T.C.
SAKARYA UNIVERSITY
INSITUTION OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

VLADIMIR PUTIN AND RUSSIA'S WAR DECISIONS: ANALYZING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DETERMINANTS OF MILITARY INTERVENTIONS IN GEORGIA, CRIMEA, SYRIA, AND UKRAINE

Rinata TERKULOVA

PHD THESIS

Thesis Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Ali BALCI

FEBRUARY - 2024

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"This thesis was defended face to face on 08/02/2024 and was majority vote accepted by the jury members whose names are listed below."

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Rinata TERKULOVA

08/02/2024

THE PREFACE

Growing up in a post-Soviet country, living in the south of France, I was haunted by the question of what would happen if I was brought up in a Turkish environment, was a Tatar by nationality, and didn't know my own language certain traits of my character did not give me peace of mind whether they had anything to do with my roots. During my doctoral work I was lucky enough to answer this question Do roots matter and is own language so important?

I thank the government of Turkiye and its wonderful people for the opportunity to live, enjoy, and understand the existential questions that haunted me. This most pleasant bright and happy moment of my life would not have been possible without the support of YTB.

I would like to thank the rector of Sakarya University Professor Hamza Al for his unique ability not only to manage a huge university but also to see in each student a separate personality.

I would like to say the greatest thanks to my supervisor Professor Ali Balci, a leading experts in the field of international relations, for his guidance in choosing a topic, academic advices, generosity, and helpfulness in various issues.

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This wonderful period of my life allowed me to understand that the roots are the basis of everything.

P.S. This work is dedicated to my grandmother, Nelly, the daughter of a Soviet general procurator, who taught us not to idealize any power. Having survived the death of her mother at a young age, and the condemnation and murder of her father, she kept smiling through the journey of her life. She gave the profound significance of every step I take. She convinced me of my worthiness of admiration in every stride. She taught me to greet every person I meet with a smile as I journey through life. As I continue on this path, I do so with a smile, cherishing all the memories with her in my heart.

Rinata TERKULOVA

08/02/2024

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ABBREVIATION

ABM : Anti-Ballistic Missile
BACE : Belief in Ability to Control Events
CC : Conceptual Complexity
CIS : Commonwealth of Independent States
COVID : Coronavirus Disease
DUMA : Federal Assembly of Russia
DIS : Distrust of Others
EU : European Union
EUCOM : European Command of United States Forces
FSB : Federal Security Service
GRU : Main Intelligence Agency
ING : Ingroup Bias
ISI : Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
KGB : Committee for State Security
LTA : Leadership Trait Analysis
NATO : North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO : Non-Governmental Organization
PWR : Need for Power
RF : Russian Federation
SSR : Soviet Socialist Republic
SC : Self-Confidence
UN : United Nations
UNSC : United Nations Security Council
USA : United States of America
US : United States
USSR : Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WTO : World Trade Organization

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ÖZET

Başlık: Vladimir Putin ve Rusya'nın Savaş Kararları: Gürcistan, Kırım, Suriye ve Ukrayna'daki Askeri Müdahalelerinin Psikolojik Belirleyicilerinin Analizi

Yazar: Rinata TERKULOVA

Danışman: Prof. Dr. Ali BALCI

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Bu tez, siyasi liderlerin kişilik özelliklerinin dış ilişkilerdeki kilit kararları nasıl belirlediğine dair temel bir soruyu sormaktadır. Diğer bir deyişle, bu çalışma uluslararası ilişkilerdeki siyasi süreç ve sonuçların, siyasi aktörlerin kişisel özelliklerine bağlı olarak nasıl ve ne zaman şekillendiğini anlamaya çalışmaktadır. Dış politika kararlarının bireysel düzeydeki belirleyicilerine özel bir vurgu yapan bu tez, Rusya'nın Putin döneminde aldığı üç önemli savaş kararının - Gürcistan, Ukrayna ve Suriye müdahaleleri - nedenlerini araştıracaktır. Bu tez, siyasetteki kişiliklerin karar alma süreçlerindeki rolünü ve dış politika süreçlerinde kritik bir rol oynama potansiyeline sahip olduğu akademik varsayımından kaynaklanmaktadır. Dış politika kararlarının siyasi liderliğin rolünü anlamak bu tezin temel amacıdır. M. Hermann'ın liderlik özellikleri analizi ve neoklasik realizm çerçevesi gibi önlemler benimsenmiştir. Liderlik özellikleri analizleri ve neoklasik gerçekçilik çerçevesi, mevcut Rus dış politikasına dair içgörü sağlamak ve Putin'in siyasi liderliğinin, hakim yönetim pratiği olarak ve uluslararası dış politika süreçlerine olan etkisinin olasılıklarını incelemek için kullanılmaktadır. Neoklasik gerçekçilik, dört savaş kararının bireysel düzeydeki belirleyicilerini araştıran bu tezde bir dış politika kararları teorisi olarak kullanılacaktır. Çalışma, sistemik ve devlet düzeyindeki belirleyicilerin açıklayıcı gücünü kabul ederken, Putin'in kişilik özelliklerinin Rusya'nın son savaş kararlarını açıklamada önemli bir rol oynadığını öne sürmektedir. Asliında da Putin yönetimindeki Rusya, kişilik ve liderlik tarzına yapılan vurguyla ilişkilendiriliyor ve modern Rusya'daki karar alma sürecinde önemli bir rol oynuyor. Bu çerçevede, tez, Vladimir Putin'in kararlarını nasıl çerçevelediğini takip etmeyi ve konuyla ilgili mekanizmalarda geniş bir şekilde anlaşılmasına katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rus Dış Politikası, Liderlik Tarzı, Putin, Karar Alma Süreçleri

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: Vladimir Putin and Russia's War Decisions: Analyzing the Psychological Determinants of Military Interventions in Georgia, Crimea, Syria, and Ukraine

Author of Thesis: Rinata TERKULOVA

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Ali BALCI

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This dissertation asks the central question of how the personality traits of political leaders determine key decisions in foreign relations. Put differently, the study attempts to understand how and when political processes and outcomes depend on the personal characteristics of political actors in international relations. With special attention to individual-level determinants of foreign policy decisions, this dissertation will investigate the causes of Russia's three faithful war decisions during the Putin's period in power, Georgian, Ukrainian, and Syrian interventions. It arises from the academic assumption that personalities in politics have the potential to generate decision-making, as well as to play a critical part in foreign policy processes. Understanding the role of political leadership in foreign policy decisions is the main objective of this thesis. It adopts both (on distance) measures such as leadership trait analysis by M. Hermann and the neoclassical realism framework. Leadership trait analyses and neoclassical realism framework hereby are used to provide insights into the current Russian foreign policy and examine Putin-style political leadership as the dominant practice of rule as well as prospects of its influence on the international foreign policy processes. As a theory of foreign policy decisions, neoclassical realism provides a useful to systemically analyze and compare causes at three different levels, system, state, and individual. Investigating the individual-level determinants of four-war decisions, this dissertation will employ LTA. While accepting the explanatory power of systemic and state-level determinants, this study argues that Putin's personality traits play a significant role in explaining Russia's recent war decisions. Indeed, Russia under Putin is associated with an emphasis on personality and leadership style and plays a crucial role in the decision-making process in modern Russia. Within this framework, the thesis aims at exploring the multiple frames at various levels of analysis to follow how Vladimir Putin frames decisions and contribute towards a broader understanding of the mechanisms involved concerning the topic.

Keywords: Russian Foreign Policy, Leadership Style, Putin, Decision-Making

INTRODUCTION

This work poses the central question of how we can examine the role of political individuals in the exercise of power within the international relations system and the state structure. The study seeks to comprehend how political processes and outcomes are influenced by individuals in politics and when such influence becomes significant. While this research analyzes political leadership from internal individual processes, its primary aim is to address gaps in understanding individuals in politics, with special attention to the analysis of individual traits and their significance in foreign policy decision-making. The focus is on identifying what works, what doesn't, and why. The diverse range of states, levels, and positions in the international system emphasizes the importance of individuals in politics.

The significance of leadership in understanding international relations is undeniable. Leadership has consistently served as a cornerstone in shaping and executing foreign policy, maintaining its enduring relevance throughout the narratives of international relations (Preston, 2010). Since the inception of the state, the study of leadership has been intricately intertwined with the field of international relations. "Political leaders play a central role in navigating and shaping foreign policy change and continuity (Aggestam & True, 2021). Leaders leverage their resources, such as experience, the ability to communicate effectively, and rapport with followers." However, the role of leadership as an explanatory variable has undergone dynamic evolution over time, oscillating from a comprehensive explanation of a state's foreign policy behavior to a minimized role within the realm of foreign policy for national states (Preston, 2010). The researcher's position is situated on the divide between the study of the individual and the idiosyncratic, on one hand, and the structural and patterned, on the other.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union laid bare the shortcomings of the systems approach, which assumes that states respond mechanically to the distribution of material opportunities in the international system. Scholars in the field of foreign policy have reached a consensus that merely scrutinizing the international system is insufficient for comprehending how states behave and the reasons behind their actions. The emergence of the structural approach was tied to the Cold War, during which individual-level factors were considered less significant in a bipolar system that imposed robust external constraints on the actions of states (Görener & Ucal, 2011).

