p. 390
convenient to argue based upon identity politics, a topic that is notoriously difficult to pin down. In the case of Crimea, there are a variety of reasons for the annexation that did not make it into the official discourse and are left out of the narrative.

VII. Chapter 6: Why They Actually Did It

One of the primary reasons why any kind of narrative is constructed is because it is the story that the creator wants to tell – which normatively implies that there are perhaps a few other strands of the story that they don’t want told. In the case of Crimea and Russia, there are many other rationales that contributed to the choice to annex this peninsula and surprisingly, none of them have to do with political identity. In particular, with the peninsula now annexed – Russia has access to huge natural gas reserves in the Black Sea as well as a newfound strategic advantage in the Black Sea itself. Further, Russia can aim to preserve the status quo between itself and Ukraine, positioning itself as a power that requires a sphere of influence. In addition, this move plays into the traditional Russian struggle for regional expansion. Lastly, with any large-scale external intervention, it immediately deflects domestic attention away from internal problems, potentially a factor in the immediacy of the act. Fundamentally, Russia had more than the interests of Russian speakers in mind when they annexed the Crimean Peninsula.

Black Sea Gas Resources & Sevastopol

Perhaps one the strongest reasons for annexing Crimea was the vast natural gas resources in the Black Sea. Before 2013, none of these reserves had been utilized by Ukraine. According to Crimea’s First Deputy Prime Minister Rustam Temirgaliev, “the Crimea as part of the Kerch area has one of the largest oil and gas deposits in the Black Sea according to geological surveys.” 143 Naturally also, preference will be given to Russian companies, namely Gazprom. Further, Sergey Donskoy, Crimea’s Natural Resources Minister told reporters in 2014 that Gazprom had “exclusive rights to develop offshore oil fields.” 144 When Russia took control of the peninsula, it also gained access to all of this maritime territory and made it almost impossible for Ukraine to ever become energy independent. This is significant because an energy independent Ukraine would mean it would no longer be dependent on Russia for energy. Although Putin and his spokesman, Dmitri Peskov, have claimed that the annexation was not about the oil and gas, the fact of the matter is – this is too big a perk to be unexpected. 145 Furthermore, Putin and Russia had in fact attempted to gain control of those

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reserves two years prior and failed. One sign that steps are being taken to monetize this region is the fact that “Russia moved drilling rigs and offshore support vessels to gas fields in waters off Crimea in July” of 2014. While speculative in nature, this move illustrates that Russia is aware of the vast resources contained under the Black Sea and wants to take advantage of them. Again, this was not mentioned in any of the narrative that Putin and Russia told about the annexation. While the oil and gas resources have not been developed yet, as previously mentioned, Russia has gained 360,000 more square miles of maritime territory and with it, control over Ukraine’s energy independence. Furthermore, this territory provides the opportunity for Russia to restart a project similar to the cancelled South Stream pipeline project, perhaps a new pipeline that would bypass Ukraine as the main transit hub to get to Europe. One telling sign of this is the signing of protocols between Gazprom and Turkey, which solidifies the land-based part of the Turk Stream gas pipeline. The Turk Stream pipeline will go under the Black Sea and until recently, had not been approved by the Turkish government. While it is not clear whether the Black Sea route goes through previously Ukrainian-owned waters – it is surely easier for Russia to justify its pipeline project now that it manages control over a much larger portion of the Black Sea. The resources that Russia obtains by annexing Crimea are threefold. It maintains control over Ukraine’s energy, successfully gains access to new resources themselves and opens up itself towards a new pathway for energy infrastructure development.