The breakdown of the Soviet Union highlighted the deficiencies of a structural determinants approach that posits states respond mechanically to the distribution of material capabilities in the international system. Recently, academic criticism has been directed at perceiving foreign policy as a deterministic reaction to structural determinants within the international system. This critique arises from the perspective that this approach falls short of advancing a more comprehensive understanding of the key actors involved in political decision-making (Hudson, 2005). The basic idea is that the actions of a country are not solely determined by structural factors; instead, they are influenced by the individuals who make decisions for the country.

In the last two decades, marked by pivotal global events, there has been a renewed academic fervor in dissecting leadership within foreign policy realms. "The leader, with centralized constitutional power, can exert control over the policymaking and decision-making process as well as the government establishment" (Hu, 2018). This resurgence of interest revitalizes the examination of political leaders as a crucial phenomenon in comprehending foreign policy, particularly in nations like Russia, Turkey, and the United States. These countries play significant roles in global processes of international relations, including events such as the Iraq War, the conflict in Syria, the subsequent economic crisis of 2008, and the ongoing challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has indeed served as a stark reminder of how important effective leadership is in times of crisis, particularly concerning foreign policy, as in no other time is presidential "leadership more important than in times of crisis" (Rutledge, 2020). "Crisis leadership is an essential component of a robust governance structure that would enable resilience" (Watkins et al., 2020). Recent events have vividly showcased the profound influence of leadership decisions and styles on shaping policies during political crises.

Consider the ramifications of the 2020 COVID political crisis in the United States, culminating in the transition of power from a populist leader to the election of a new administration led by President Biden. This transition significantly reshaped the trajectory of U.S. foreign policy. President Biden's administration has exemplified a renewed commitment to multilateralism and a more collaborative approach to global challenges, starkly contrasting the previous administration's unilateral stance (Hart, 2022). President Biden's strategic withdrawal from Afghanistan reflected a departure from prior policies,

emphasizing his critique of past leadership and a deliberate shift in approach (Boys, 2022). However, the logistical challenges faced during the evacuation underscored the intricate link between leadership decisions and their practical execution. Meanwhile, Putin's engagement with the Taliban showcased a distinct leadership style, characterized by calculated geopolitical maneuvering, albeit contradicting established domestic policy (Kaura, 2021; Keskin et al., 2020). The evolving global landscape, marked by tumultuous events like geopolitical power shifts, economic transformations, and unprecedented challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, has revitalized academic interest in studying the role of leadership within international relations. The recent challenges faced by international dynamics underscore the significance of leadership as a crucial determinant of a country's foreign policy, highlighting the pivotal role played by individual leaders in shaping the direction and response of a nation to global events (Kumah-Abiwu, 2016).

Neglecting the substantial influence of leadership on foreign policy decisions poses a significant risk of overlooking critical variables that shape a state's behavior. Leaders play a pivotal role in formulating, implementing, and directing foreign policy, as their personal beliefs, experiences, and styles significantly impact decision-making processes and outcomes (Hermann, 2019). These events have acted as catalysts, highlighting the enduring potential inherent in foreign policy leadership positions. Furthermore, they have exposed the repercussions of entrusting foreign policy decisions to those in charge, as their strategies and methodologies carry significant consequences. The underlying logic is that there are often inconsistencies or conflicts between how leaders perceive their environment and the actual realities, leading to suboptimal foreign policy choices. Therefore, the study of leadership in foreign policy necessitates an examination of factors such as personality, rationality, social environment, individual characteristics, and the perception and image of the external world, all of which are crucial for understanding foreign policy leadership (Hu, 2018; Hermann, 1980). One such leader is President Putin of Russia, known for making key decisions in both foreign and domestic policies. Putin remains popular with the people of Russia and is widely regarded as the embodiment of the concept of "the State is the leader" in international relations (Baev, 2018). Putin's persona has been dubbed the "dash hero" and is often cited as a powerful force in international politics (Sakwa, 2019). His leadership style has been the subject of study by researchers throughout his career.

A controversial figure, Putin has experienced a spectrum of interactions with the world community, from being named Time magazine's Person of the Year to leading Russia to a level of isolation comparable to the Cold War era. Undoubtedly, Putin's management style has been influenced by critical foreign policy decisions for Russia, such as the Russian military interventions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria. In these instances, Putin demonstrated himself as a leader with a certain vision of global affairs. To understand the importance of leadership style in shaping foreign policy, this work aims to answer the question: What was Putin's foreign policy style and worldview? How did Putin's distinctive style influence Russia's foreign policy choices during critical periods and why? Thus, studying the role of Putin's political personality in shaping Russian foreign policy decisions is foundational for a comprehensive understanding of global affairs and the driving motivations behind Russia's actions in the international arena.

Aim of the Study

This thesis endeavours to contribute substantively to the academic discourse within the field of international relations by undertaking an in-depth examination of the pivotal role played by individuals in the formulation of foreign policy decisions. The central inquiry guiding this research is articulated as follows: “To what extent does leadership influence foreign policy, with specific emphasis on the decision-making processes employed by Vladimir Putin in critical junctures?" The research seeks to address this question through meticulous analysis of state-unit level variables, placing emphasis on leadership style as discerned through the lens of political psychology. Specifically, this study undertakes a comprehensive analysis of Vladimir Putin's decision-making responses to the invasions of Georgia in 2008, Ukraine in 2014 and 2022, and Syria in 2015. This analysis incorporates insights from the neoclassical realism framework, with a specific focus on scrutinizing psychological traits exhibited by Putin. By concentrating on the impact of Putin's leadership style, this thesis endeavors to fill a cavity in the existing literature and contribute to a more profound comprehension of the role played by individuals in the intricate realm of foreign policy decision-making. The foundation of this research rests upon the work of M. Hermann, who posits that leadership styles wield substantive influence on decision-making, particularly in critical foreign policy instances.

The methodology employed in this study deviates from conventional approaches, drawing inspiration from both neoclassical realism and political psychology. This innovative approach seeks to bridge the gap between state-level and unit-level explanations within the context of Russian foreign policy. Recognizing the underdeveloped nature of this explanatory paradigm within mainstream scholarship on Russian foreign policy, the thesis strives to articulate an alternative analytical framework. The utilization of a multi-level analysis proves instrumental in gauging the significance of individual actors in the realm of foreign policy decision-making. This approach facilitates a nuanced exploration of the intricate factors shaping political actors' perceptions and decision-making processes. The analysis accentuates the pivotal role played by individual interpretations and calculations in determining foreign policy outcomes.

The principal aim of this thesis is to scrutinize the impact of political individuals on foreign policy decision-making. Specifically, the study centers its focus on the case of Vladimir Putin and his influence on Russia's foreign policy decision-making processes. Through an in-depth examination of Putin's leadership style, the research endeavors to illuminate the role of political individuals in shaping foreign policy outcomes during critical junctures in international relations. This thesis augments existing scholarly discourse by offering a detailed analysis of Putin's responses to the Georgian, Ukrainian (2014/2022), and Syrian cases, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the ramifications of individual leadership on foreign policy decision-making.

Subject of the Study

Why Putin?

The ascent of Vladimir Putin to power in 2000 marked a significant shift in Russian domestic and foreign policy. Putin's presidency was marked by rapid change, as he sought to reassert Russian influence on the global stage (Sarwa, 2004). Putin's tenure in power lasted for more than two decades, during which he served as both prime minister and president, and his rule was characterized by a centralization of power and a focus on promoting Russian interests. The notion of leadership in international relations has gained significant attention in the scholarly discourse after Putin's Munich speech. Starting from the Munich speech, Putin called on world communities for multipolarity,

promoting multipolarity as the ability to make independent decisions, both on global and local affairs, without dependence on hegemon. One of the key features of Putin's foreign policy after the Munich speech became his rejection of the unipolar world order dominated by the West. Putin demonstrated his decisive leadership style, aimed at re-establishing Russia as a global power (Paul, 2016; Hall, 2013). This assertive foreign policy stance was marked by his willingness to challenge Western dominance and pursue Russian interests (Tsygankov, 2018).

This address notably shifted Russian foreign policy under Putin, reflecting a departure from prior strategies. It served as a prime example of where individual leaders' perceptions and actions interact with systemic structures. Putin's speech symbolized a shift toward a more assertive and confrontational stance in global affairs, showcasing the interplay between his beliefs and reactions to the systemic environment, significantly influencing subsequent Russian foreign policy decisions. In addition to his focus on multipolarity, Putin's foreign policy was also characterized by a more aggressive stance towards Russia's sphere of influence. This was evident from Georgia 2008 to Ukraine 2022 including Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Wilson, 2021). Over more than 20 years in power, Putin's relations with the West have been ambiguous. It would seem that from being strategic partners, they evolved into absolute opponents in international affairs. This contradiction reflected a fundamental clash of perspectives between Russia's actions and the principles upheld by the Western world, escalating tensions and significantly straining diplomatic relations between Russia and the West, leading to Russian isolation.

Therefore, it is imperative to acknowledge that a comprehensive analysis of Russia necessitates the inclusion of Putin as a central figure. The intricate landscape of Russian foreign policy spanning the last two decades has undeniably shaped Putin's political leadership and his nuanced perspective on international processes. Overall, Putin's tenure in power was marked by a significant shift in Russian foreign policy, as he aimed to reassert Russian influence on the global stage and challenge the dominance of the West. While his approach faced criticism and controversy, Putin's impact on Russian politics and foreign policy cannot be denied. The execution of decisions, such as the military interventions in Georgia and Ukraine, and the annexation of Crimea, would have been

unattainable without accounting for Putin and his strategic vision of politics and Russia's role within it.

While these decisions faced international criticism, they garnered support among many Russians who perceived Putin as a strong and decisive leader. Additionally, Putin's leadership and foreign policy choices have wielded a substantial influence on Russian politics and society. His economic policies contributed to economic growth and political stability in Russia (Henderson & Mitrova, 2015). While the world's attention is primarily focused on Putin's foreign policy, his domestic leadership should also be studied in detail to understand the reasons and consequences of his decisions. In this context, Putin's consolidation of power domestically is evident through restrictions on political opposition, limitations on media freedom, and the implementation of laws viewed as curbing civil liberties. The interplay between his leadership and the broader socio-political landscape is apparent in measures such as crackdowns on protests, heightened regulatory oversight of independent media, and legislative actions limiting freedom of expression and assembly.

The concept that Putin is a leader with his own vision of how to govern Russia became apparent during the Russian intervention in Georgia for the first time. Putin's foreign policy decisions, such as Russia's military intervention in Georgia in 2008, underscore his proactive approach to foreign affairs, showcasing a readiness to employ military force in defense of perceived Russian interests. Despite Putin's rationale that the intervention aimed to safeguard the Russian-speaking population in South Ossetia, it was met with strong criticism from Western powers, alleging a breach of Georgia's sovereignty. Putin's leadership style during this conflict notably resonated with the Russian populace, portraying him as a strong and decisive leader, bolstering his image as a hero through a direct visit to the conflict zone. This episode not only solidified his popularity among Russians but also signalled a shift towards a more assertive foreign policy approach under his leadership, encapsulating the complex interplay between individual leadership traits, strategic decisions, and their repercussions within the broader international landscape.

Putin's subsequent foreign policy decisions reflect his vision of reasserting Russian power and influence. The pivotal moment in this strategy came with the annexation of Crimea in 2014, serving as a defining episode. For Putin, the annexation represented an opportunity to showcase leadership and bolster his standing among the Russian populace.

This move was prompted, in part, by the outcome of the 2014 Ukrainian presidential election, which saw the victory of pro-Western candidate Poroshenko. Initially congratulating the pro-Russian candidate Yanukovych on his presumed victory, Putin's premature congratulations turned to disappointment and disagreement when the official results were announced (Wilson, 2015).

Putin perceived this political shift as a potential threat to Russian interests, prompting decisive action to secure Crimea, an area of significant historical and strategic importance to Russia. This decision reflects a calculated response to perceived threats and opportunities, intertwining Putin's leadership objectives with broader systemic dynamics, and showcasing how individual actions intertwine with geopolitical shifts to shape foreign policy trajectories. Putin's surging popularity within Russia following the annexation of Crimea and other foreign policy actions played a pivotal role in consolidating his leadership. The significant rise in Putin's domestic approval ratings following these events not only bolstered his position upon returning to the presidency but also served as a crucial factor in overcoming internal challenges, notably the Bolotnaya protests spanning 2011 to 2013.

The surge in Putin's popularity was, in part, a consequence of his assertive foreign policy actions, particularly the annexation of Crimea. Widely perceived within Russia as a triumph and a reclaiming of national pride, this event significantly contributed to the boost in approval ratings and Putin's self-confidence. Such heightened popularity provided Putin with substantial domestic legitimacy, consolidating his position at the helm of the Russian leadership. Furthermore, this increased support played a pivotal role in mitigating the impact of the Bolotnaya protests 2011-2013, a series of widespread opposition demonstrations posing a significant challenge to his authority. Annexation of Crimea Putin's reinforced domestic standing, coupled with his decisive foreign policy actions, fortified his position, enabling him to navigate and ultimately overcome these internal challenges.

Putin's foreign policy vision on military intervention in Syria in 2015 represented a calculated move, aimed at not only expanding Russia's influence on the global stage but also alleviating systemic pressures following the annexation of Crimea. The decision to engage in Syria was perceived as an opportunity to bolster Russia's global standing and showcase its military capabilities, positioning the country as a key player in Middle

Eastern affairs. Moreover, Putin's Syria intervention was strategically crafted to divert international attention away from the aftermath of the Crimea annexation, potentially mitigating the systemic pressures and diplomatic isolation Russia faced following that controversial move. By engaging in Syria, Putin sought to reshape global perceptions of Russia's role and capabilities, particularly in the context of international security and the Russian indispensable place in it. This intentional foreign policy maneuver illustrates the intricate interplay among systemic limitations, leadership initiatives, and strategic calculations. Putin's intervention in Syria wasn't solely about expanding influence; it encompassed managing the consequences of prior actions, illustrating the multi-layered nature of foreign policy choices within the broader scope of international relations. The deployment of Russian troops to Syria was a calculated move aimed at demonstrating Russia's military power and cementing its position as a serious power broker in the Middle East (Matthews, 2019, pp. 12-13). Putin's decision to intervene in Syria was driven by a desire to showcase Russia's military might and establish the country as a key player in resolving international conflicts (Sakwa, 2018).

Putin's leadership style and foreign policy decisions have been characterized by a strong populist element, as he aims to position Russia as a key player on the global stage. Putin's stance was significantly influenced by Russia's abstention in the UN vote on Libya during Medvedev's presidency, which led to the fall of Kaddafi's regime. This experience influenced Putin's approach to the Syrian conflict, where he made it clear that he would do everything possible to keep Assad's regime in power. Putin stated that the main reason for Russia's intervention in Syria was the fight against the Islamic State (Dannreuther, 2022). Despite the defeat of the Islamic State in 2017, Russia's ongoing military presence in Syria served multiple strategic purposes. It extended beyond counterterrorism efforts to maintain influence in the region, solidify support for the Assad regime, safeguard military assets, and project strength globally. By remaining engaged, Russia positioned itself for a significant role in post-war Syria's reconstruction and political negotiations, asserting its geopolitical interests and showcasing military capabilities on the global stage. Putin's primary goal in Syria can be understood as part of a broader strategy to assert Russia's influence in global affairs. Russia's behavior is influenced not only by systemic factors but also by the perception and interpretation of those factors by leaders and the state's internal dynamics. Putin, as a rational actor, is driven by both systemic

pressures and his perception of Russia's position in the international system. In Syria, Putin sought to demonstrate Russia's indispensability in resolving international conflicts. By actively intervening in the Syrian civil war, supporting the Assad regime, and showcasing Russia's military capabilities, Putin aimed to position Russia as a key player in global conflict resolution. He likely perceived a vacuum or diminished presence of major powers, particularly the United States, in the region. This perceived absence provided an opportunity for Russia to fill the void and play a significant role in shaping the outcome of the Syrian conflict. Putin's goal was not merely limited to regional influence but extended to sending a broader message that global conflict resolution could not be achieved without considering Russia's interests and involvement.

Putin's actions in Syria can be seen as a deliberate effort to enhance Russia's standing in global politics by demonstrating its indispensability in resolving international conflicts, thus shaping the narrative around the necessity of Russia's participation in global conflict resolution. According to political analyst Katz (2018), "Putin has seen the Syrian intervention as a way for Russia to regain its great power status and to demonstrate that Russia is a force to be reckoned with in the Middle East." The intervention in Syria provided Russia with an opportunity to build alliances with other Middle Eastern powers, such as Iran and Turkey, and to showcase its military capabilities. However, the success of Putin's strategic calculations in military intervention in Syria was largely dependent on its membership in the international coalition led by the United States. Putin's strategy in Syria relied on being part of a US-led coalition, which gave him cover to act as a serious player in the Middle East. Without the support of the US-led coalition, Russia's intervention in Syria may not have been as successful in achieving its objectives.

Indeed, Putin's decision to intervene in Ukraine in 2022 has had profound implications for Russia's foreign policy, resonating particularly in the Middle East. The global community, including entities like the European Union and the United States, vehemently criticized Russia's actions in Ukraine, resulting in the imposition of economic sanctions. The fallout from the Ukrainian crisis prompted several countries to distance themselves from Russia, impacting Moscow's ties with nations in the Middle East, notably Turkey, Iran, and China. This geopolitical shift compelled Russia to recalibrate its foreign policy priorities, placing greater emphasis on preserving alliances with key Middle Eastern allies, such as Iran and Syria (Sadri Alibabalu, 2017; Joobani & Mousavipour, 2015).

Furthermore, Russia's intervention in Ukraine eroded its standing as a significant player in the Middle East. The actions in Ukraine strained relationships with pivotal Middle Eastern states, especially Turkey, forcing a delicate balancing act between maintaining ties with Russia and safeguarding strategic interests in the region (Karasik, 2018). Putin's intervention in Ukraine aligns with his overarching foreign policy objectives, aiming to expand Russia's global influence and power. However, the choice to pursue these objectives through military means incurred substantial costs, tarnishing Russia's reputation in the international arena. Therefore, while Russia initially secured a heightened role in the Middle East through actions in Syria, its involvement in Ukraine cast doubts on the legitimacy of its actions and undermined its position within the region.