Another aspect of the annexation that proved useful to Russia was the acquisition of the Sevastopol strategic military base. Although Yanukovych had agreed to extend the Russian lease of the military base for an additional 25 years after 2017, there was still some degree of uncertainty with the new government ushered in by Euromaidan. Would they uphold the promises of their predecessors or not? It is also interesting to note that even in the renewal process of their lease, Russia did not get the terms and conditions that they wished for, as the terms “prevented any expansion of the Black Sea Fleet by allowing Russia only to replace old naval craft with similar ones. So, Russia could not add new types of ships or naval aviation.” Not only was Russia not able to add new ships or naval equipment, Russia also acceded to a reduction in gas supplies to Ukraine by 30 percent. After the annexation, Russia not only had this base without any lease or contract restrictions, but they also gained control of Ukrainian ships and bases throughout the Black Sea region. Russia also announced six new frigates and submarines that are due to join the Black Sea Fleet and gained control of

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148 Allison (2014) p. 1278
various Ukrainian ships in the region. Furthermore, Russia also gained the upper hand in terms of the energy agreement between themselves and Russia and could choose to use the discount as a bargaining chip.\textsuperscript{150} This both strengthened their regional power position and weakened Ukraine’s at the same time – a win-win. In fact, with the new additions to the fleet – Russia will have the most powerful Black Sea fleet in the region. In addition, the annexation of Sevastopol gave Russia a warm water port from which to launch their navy. The acquisition of a warm water port has been a long-time strategy for Russian navy. This is important because it allows Russia to now obtain access to the Black Sea and become a regional power in that area. Interestingly, this plays into a later reason why Russia annexed Crimea as it has to do with regional expansion. By gaining access to this port in Sevastopol, Russia also can display its power and capability to intervene in Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria, and Georgia.

**Maintain the Status Quo**

While it is an oft-used argument for Russia’s actions in Ukraine, it is nonetheless true that with Ukraine’s westward orientation – Russia may have felt threatened and annexed Crimea in order to maintain the status quo. Although Ukraine joined the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS – i.e. Russia’s regional security organization), Russia may have felt it was moving too westward. They engaged in a “policy of strategic denial,” where Ukraine would not be allowed to join any kind of European organization or NATO simply because it lay in the Russia’s traditional sphere of influence.\textsuperscript{151} Ukraine represented the buffer between Russia and the West so when any kind of policy move was taken, particularly such as the Accession Agreement, it was immediately seen as threatening. In particular, Ukraine’s hesitance concerning joining the Eurasian Economic Union, Putin’s economic project aimed at forming a buffer against European expansion, was concerning to Russia. When Yanukovych didn’t sign the European Accession Agreement, there was most likely relief on the behalf of Russia. Why? They most likely believed that Ukraine would, in response, join the Eurasian Economic Union instead. In fact, Russia spoke out very strongly against Ukraine’s lack of support for the Eurasian Economic Union, stating if instead it chose the Accession Agreement, Russia would not see it as a “strategic partner.”\textsuperscript{152} In other words, in Russia’s view, the Accession Agreement and the Eurasian Economic Union were the only two choices that Ukraine had. However, when the Euromaidan movement was formed in opposition with Russia’s preferred option and large swaths of the western Ukrainian population began to speak out in favor of European integration – it may have been a warning sign.

With Crimea’s annexation, however, there have been corresponding build-ups of military in other eastern European and Baltic states. This actually strengthens Putin’s domestic position.

\textsuperscript{150} Socor, Vladimir (2014)
\textsuperscript{151} Allison (2014) p.1269
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid. p. 1271
that the West is attempting to cut off Russia from its traditional power base and is acting to put it in a corner. Furthermore, with Russia as the de-facto occupying power in Ukraine, Russia can now increase or decrease the pressure on Ukraine when it believes Ukraine is moving too westward or acting in ways that do not benefit Russia. Maintaining the old Soviet Union orientation and spheres of influences may seem like an outdated Cold War argument but given how Putin has spoken about Ukraine and NATO – it may have merit. In June 2014, he stated “we could not allow a historical part of the Russian territory with a predominantly ethnic Russian population to be incorporated into an international military alliance… [or] NATO infrastructure ... directly towards the Russian border.”

Concerning the Eurasian Economic Union, Ukraine has still not joined. However, what the Eurasian Economic Union was promoting was a buffer zone meant to prevent further European expansion and to maintain the status quo in the region. As Europe has grown warier of joining with Ukraine, Russia has, in theory, received the same outcome as it would have with the Eurasian Economic Union – continued stability.