On February 24, 2022, Putin decided to intervene in Ukraine once again. According to reports, six months before the events of February 2022, US intelligence services reported the possibility of an imminent attack on Kyiv by Russia (The New York Times, 2022). Putin used a similar tactic to the conflict in Georgia in August 2008, where Russia attacked the capital Tbilisi, but unlike the Georgian scenario, the blitzkrieg did not happen. Furthermore, Putin declared after six months of conflict that "We haven't really started yet..."(The Moscow Times, 2022). Unlike Western intelligence services that accurately predicted Russia's intervention in Ukraine, Russian intelligence services reportedly gave Putin a forecast that Ukrainians were expecting his intervention in 2022, similar to the Crimean occupation in 2014 (The New York Times, 2022). Putin began preparing for a full-scale intervention in Ukraine long before the events of February 2022 (Foreign Affairs, 2022). It is unclear whether Putin would have intervened in Ukraine if opposition leader Alexei Navalny were free and safe. After an unsuccessful poisoning attempt, Navalny was imprisoned in 2021, leaving the Russian opposition without a clear leader. Later in 2022, another opposition leader, Yashin, was also sent to prison (The Washington Post, 2022).

Putin has consistently employed intimidation and the constant threat of nuclear war as part of his foreign policy approach. During the Valdai forum in 2018, he notably remarked on the possibility of Russia using nuclear weapons, stating, "We will go to heaven as martyrs, and they will just drop dead" (Putin, 2018). The Ukrainian crisis of 2022 exposed the vulnerabilities and corruption within the Russian army. Putin demonstrated the extent to which Russia was willing to go to achieve its foreign policy goals, beginning with the

attack on Kyiv and capturing cities like Bucha, Irpen, and Mariupol (Foreign Affairs, 2022). Putin's intervention in Ukraine was fueled by his perception of the region as part of Russia's sphere of influence, leading him to employ military force to achieve his objectives. His decision-making was marked by swift mobilization of Russian forces towards strategic Ukrainian targets and a dynamic adaptation of strategies in response to changing circumstances. Faced with unexpected resilience from the Ukrainian army, Putin adjusted his focus to the Donbas region, seeking more achievable success (Person and McFaul, 2022). Despite initial ambitions to capture Kyiv, his inclination toward a "small victorious war" strategy, reminiscent of the 2008 conflict with Georgia, encountered resistance. Despite setbacks, Putin persisted with military operations in Ukraine, concentrating Russian forces and employing robust tactics to seize control of cities and towns. His adaptive decision-making showcased flexibility in adjusting tactics according to evolving circumstances. Putin's leadership style remains challenging to comprehend; despite growing authoritarian tendencies, his control over Russian foreign and domestic policy retains an element of unpredictability. This dynamic leadership approach, blending caution and assertiveness, offers an intriguing paradigm in politics where the leader's personality plays a pivotal role.

This thesis employs a multidimensional framework to investigate the reasons behind Vladimir Putin's deployment of military forces in the 2008 Georgian War, the 2014 and 2022 Ukrainian War, and the 2015 Syrian conflict. The argument presented challenges the adequacy of relying solely on the neoclassical realism framework to explain Russian foreign policy choices. Instead, the author posits that examining Vladimir Putin's traits, particularly those influencing his foreign policy decisions in critical situations, is essential for a comprehensive understanding of Russia's interventionist policies. To thoroughly re-examine Russian foreign policy, this study utilizes the neoclassical realism theoretical framework, which underscores the significance of leadership as a unit-level variable shaping foreign policy and grand strategic adjustments in response to the international system. The practical assumption is that individual traits have a causal impact on foreign policy outcomes, gaining explanatory power when considering prominent historical cases of political leadership. The causal effect is not solely a result of rational choices made by leadership to ensure the state's safety, but rather the impact of their distorted view of the international environment, shaped by their beliefs, values, and interpretations of global

dynamics. In this study, therefore, the dependent variable is Vladimir Putin's war decisions during four critical cases: the Georgian, Crimean, Syrian, and Ukrainian crises.

Significance of the Study

Conceptualisation of Russian Foreign Policy

Between 2008 and 2022, Russia pursued an assertive regional foreign policy, aiming to maintain its predominant position in the former Soviet states while simultaneously enhancing its global influence, particularly in the Middle East. This foreign policy trajectory was characterized by decision-making processes that deviated from established discourses, norms, and practices within the domain of Russian foreign policy. Vladimir Putin, serving as both Prime Minister and President during this period, led the two successive governments that orchestrated these strategic initiatives. The present research aims to elucidate the role of Putin's personality in shaping Russian foreign policy, focusing on four conflict cases: Georgia, Crimea, Ukraine, and Syria. Employing a multi-methodological approach, this study seeks to unveil nuanced dimensions within Russian foreign policy decision-making.

The research aims to scrutinize the intricacies of political decision-making within the Russian leadership, focusing on the initiatives undertaken by the leader and their consequential impact on the decision-making process and outcomes. Specifically, the study seeks to explicate Putin's leadership role in the Russian incursions into Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria, including his approach toward war decisions in these instances. It is widely acknowledged that Putin's response to the "Color Revolutions" prompted a proactive shift in Russia's foreign policy. In the Georgian conflict, Putin's political persona as a formidable and charismatic leader played a pivotal role in conflict resolution, shaping his leadership style and contributing to his heightened self-confidence. However, the question of the instigator of the war and the underlying motivations remain unresolved, as existing empirical studies have not comprehensively addressed the personal characteristics of leaders involved in the decision-making process. Similarly, in the Ukrainian crisis, Putin's reactions were fueled by apprehensions concerning NATO's expansion and his conceptualization of Ukraine as an integral component of Russia. Putin asserted in a 2021 article that Ukraine did not exist as a separate state but was an integral part of Russia, bound by historical, cultural, and geopolitical roots. Following the Crimea

referendum in 2014, the issuance of Russian passports, and collaborative infrastructure development, it culminated in the eventual invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. To gain a nuanced understanding of Russian foreign policy, an examination of Putin's political persona within the framework of neoclassical realism, with a focus on leadership trait analysis, becomes imperative.

The three intervention initiatives supported by Putin and his government unfolded amidst conditions of uncertainty and yielded consequential outcomes. Prevailing explanations, such as NATO's eastward expansion, the perceived curtailment of the rights of Russian-speaking populations in former Soviet countries, and the anti-terrorist campaign in Syria, inadequately capture Putin's motivations and foreign policy choices.Traditional theories in international relations often overlook the significance of individual actors and their personal traits in shaping foreign policy decisions. These theories primarily focus on structural factors, such as economic or military power, or operate at the systemic level of analysis, neglecting the intricate and nuanced nature of decision-making processes. These processes are frequently influenced by a myriad of factors, including personality traits, beliefs, values, and emotions of the leaders involved. Therefore, the examination of leadership traits becomes crucial in uncovering novel dimensions of foreign policy decision-making.

Scrutinizing the personal attributes and experiences of political leaders allows for a deeper comprehension of their motivations, preferences, and decision-making processes. This approach facilitates the dismantling of the metaphorical "black box" of political decision-making, elucidating the factors that shape leaders' perceptions of events and their interpretations thereof. Furthermore, understanding the impact of individuals in the realm of politics is not merely an academic pursuit but carries tangible implications for policy-making. Acknowledging the role of personal factors in shaping foreign policy decisions enables policymakers to anticipate the actions and reactions of other states and leaders adeptly, thereby formulating more effective strategies to achieve their objectives. Therefore, for a comprehensive understanding of foreign policy decision-making, it is imperative to integrate the study of leadership traits into traditional theories, enriching the analytical framework and fostering a more nuanced comprehension of the intricate dynamics inherent in political decision-making processes in international relations. By

doing so, we can shed light on the complex and multifaceted processes that underlie the actions of states and leaders in the international arena.

Research Method

The dissertation is a comprehensive study of Russian foreign policy under Vladimir Putin, focusing on the significant role of psychological determinants within neoclassical realism. In a global context characterized by systemic constraints and a dynamic political landscape, the study highlights the importance of carefully examining political leadership at the individual level to gain a comprehensive understanding of state behavior. To achieve this goal, the dissertation uses a multidimensional framework, examining Vladimir Putin's deployment of military forces in key events such as the 2008 Georgian war, the 2014 and 2022 Ukrainian wars, and the 2015 Syrian conflict.

Neoclassical realism, as a theoretical framework, provides a foundation for defining the role of the individuals in politics, recognizing the influence of environmental conditions while arguing that actions are not entirely determined by them. It is argued that the inclusion of individual-level variables in this framework offers a more precise explanatory approach to understanding state foreign policy, moving away from the binary and limited predictions associated with classical/structural realism. This methodological shift aims to address empirical inaccuracies in the field of foreign policy research, especially those that stem from the limitations of classical/structural realism.