Russian Struggle for Regional Expansion

Somewhat alluded to in the previous section, Russia’s regional expansionist tendencies are nothing new. While the expansion is nowhere on the scale that the Soviet Union was able to achieve, Russia’s regional security organization, the Commonwealth of Independent States, nonetheless is a key tool in understanding the annexation. Further, the Eurasian Economic Union is an interesting factor to contemplate. Members of the CIS include Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Moldova, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Belarus, Azerbaijan and Armenia. Although the organization does not necessarily play a large political role, rather it is mostly symbolic, and Ukraine has actually indicated its willingness to leave – it is an example of the regional power urges that Moscow claims to hold and its sphere of influence that it wishes to protect. The Eurasian Economic Union consists of Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. The purpose of the Union is further economic integration. For Russia, however, Ukraine was always “politically and geographically essential for the project. Indeed, Russia could not accept that Ukraine was in the EU orbit.”

Putin’s will to have Ukraine in the Eurasian Economic Union was complicated with the offer of the European Accession Agreement. However, now with the annexation of Crimea, Russia not only has a foot in Ukraine’s territory, it has also increased its territorial waters and provided a port in the Black Sea where Russia now has the capacity to challenge Turkey’s traditional regional dominance. This acquisition of land and maritime

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153 President of Russia (2014) “Address by Putin, 18 March 2014; Direct Line interview with Putin: Putin’s interview with 69 Radio Europe 1 and TF1 TV channel” 18 April 2014


156 Sergei, Bruno (2018) Putin’s and Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union: A hybrid half-economic and half-political “Janus Bifons” Journal of Eurasian Studies 9, p. 57
territory means that if Russia wished, it would have the ability to “gain greater influence over the Odessa region or, more speculatively, to enforce a military supply route from Russia to Transnistria.” 157 In short, it could represent part of a plan to increase Russia’s military presence abroad.

Interestingly, while Russia has mostly focused on protecting its sphere of influence, it also has a “new campaign [which] has sought to damage the international image of Western democracy, exacerbate the internal tensions within Western political and security institutions, and expand Russia’s global reach at the expense of Washington and its allies by playing on Western missteps in different parts of the world.” 158 The problem with this campaign is it can be difficult to distinguish between simple chaotic actions meant to destabilize the Western world order or actions taken to distract domestic audiences from homegrown Russian problems.

**Deflecting Domestic Attention to the External**

When there is trouble at home, a common political tactic is to create some of kind tension abroad and distract domestic audiences. Putin is known for his strong dislike of the ‘color revolutions,’ such as the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004 and the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003. These types of revolutions represent the kind of populist uprisings that bring lead to a change in governance. From a Russian point of view, these revolutions are construed by Western powers to infringe on Russia’s traditional territory. In particular, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004 is seen by Russia as completely fabricated and formed by Western governments to put into place leaders backed by them. This dislike was whipped into a fear in 2011 and 2012 when Russia experienced its own slew of street protests “against vote-rigging in parliamentary elections and more directly against the system of rule.” 159 These protests were compounded by surveys that suggested that many Russians were prepared to protest. Watching how other autocratic governments fell across Eurasia may have been concerning for Putin, particularly when such protests happened in his own country. This may have driven his actions towards an external action that could distract Russians.

In light of this, the annexation of Crimea could be seen as a sort of a “color counter revolution.” 160 Russia may have felt trapped and one potential way to deflect attention from domestic problems, such as potential protests, is by staging an annexation for Russian speakers who required help from their home country. In other words, it’s a classic diversionary tactic policy, where international matters become matters of nationalist pride.

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157 Allison (2014) p. 1281
159 Allison (2014) p. 1290
160 Ibid.
Russia suffers from countless infrastructure problems, so much so that in 2014, 10,068 people died as a result of a fire in 2014 compared to the 3,275 people who died in the United States. Distracting from this is not only important for Putin, it’s essential to maintain his grip on power.\textsuperscript{161} It not only fomented an increase in nationalism domestically, it also distracted from Russia’s economic sluggishness and internal political corruption. These internal problems had been a constant struggle for Putin domestically, as living standards grew in other post-Soviet states but not in Russia itself. Furthermore, the price of oil dropped drastically in 2014. What does this have to do with Russia? One of Russia’s largest exports is oil and thus, this price drop severely impacted Russia’s exports and caused an economic slump within the country that could not be easily rectified. Putin’s approval ratings skyrocketed with the annexation, and he rode “on the crest of renewed populist support, and something of a Putin personality cult has been forming. This has allowed him to reinforce further central control in Russia over dissent and criticisms of the existing power structure.”\textsuperscript{162} Putin’s actions in this regard can be seen as opportunistic as with this support comes the ability to make changes within the government that could increase his own standing. He has been able to crack down on opposition politicians such as Alexei Navalny and increase his own party’s standing in the Russian government. In other words, the annexation served as a domestic tool for Putin to use to reassert his own leadership.

\textbf{Implications}

What all of this tells us about securitizing political identity as a tactic is interesting, as it is evidently not a universal tool. While Russia has chosen to adopt it in certain cases such as Crimea and South Ossetia – it is by no means used everywhere. Securitization asks whether or not an emergency situation has been created to the extent that exceptional measures that are out of the ordinary can be taken with the consent of the audience. However, the nature of securitization also claims that security is what is spoken, not what is objective fact. Hence, Russia’s securitization of the political identity of Russian speakers just has to convince an audience that will support Putin. This is inherently complex as that further begs the question – to what audience is the securitization directed towards? Putin’s narrative about the historic legacy of the Russkiye mir and illegitimacy of the Euromaidan revolution seem to be aimed towards a domestic audience. However, that audience is only fed information from Russian government information that is fed both from Putin himself and from Russian state-controlled television. On an international level, the Russian narrative seems to exist to foment the chaos of the situation and serve to create some degree of uncertainty, therefore limiting punitive action against the Russian state. Concerning the Crimeans themselves, the analysis must be nuanced. There are three main groups of people in Crimea: pro-Ukrainians, pro-Russians and the Crimean Tartars. While pro-Ukrainians have generally left the peninsula, Crimean Tartars who remained are branded as extremists and terrorists. What is left is the pro-Russians, who


\textsuperscript{162} Allison (2014) p. 1292
speak out in favor of the annexation. This aids Putin’s narrative because it means the only audience willing to speak out from within Crimea is the one that accepts Russian control.

The role of political identity as a tool to be securitized will most likely remain geopolitical in nature, only to be used when convenient. The actual reasons behind the annexation, however, are multi-faceted, the most prominent amongst them being the acquisition of oil and gas reserves in the Black Sea. As mentioned earlier, this part of the narrative along with many other bits and pieces, are not included in the traditional Russian discourse surrounding Crimea. Furthermore, much of the historical and cultural nuance is lost when just examining Russian discourse because as a narrative – it serves only to support and further the perspective that Russia is selling. Using identity calls back to the historic tradition of the Kievan Rus and allows Russia to sell the idea of a shared historical memory to not only Ukraine, but also to domestic Russian audiences and to the world at large. Securitizing political identity did not just happen by chance, it is a strategic tactic that Russia believes has a legal basis in the precedent from Kosovo and fits into the narrative that Russia has and most likely will continue to sell at the Kremlin, in Crimea and at the UNSC.

VIII. Conclusion

Securitization of any object or idea essentially means taking that one idea and building discourse around it to create an existential threat. When analyzing how Russia rationalized the annexation of Crimea, it is by looking through the lens of securitization that can provide interesting and unique insights. The security of political identity of Russian speakers in Crimea is presented over and over again as the most critical threat to the whole of Russian identity. Whether it is Putin, Churkin or Lavrov – the message is the same: steps must be taken to ensure the continued safety and security of Russian speakers living in Crimea. When no such sufficient action was taken by the Ukrainian government or international organizations, by the nature of its own discourse, Russia had to annex the region. This existential threat against the Russian speakers (i.e. the Referent Object) had become a concept that the securitizing actor, Russia, could not ignore,