In the specific context of this dissertation, it is emphasized that defining Russian foreign policy through the framework of neoclassical realism is necessary but also provides a platform for multifaceted analysis with an in-depth examination of the role of the individual in determining the processes and outcomes of foreign policy decisions. In particular, this assertion stems from the recognition that studying the multifaceted nature of the geopolitical behavior of countries such as Russia requires a more nuanced analytical approach, going beyond neoclassical realism by identifying in detail the role of individuals in politics. Consequently, adopting a broader theoretical perspective becomes imperative to capture the complex interplay of domestic, systemic, and conceptual factors influencing Russian foreign policy, while the study of personality in politics requires identifying the psychological determinants influencing foreign policy decisions. Thus, this study utilizes the theoretical framework of neoclassical realism by emphasizing the

key role of leadership as an individual-level variable that shapes foreign policy and grand strategic adjustments in response to the international system. The practical assumption underlying this approach holds that individual traits have a causal influence on foreign policy outcomes, and this view gains explanatory power through a careful examination of prominent critical cases in which political leadership plays a significant role.

The causal effect is not only the result of rational choices made by the leadership to promote the national interests of the state but rather the impact of their distorted view of the international environment, shaped by their beliefs, values, and interpretations of the international environment. The study further identifies the relevant variables. In this study, the dependent variable is Vladimir Putin's decision-making in four critical cases. Independent variables include NATO's expansion to the East, US unilateralism, support for anti-Russian governments by Western powers, the creation of new norms in the US international system, the overthrow of pro-Russian governments in the Middle East, the isolation of Russia in the Middle East, and the spread of religious fundamentalism in the former USSR region. The proposed research includes a diverse set of methodologies to thoroughly examine the identified variables, covering a wide range of approaches. To extend the theoretical framework, additional methods are proposed to determine the variance of both independent and dependent variables. Notably, the dependent variable—Vladimir Putin's decisions to intervene—manifested itself differently in the four critical cases examined. Significant differences between these cases are obvious. Although Georgia and Ukraine share post-Soviet historical, cultural, and geopolitical roots, the case of Syria demonstrates clear international contextual differences.

To establish a reliable relationship between previously identified independent variables and the dependent variable, the study recommends using a series of follow-up questions. These investigations aim to gain insight into the multifaceted factors influencing Putin's decisions to intervene on a case-by-case basis. These could include examining the key events leading up to each intervention, assessing Putin's beliefs, values, and interpretations of the global landscape, analyzing the influence of his personal experiences and worldview on his decision-making process, and assessing international factors such as economic or military considerations in shaping his choices. Through the implementation of these methodological approaches, the study attempts to offer a more

complete understanding of the complex factors that underlie Putin's decisions to intervene in Georgia, Ukraine and Syria.

Source and Data

The present study employs a multi-method approach to examine the personality traits influencing Vladimir Putin's decisions to intervene in the Georgian, Ukrainian, and Syrian conflicts. The primary data source used in this study is direct interviews with Putin, collected and evaluated from various media sources. Relevant data was gathered using the NexisUni database and Kremlin.ru, the official website of the Russian president, to access and evaluate transcripts of key media interviews. A total of 119 direct interviews, totaling 429,329 words, were collected from Russian and foreign media sources, providing a rich and diverse dataset for trait analysis. To facilitate a nuanced understanding of the factors shaping Putin's foreign policy decisions, the collected data was organized into timelines based on key cases. This allowed for a more focused analysis of the specific factors influencing Putin's decisions to intervene in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria, considering the unique historical, cultural, and geopolitical contexts of each case. The use of timeline separation provides numerous advantages as a data source for leadership trait analysis, enabling a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Putin's personality and its impact on his decision-making.

Georgian crisis before the crisis 19.12. 2007 to 06.08. 2008 and after 10.05. 2009 to 22.05.2010 (date of invasion 08.08.2008).

Crimean crisis 2014 before the crisis 06.09. 2012 to 19.01.2014 and after 07.05.2015 to 27.10.2016 (date of invasion 20.02.2014).

Syrian crisis before the crisis 17.01.2014 to 29.05. 2015 and after 23.06.2016 to 13.11.2016 (date of invasion 30.09.2015).

Ukrainian crisis 2022 before crisis 20.02. 2020 to 23.11.2022 after 16.08.2023 to 05.10.2023(date of invasion 24.02. 2022).

The present research primarily relies on direct question-answer interviews as the primary data source, aiming to avoid prepared speeches by President Putin's staff. Direct interviews provide a relatively spontaneous approach to data gathering compared to other data varieties, such as set-piece interviews, thereby reducing the likelihood of prepared responses by speechwriters or assistants. Moreover, responses to media queries during

direct question-answer interviews offer a wealth of data for analysis, as President Putin's responses are typically spontaneous, especially when discussing significant governmental policies. It is crucial to acknowledge that autobiographical sources or research based on interviews carry the risk of potential misinterpretation by the author, demanding additional vigilance and absolute impartiality from the researcher. The leadership trait analysis methodology employed in this study relies on the statistical results of average scores compared with different groups of world leaders. While this approach has inherent limitations in achieving 100 percent accuracy, it allows the researcher to work within certain limits that help mitigate bias from both the sources and the researcher.

The leadership trait analysis methodology involves the quantitative analysis of leaders' speeches by counting the frequency of specific words and word combinations. This technique leverages an online tool, such as Profiler Plus, to generate a scheme of results contributing to the final leadership style analysis. Profiler Plus, an automatic content analysis software developed by Michael Young and his colleagues at Social Science Automation, facilitates more accurate and efficient processing of large volumes of data. Research has shown that computerized coding systems, such as Profiler Plus, have improved the accuracy of leadership trait analysis by reducing the potential for human error and allowing for more objective and standardized analyses (Quaquebeke and Felps, 2018). The primary approach of Profiler Plus is to code the frequency of word and phrase usage in spontaneous interviews, utilizing an extensive dictionary that was developed for each trait. Since its inception in 2001, Profiler Plus has been used to examine the personal assessment of various political leaders, identifying their strengths and weaknesses by calculating the frequency of particular phrases and words spoken by the leaders and coded by the software. Profiler Plus aims to generate psychological profiles for leaders based on their speech patterns and assess potential threats to their leadership.

Hermann (2003) proposed the leadership traits analysis approach to generate psychological profiles for numerous political leaders. This method involves creating a leader profile for each leader and comparing it to a previously established reference group of world leaders. The reference group is a diverse collection of individuals in politics from various governments and political systems. The collected data are then analyzed using a framework for leadership traits analysis. The purpose of comparing a certain leader's results under analysis with this reference group is to calculate the result accurately

(Hermann, 2003). Therefore, it is essential to compare Putin with world leaders who hold similar positions of power. To this end, Putin's personality was compared with a diverse group sample of 214 other political leaders, and the reference group for content analysis calculation provided by Hermann and colleagues was utilized (Hermann, 2003). To produce a comprehensive and nuanced analysis, this study drew upon various sources, including the neoclassical realism framework, at-distance measurement as the Profiler Plus program, the leadership traits analysis scheme, bibliographical materials, and Russian foreign policy literature. The use of these sources allowed for an in-depth examination of critical events that took place between 2008 and 2022, providing a detailed individual-in-politics perspective and facilitating an understanding of the factors that influenced Vladimir Putin's decisions to intervene in four critical cases.

Thesis Structure

This research study consists of eight chapters delving into Vladimir Putin's decisions to intervene in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria. The introduction chapter offers a comprehensive overview of the research, crucial for understanding the significance of Putin's decisions in Russian foreign policy. The introductory section examines the importance of scrutinizing Putin's choices regarding Russian foreign policy, along with an analysis of the available resources for conducting this examination. To address gaps in the literature, the study formulates pertinent analytical questions and assesses responses to these questions through a literature review.

Chapter 1. Neoclassical Realism and Political Psychology

This chapter introduces the neoclassical realism theoretical framework, serving as the underpinning for the study's themes. The chapter offers a theoretical exploration of the neoclassical realism framework, commencing with the international system and progressing into the role of political leaders. The framework views political leaders as autonomous individuals with distinct traits, including beliefs, objectives, and motivations, that significantly influence their decision-making processes. The chapter delves into how these traits, alongside the interactions of political leaders with the international system, shape foreign policy decision-making. It examines the evolutionary aspects of Putin's influence on decision-making and investigates the personality traits linked to Russia's foreign policy. The objective of this chapter is to convey that neoclassical realism

encompasses a broader array of causal variables, encompassing not only system-level outcomes but also unit-level choices, rendering it a versatile framework for elucidating foreign policy. It elucidates how the neoclassical realist foreign policy framework utilizes political psychology to comprehend when and how individuals in politics matter, particularly in the domains of foreign policy analysis and political psychology.

Chapter 2. Leadership Trait Analysis

This chapter elucidates the leadership trait analysis developed by Hermann. LTA is a quantitative method designed for distant examination. By structuring the political tenure of leaders "in power," this method scrutinizes personalities by traits across various role changes, traumatic events, and audiences. LTA posits that specific words uttered by a leader reflect particular personality traits. The more frequently leaders employ certain words and phrases in their speeches, the more prominent and salient such content is to them, revealing underlying personality traits (Çuhadar et al., 2017). The chapter delves into leadership traits and provides additional insights into the political decision-making process. The traits encompass a distrust of others, a belief in the ability to control events, conceptual complexity, a need for power, an attitude of self-confidence, and a focus on the task. It explains how to utilize the technique to construct an individual profile in foreign policy at the unit level. The chapter expounds on the automatic program Profiler, developed by Young, as a system to calculate results and formulate leaders' traits. The developed program, Profiler Plus, aids in eliminating inter-coder reliability issues, as the automatic system consistently reproduces the encoding scores. Towards the conclusion of the chapter, all the results obtained from the interview with Vladimir Putin are structured and presented in tables. General tables showcase the results of the dynamics between the combined cases from 2008-2022, tracing the changes in Putin's characteristics over the past period of his leadership.

At the conclusion of the chapter, the results derived from the interview with Vladimir Putin were meticulously organized and presented in tabular format. Each table is segregated based on the principal intervened state, encompassing distinct cases: Georgia 2008, Ukraine 2014, Syria 2015, and Ukraine 2022. These cases are categorized by the pre- and post-intervention phases. Additionally, to capture the evolution of Putin's traits over his tenure, general tables are included, illustrating the dynamics between the combined cases over the period from 2008-2022. This structured presentation of the

interview findings enhances the organization and clarity of the results, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the variations in Putin's characteristics over time. The inclusion of general tables enables a holistic assessment of the evolution of Putin's traits and allows for a comparison of the shifts in his leadership style over time.

Chapters 3-6. Case Studies

These chapters serve as case studies employing the neoclassical realism framework to analyze state-level and unit-level variables in Russian foreign policy. Each case delves into theoretical, analytical, and empirical contributions to the academic literature concerning Russian foreign policy and Putin's outcomes. The analysis is framed through the lens of system structure/unit-level variables, as emphasized by the neoclassical realist framework.

The chapters identify neoclassical realism framework as:

1.systemic stimuli 2 structural modifiers 3.Relative Distribution of Power and Polarity, 4. Clarity 5. Permissive strategic environment. As for the unit-level variables, it identifies 1. Strategic culture of Russia 2. Leader’s perception 3.Domestic Institutions 4. State-Society Relationship.

These variables define the broad parameters of the Russian intervention strategy and its negotiating alternatives with Western Powers and the dynamically intervened states. The research analyzed Putin's traits in each case, developing his leadership image by examining his leadership style using Hermann's leadership trait analysis. The analysis identified when and how Putin's leadership traits became significant in foreign policy, offering an alternative explanation for political events. The study systematically examined every answer Putin provided in direct interviews to evaluate the accuracy of the developed leadership image. To assess the precision of the leadership image, the study compared Putin's traits to the average scores of 214 world leaders. This comparison enabled predictions about how a leader with a similar style to Putin's would conduct themselves in international affairs. The study then compared these predictions to assessments in research literature and biographies, finding a good fit between the data and expert observations. This approach provides an opportunity to scrutinize Putin's influence on notable events in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria in the case chapters.

Literature Review

Understanding Russia's foreign policy behavior has long challenged scholars in international relations. This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive review of contemporary academic discourse on Russian foreign policy, with a focus on the role of Vladimir Putin in international relations. The primary objective is to assess methodologies employed in analyzing Putin's influence on Russian foreign policy across system-, state-, and individual-level variables. To achieve this, the chapter begins with a detailed review of relevant literature to offer insights into existing academic perspectives on Russian foreign policy. Subsequently, it delves into the individual-level literature, examining Putin's leadership style, personality, and impact on Russian foreign policy. This literature review underscores the importance of considering both individual-level and system/state-level variables in comprehending Russian foreign policy behavior. The subsequent section critically evaluates various approaches and methodologies employed to study Putin's role in Russian foreign policy, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of each perspective. Identifying gaps in current research, the chapter emphasizes the need for further exploration into Russian foreign policy and Putin's political personality.

In Bobo Lo's (2009) books, "Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing, and the New Geopolitics" and "Russia and the New World Disorder," (2015) the focus is on Russian foreign policy and its role in international relations. Lo provides a compelling analysis of contemporary global politics, emphasizing Russia's relationship with the West, which he sees as marked by mutual mistrust and hostility. The author attributes Russia's growing geopolitical ambitions to the overall crisis of the international system and the perceived weakening of US foreign policy, particularly evident in the aftermath of strategic interventions like the Iraq war. Lo underscores the significance of the NATO peacekeeping operation, which relied on support from countries like Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Central Asian nations for military operations. As NATO airfields in Central Asia decrease, the importance of these territories for Russia grows. The mistakes made by the Bush administration in the Iraq war have, according to Lo, contributed to a decline in the global authority and image of the United States, fostering anti-American sentiments in Europe and division within the North Atlantic alliance.

The author explores how Russia's increased political activity on the international stage is influenced by the growing imbalance in the Middle East and fluctuations in oil and raw materials prices. Lo argues that Moscow perceives the rise of other nations as an

opportunity to assert national sovereignty against Western hegemony. He highlights Russia's desire to become a "third pole" in the emerging global multipolar order, aiming for a distinct strategic identity and a balanced relationship with both the United States and China. Putin envisions Russia as an "equal partner" to both powers without becoming overly dependent on China. One of the book's strengths is Lo's ability to synthesize diverse sources and perspectives, incorporating insights from scholars, policymakers, and experts. He effectively traces the historical roots of tensions between Russia and the West, providing a comprehensive view of the long-term dynamics shaping the current geopolitical landscape.

Andrei P. Tsygankov's (2009) book, "Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity," makes a significant contribution to Russian foreign policy analysis. Tsygankov argues that Russian foreign policy is shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including historical legacies, domestic politics, and international pressures. He emphasizes the concept of national identity as a key driver, asserting that Russia has been in a political identity crisis since the Soviet Union's collapse, with competing visions vying for influence. Despite these conflicts, Tsygankov identifies continuities in Russian foreign policy, including a commitment to great power status, regional stability, and cooperation with major powers.

Tsygankov's research analyzes Russian foreign policy using the theoretical framework of Statism, Westernism, and Civilizations within the timelines of the Yeltsin and early Putin years. He provides insights into the principles and foundations of foreign policy choices based on political individuals in the Russian Federation, offering an understanding of their roles. However, the research refrains from characterizing Putin according to different schools of thought, and it lacks a detailed examination of Putin's inner circle, which gained relevance during his second term and the 2012 presidential election. While Tsygankov's work sheds light on the factors shaping Russian foreign policy, this thesis suggests supplementing it by emphasizing the importance of examining individual decisions and actions of Putin and his inner circle. The goal is to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the overall direction of Putin's foreign policy by considering the influence of these key individuals.

Additionally, Tsygankov's research explores critical events in US-Russia relations, focusing on the Russian-Georgian conflict. It highlights Russia's reaction to perceived

threats and its focus on post-Soviet interests. The Kremlin viewed NATO's presence as a threat and sought to assert itself as an honest broker in the region. The authors stress the Russian public's widespread perception of NATO advancing dangerously close to Russia's borders, contributing to tensions in the relationship. Tsygankov's work offers a nuanced analysis of Russian foreign policy, emphasizing the role of national identity. However, this thesis suggests enhancing the analysis by considering individual decision-makers, particularly Putin and his inner circle, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Russia's foreign policy direction.

In their article "Geopolitical Transformations in the Caucasian-Caspian Region," A. Dobrev and A. Dugin (2005) present a Russian perspective on geopolitical processes in the region, arguing that it should be viewed as a coastal zone from the position of the Land (Russia) and included in the sphere of continental influence. From the perspective of the Sea (USA, NATO), the region should serve as a springboard for expansion into Eurasia. The authors highlight events that influenced Russia's political reactions, including the NATO summit in 2004 and the expansion of2/3 the Alliance, bringing it closer to Russia's borders. They note the increased activity of NATO in the Caspian and Black Sea regions, particularly after the official NATO summit in Istanbul in 2004, where the organization expressed "special attention" to Central Asia and the Caucasus. The article highlights the inclusion of several countries in the area of responsibility of the US European Command and the Central Military Command, signaling a growing American military presence in the region. The authors point to key diplomatic developments, such as Uzbekistan declaring itself the main US partner in Central Asia and the establishment of US military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Georgia. They interpret these actions as part of a US geopolitical strategy to diminish Russia's influence in the post-Soviet Union. According to Dugin and Dobrev, the Western military activities in countries like Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Moldova serve as a direct route for NATO from Europe to Afghanistan, contributing to the reduction of Russia's political influence in the region.

Norbert Eitelhuber (2009) argues in his article "The Russian Bear: Russian Strategic Culture and What it Implies for the West" that Western policymakers often misunderstand Russian foreign policy due to a lack of consideration for Russia's strategic culture rooted in its history and geography. He contends that Russia, despite not engaging in a large-

scale arms race post-USSR collapse, maintains a reliance on nuclear strategic forces for defense. Eitelhuber sees the war in Georgia as a manifestation of Russia's strategic culture, driven by a tit-for-tat policy with the West, eroding trust. Russia perceives threats to its Eurasian dominance but not with imperial ambitions. Instead, it seeks to maintain its current dominance in the Caucasian region and the Black Sea. The author emphasizes the increasing importance of economic power in Russian strategic culture, with a shift toward economic cooperation with the West. Russia, post-Soviet collapse, has aimed to recover its position among great powers, improve citizens' quality of life, and forge its unique national character. Economic considerations, according to Eitelhuber, play a critical role in Russia's strategic thinking, fostering a civilizing influence on its strategic culture. The existing literature on Russian foreign policy, focusing on unit-level analysis, underscores the significance of Putin's individual traits, motivations, and beliefs in shaping foreign policy choices and influencing broader system-level variables.

Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy's (2013) study, "Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin" offers a detailed analysis of Vladimir Putin's leadership style and its influence on Russia. The book identifies key identities, including Statist, History Man, Survivalist, Outsider, Free Marketeer, and Case Officer, contributing to Putin's worldview and shaping his policies. The study highlights his centralized control preference and zero-sum decision-making, rooted in his KGB background. Additionally, it explores his domestic policies, crackdown on dissent, and efforts to project a populist image. The authors assert that Putin's foreign policy aims to restore Russia's global status and counterbalance Western influence. Hill's research emphasizes the significant impact of Putin's personality on Russia's foreign policy decisions.

Marc Galeotti (2015), a scholar on Russian politics, presents a comprehensive analysis of Vladimir Putin's government and its functioning. In his various works, including "Spetsnaz: Russia's Special Forces", "Vory: The Story of Russian Organized Crime" (2018), and "We Need to Talk About Putin: Why the West gets him wrong, and how to get him right" (2019), Galeotti argues that Putin's regime is not a typical authoritarian system but rather operates on a basis of "cronyism." According to Galeotti, Putin relies on a network of loyalists and oligarchs, predominantly wealthy businessmen with government connections, to maintain his political power. In exchange for their loyalty, these oligarchs are allowed to accumulate wealth and influence, and corruption becomes

a crucial element in securing the support of Putin's allies. This creates a system of mutual dependence, enabling Putin to control those around him.

Galeotti's (2022) book, "Putin’s War: From Chechnya to Ukraine," offers a detailed analysis of Russian military forces, tracing their evolution from the Soviet Union's collapse to the reforms implemented under Putin's rule. The work covers various aspects of Russia's military, including doctrine, armed branches, covert operations, and more. Galeotti explains that Putin's foreign policy is shaped by efforts to rebuild and modernize the military, citing successes in conflicts such as the second Chechen war, operations in Georgia, Crimea, and Syria. However, Galeotti notes that the recent invasion of Ukraine indicates that the high-spending military reform may not have been entirely successful. Despite the challenges, the book is recommended for anyone seeking an understanding of Russian military politics and strategy. Overall, Galeotti's analyses provide valuable insights into the dynamics of Putin's government, emphasizing the role of cronyism and the significance of military reforms in shaping Russia's political landscape.

E. Götz's (2017) exploration of Russian foreign policy from a neoclassical realism perspective, particularly focusing on Putin's traits. In the article "Putin, the State, and War: The Causes of Russia's Near Abroad Assertion Revisited," Götz categorizes existing literature into four approaches for analyzing Russian foreign policy. These approaches include Putin's professional background and Cold War mindset, domestic political factors, aspirations for superpower status, and geopolitical imperatives. The author emphasizes the influence of leaders' beliefs and worldviews on foreign policy formulation and execution, specifically underscoring Putin's role in shaping Russian policy due to the centralized power structure. The study identifies key points about Putin's leadership, cautioning against oversimplifying complex dynamics solely based on his personality. It asserts that Putin's goal of restoring Russia's hegemony in the Post-Soviet region has driven actions like the annexation of Crimea and intervention in Syria. The author argues that historical evidence suggests continuity in Russia's assertive policies, reflecting a long-term strategy to reassert influence.

The review notes Yeltsin's use of energy weapons in the 1990s as indicative of persistent motivations in Russian foreign policy. Despite domestic upheavals, the study suggests that fundamental drivers guiding Russia's foreign policy remain stable, reflecting enduring strategic goals and pragmatic use of power. The examination of Putin's inner

circle is highlighted, emphasizing its significance in shaping both domestic and foreign policies. Scholars delve into the dynamics, power structures, and informal connections within the inner circle, revealing its impact on decision-making processes and policies. The review concludes that understanding the interplay between Putin's inner circle and foreign policy decisions provides a nuanced understanding of how personal relationships influence global matters.

Ian Bremmer and Samuel Charap's (2007) article, "The Siloviki in Putin's Russia: Who They Are and What They Want," provides a comprehensive analysis of how Putin has shaped the Russian domestic elite and established a loyal cabinet. Unlike previous studies, the article focuses on Putin's inner circle, specifically the Siloviki group, shedding light on key components of the Kremlin's decision-making processes. The authors identify two main elite groups, liberals and technocrats, with technocrats holding significant domestic power. The article examines Putin's KGB background and conducts biographical analyses of his cabinet members. However, it does not delve into the internal features of Putin's leadership or explain why he chose a temporary successor from the liberal camp, leaving these aspects unexplored in their analysis.

Tuomas Forsberg and Christer Pursiainen's (2017) article, "The Psychological Dimension of Russian Foreign Policy: Putin and the Annexation of Crimea," explores Vladimir Putin's decision to intervene in Ukraine in 2014 through a political psychology lens. The authors advocate for incorporating psychological methodologies into International Relations analysis, aiming to uncover the individual characteristics that influence foreign policy decisions, particularly in the context of Russia's actions in Crimea. The article reviews existing political psychology methods and applies various psychological theories, including groupthink, prospect theory, operational code, personality traits, and emotions, to explain Putin's decision-making. The authors argue that conventional political theory often overlooks individual characteristics, emphasizing the importance of psychological approaches in understanding Putin's intervention in Crimea. While the research framework presented is deemed intriguing, the authors suggest further elaboration and refinement. They propose creating a precise portrayal of Putin's leadership style through a neoclassical framework, advocating for a comparative analysis. To enhance their approach, the authors recommend incorporating more detailed case timelines and specific traits, such as utilizing leadership trait Analysis (LTA) results as it could significantly

contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between individual psychology and foreign policy decisions.

Despite the fairly voluminous literature on Russian foreign policy, encompassing analyses at the state, systemic, and individual levels, there remains a clear limitation in the multifaceted analysis of critical cases of Russian foreign policy. The use of a three-level analysis is essential for a detailed understanding of the processes and consequences of these decisions. In this work, the descriptive nature of intervention begins to explain the systemic state levels and examines in detail Vladimir Putin's application. It scrutinizes the political psychological determinants that influenced his decision in this case within the framework of neoclassical realism. While existing literature at the individual level explains Vladimir Putin's decision, it is limited by the explanatory power of his previous experience in the KGB or elements associated with his biography and decision-making system.

Nevertheless, this work stands out as an attempt to explain Vladimir Putin not just as a person but as a political figure. It delves into the psychological determinants influencing his political decisions, providing a nuanced understanding of Putin's leadership style during a specific period. This work aims to eliminate the possibility of a distorted personal perception of the author regarding a political figure. The analysis relies on indicators obtained through automated content analysis using a template prepared by Hermann, ensuring a systematic approach. This method helps unveil why Putin as a political individual behaved in a certain way in four critical cases, while neoclassical realism explains the environmental conditions, providing empirical evidence under which Putin made his foreign policy decisions.

CHAPTER 1: NEOCLASSICAL REALISM AND POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY: A THEORY OF FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS

This chapter discusses neoclassical realism theory and its application to the study of individuals in politics. It examines state-level units' variables and the importance of political psychology methodology in researching political actors. The first part explains the neoclassical theory framework, which includes system-level (independent) variables such as polarity, systemic modifiers, clarity, permissive or restrictive strategic environment, and unit-level variables such as leaders' perception, strategic culture, domestic institutions, and state-society relationship. These variables are linked to dependent variables, which in the neoclassical theory framework is foreign policy. Special attention is given to political psychology as a significant aspect of leadership style, crucial in analyzing foreign policy decision-making processes and outcomes.

The chapter starts with an explanation of the neoclassical realism theoretical framework as two sets of variables: system-level and unit-level variables. System-level variables are external factors that influence state behavior, such as polarity, systemic modifiers, and the strategic environment. Unit-level variables, on the other hand, are internal factors such as leaders' perception, strategic culture, and domestic institutions, shaping the state's foreign policy decisions. The second part of the chapter dedicates itself to a general observation of political psychology as a theory and existing methodology. It explains how political psychology as a field can explain individuals in politics and, under which conditions, personal characteristics can influence the state's foreign policy.

This chapter underscores the pivotal role of leadership in shaping a nation's foreign policy, emphasizing the need to contextualize a state's global position while recognizing the significant influence wielded by leaders. It delves into an analysis of the multi-methodological approach's potential application to Russian foreign policy under Vladimir Putin's leadership. By integrating diverse tools and methodologies, this analysis aims to unravel the intricate layers of Putin's decision-making processes, encompassing historical, geopolitical, and individual elements that mold Russia's global engagements. This comprehensive exploration seeks to illuminate the interplay between Putin's leadership style and its impact on Russian foreign policy, providing insights into the

complexities of leadership dynamics within the context of Russia's international interactions.