However, like most political speech, what is said and what actions are taken can be radically different. When asking and answering the question of how Russia securitized political identity, the answer falls into series of arguments. Using the ‘political identity argument’ operationalized precedents like the one set in Kosovo, where ethnicity was considered a reasonable strategy to divide a state at war, sowing uncertainty on the international stage. Russia also referenced the illegitimacy of Euromaidan, further creating doubt in how countries how to distinguish between a revolution and coup d’état. Once the Crimeans had voted in an allegedly free and fair referendum, Russia fell back towards legal arguments of self-determination. Lastly, Russia used the ‘good neighbor’ argument, claiming that their help had been asked for by both Yanukovych and the Crimean Prime Minister. All of these
arguments together built a particular environment in which Russia could securitize political identity. This narrative can be likened to pieces of a puzzle, where only certain pieces are used to build the picture. However, that picture is incomplete and relies on partial information that only serves to support the Russian narrative.

What the Russians did provide more depth into the actual reasons why. The secondary part of the question, asking what the actual reasons were for the annexation offers more insight. Perhaps the most under examined reason is the vast resources that the Black Sea holds for Putin. Not only does the area reportedly contain immense untapped gas and oil reserves, but by seizing control of Sevastopol and Ukrainian maritime territory – Russia gains regional prominence in the Black Sea region. Without the potential to develop their own energy, Ukraine also loses its chance to become energy independent and must remain dependent on Russian energy for the foreseeable future. Russia’s seizure of the Sevastopol port also negates any rental payments that the Russia was paying to the Ukraine and allows Russia a warm water port, a long-time strategic goal of Russia. This plays a role into an underlying reason as to Russia’s actions – regional expansion and maintaining the status quo in the region. As Europe has expanded, Russia has increasingly felt threatened by incursions into its sphere of influence. By annexing Crimea, Russia maintains alleged regional importance while expanding their presence into the Black Sea region. Furthermore, this has created wariness on the part of Europe to continue accession for Ukraine – creating an uneasy maintenance of Ukraine has a buffer zone of sorts. On a domestic level by annexing Crimea, Putin is engaging in diversionary foreign policy – meant to distract domestic attention towards an existential threat instead of crumbling infrastructure, corruption and other internal problems.

Securitizing political identity will certainly not be a universal tool adopted by Russia. Not only would it be overwhelming in its scope, it would also not serve the interests of Russia. By choosing to deploy this strategy in geopolitically important cases, Russia maintains a level of uncertainty of when and where it will use this narrative. Ukraine and Russia’s complex historical and cultural relationship is a hotly debated topic. Its inherent complexity and fragmented nature means that it can be operationalized by Russia to serve its purpose in creating a story about Crimea that may not match up reality. Do Russia and Ukraine share “not only a common history, but also a common memory,” – or neither?¹⁶³ What is the legacy of the Kievan Rus and what does the historic movement of peoples within the two countries imply? What is the heritage of Crimea itself? These questions do not have simple one or two words answers. Rather, their answers depend on who is asking the question and what the political motive is behind the answer. It is that inherent complexity that exposes the Russian narrative as one that relies on its simplicity. Instead of using the complicated nature of

¹⁶³ Kappeler, Andreas (2014) Ukraine and Russia: Legacies of the imperial past and competing memories Journal of Eurasian Studies 5, p. 112
history, it uses bits and pieces that may be factual, but when put together – the narrative is not as simple as Russia would have the world see.

What is noteworthy to conclude with is that securitization does not imply an objective existential threat. The suppression of the Russian speaking minority in Ukraine may have been the tool through which Russia justified its actions – but it did not have to be true in order for it to be used to great effect. Using political identity as the Referent Object for its securitization was useful, but not entirely accurate. As mentioned earlier, there are a multitude of other reasons for why Russia annexed Crimea, and protecting Russian speakers is not particularly convincing as one. Rather, it is adopted as rhetoric used to convince others and create chaos. Framing both the question and answer in this narrative served Russia’s interests as the securitizing actor. Will Russia securitize political identity again? Instead of looking at the existence of Russian diaspora communities to answer this question, it may be better to look at where Russian geopolitical interests are threatened and observe discursive techniques to watch for similar language patterns. As it happened in South Ossetia in 2008 and again in Ukraine in 2014 – there is now two precedent cases and every chance that this effective tactic will be chosen and used again.

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