1.1. System Level (Independent) Variables

Neoclassical realism, a school of thought in international relations, offers criticism of neorealism, another type of realism. One of its main critiques is that neorealism cannot effectively predict the foreign policy behavior of states (Taliaferro, 2001, p. 133). According to Taliaferro, this failure to answer important questions is a major flaw in neorealism, and neoclassical realists argue that it cannot provide guidance on what states should do when faced with difficult conditions. The neoclassical realist framework considers the international system as the independent variable, beyond the control of actors. This system's pressures are seen as the most significant factor behind the foreign policy behavior of states, but they only manifest through unit-level variables such as the perceptions of elites, leaders, and domestic politics. Like realism, the school of neoclassical realism gives great importance to the concept of power in the international system. However, there is no consensus on how to define and operationalize power. According to neoclassical realists, power refers to the state in which states can influence and direct their rivals or have significant resources. They also believe that there is a distinction between power sources and potential and the interests that guide a country's foreign policy (Rose, 1998, pp. 151-152).

Neoclassical realists have a similar opinion to structural realists on the need for foreign policy to conform to the international system. However, according to them, states cannot always adapt their policies to this environment. The reason for this situation is that the stimulus coming from the system is misunderstood, the decision-making processes are long or complex, and the social resources cannot be mobilized (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 139). Rose argues that the scope and extent of a country's foreign policy are due to its position in the international system and especially its relative material power capacities. Because relative material power determines the basic parameters of the foreign policy of the actors. But the impact of relative power on any foreign policy is indirect and complex; because systemic pressures are exerted through unit-level intervening variables (Rose, 1998, pp. 151-152). Neoclassical realists share the belief with structural realists that foreign policy should align with the international strategic environment. However, they

acknowledge that actors sometimes misinterpret systemic stimuli. In such situations, different decision-making processes, based on actors' individual characteristics and their inability to mobilize social resources, may isolate them from the international arena. Furthermore, since various foreign policy options can be appropriate responses to a particular international environment, the choice of a particular policy among several acceptable policy options depends on the dynamics and actors in domestic politics. Thus, the domestic policy environment, institutions, and interactions can influence foreign policy decision-makers' perceptions of international issues, their decision-making processes, and their ability to implement chosen policies. Neoclassical realism theorists aim to understand actors' national security behaviors by considering both domestic politics and the international system, creating a mixed picture (Ripsman et al., 2016, pp. 33-34).

According to the neoclassical realism theoretical framework, a state's foreign policy is limited by the constraints and opportunities presented by the international system in the long run. Zakaria emphasizes that the influence of actors in the international system on foreign policy should be the primary focus. This is because a state's relative position in the international system is determined by its internal capacities. Therefore, foreign policy theories that prioritize national, bureaucratic, or micro-level factors should also take into account how the international environment shapes the state's preferences (Zakaria, 1992, p. 197). For example, Russia's regional policy can be viewed as a reaction to regional power competition. According to neoclassical realism, the relative amount of material power resources possessed by countries shapes their foreign policy size and ambition in the long run. When states experience an increase in their relative power, they may seek greater influence abroad, and as their power decreases, their actions and ambitions decrease as well. Therefore, a foreign policy theory limited to systemic factors would often lead to a major fallacy, as neoclassical realists insist that analysts of the aggressive school of realism are misleading. To understand how states interpret and react to what is happening in the international environment, it is necessary to analyze how they are transformed, taking into account intervening variables at the unit level, such as systemic pressures, decision-makers' perceptions, and the internal structure of the state (Rose, 1998, p. 152).

The current international system is characterized by an unstable horizontal and multipolar structure, in which middle powers challenge great powers. This affects the functioning of the system, even if to a small extent. Neoclassical realists argue that the international system exerts pressure on all countries by bridging the gap between domestic politics and the international system. However, they emphasize that this effect is realized through unit-level variables such as the perceptions of the state's decision-makers and domestic political conditions. Neoclassical realists also argue that international system pressures are the most important reason behind the foreign policy behavior of certain states. The neoclassical perspective directs leaders to investigate the reasons that lead them to certain policies, recognizing that the inherent characteristics of states limit their ability to advance their national interests. Despite systemic constraints, neoclassical realists see the state as a "top-down" structure. Overall, neoclassical realism updates and modifies the neorealist understanding of systemic factors (Dueck, 2005, p. 141).

1.1.1. Polarity

Neoclassical realists, like other realists, employ the term "polarity" to denote the number of great powers or superpowers in a system, based on their control over sufficient material resources and political and bureaucratic tools to extract and mobilize these resources when necessary. Polarity is determined by the distribution of relative capacities among great powers, excluding patterns of cohesion or unity between them. In contrast to some constructivist perspectives, neoclassical realism does not object to explaining polarity using the positivist method (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 45).

Neoclassical theory, akin to other realist theories, assigns significant importance to the nature of polarity and the opportunities and threats it presents for actors. In a bipolar system, the range of activities available to actors is limited, whereas in a multipolar system, the field of activity expands, providing both opportunities and threats. Consequently, miscalculations and misperceptions at the individual level increase the likelihood of war and conflict. Within the framework of neoclassical realist analysis, polarity and systemic variables are crucial in determining the range of activities available to states in the system (Camilla and Sørensen, 2013, p. 369). The number of major powers in a system, or polarity, serves as a clear indicator of the distribution of power in that system. However, structural regulators provide insight into the relative distribution of

capabilities used by states to pursue various strategies. These regulators impact the scope and intensity of the security dilemma, whether between specific states or within regional subsystems. Therefore, at the systemic level, structural regulators play a prominent role in shaping or mediating the behavior of states (Taliaferro, 2000, p. 137).

1.1.2. Systemic Modifiers

Neoclassical theorists emphasize the significance of systemic modifiers as influential factors shaping foreign policy behavior. According to Taliaferro, the security dilemma is an ever-present reality that states cannot escape, but it does not invariably lead to competition or war. In addition to the distribution of power in the international system, other material factors can heighten or diminish the likelihood of conflict. Taliaferro refers to these factors as "structural modifiers," encompassing aspects like the defensive-offensive balance in military technology, geographical proximity, access to raw resources, international economic pressure, regional or bilateral military balances, and the ease with which states obtain resources from occupied territories. These structural modifiers impact the probability of conflict or cooperation on the international stage, focusing more on specific factors than the general distribution of power held by states in the international system, which is considered more overarching (Taliaferro, 2000, p. 137). The mentioned structural modifiers play a substantial role in shaping the functioning of the international system concerning bilateral relations, regional interactions, and global dynamics. This role extends beyond a binary state of conflict or peace and encompasses various behaviors such as war, alliances, and other similar actions. For instance, military exercises conducted by an actor, as suggested by Taliaferro, can influence the actions of other actors. Even if these exercises do not directly impact the alliances or strategies of opponents, they may exert an influence on regional dynamics in the medium term. Another example is the European Union's dependence on natural gas as a raw material, placing the organization in a vulnerable position vis-à-vis Russia and influencing Russia's behavior within the system.

Various factors can alter the strategic interactions of the system's structure and the potential behavior of its units. However, structural modifiers do not uniformly impact the behavior of all states in the system. While some regulators have a similar effect on the behavior of all units, others have limited effects on specific regions, groups of units (e.g.,

great powers versus weak states), or only two units. For example, nuclear weapons have acted as a structural modifier, preventing large-scale wars that could have fundamentally altered the international system both between superpowers and in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East until the end of the Cold War. This regulator ensured the preservation of anarchy, but its impact is minimal and indirect in sub-Saharan Africa and South America, regions where the superpowers have fewer strategic interests (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 41).

Geography has played a significant role in shaping the international system throughout history, with some states gaining an advantage in wars by leveraging this factor. However, neorealists argue that an actor's strength is only meaningful if it can materialize as an active power to inflict a significant blow on an enemy during a real war. In other words, a powerful actor is one that can actively wield its power to achieve its objectives (Rathbun, 2008, p. 301). However, geography is an important structural regulator as it can provide constraints and opportunities for certain actors within a certain system structure. But constraints and opportunities are not always functional in the system as a whole. Physical distance and loss of power, strategic depth of the actor, and the abundance or absence of topographical barriers are factors that affect the security environment in which states operate. The entire realist family (classical realists, structural realists, and neoclassical realists) accepts these factors. In particular, the geography factor is an effective regulator throughout history. For example, the distance of Great Britain and especially the USA from enemies was an important factor in protecting them. However, such a lack of strategic depth and difficult-to-defend borders have been a constant problem for many great powers such as Prussia and Germany. These problems have left many states such as Denmark, Pakistan, and Singapore in a difficult position even today. However, the geographical factor has taken a new form with technological developments (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 42).

Structural regulators are not structural factors; more precisely, they are systemic factors. These modifiers affect the ability and willingness of units to interact within the system and indicate that any interaction between units is possible and has acceptable results. Structural modifiers regulate the effects resulting from the process of interaction of structural elements, but they differ from the act of interaction (Lobell, 2016, p. 6). In this sense, neoclassical realism argues that the structural regulators that determine the foreign

policy of the state cover a wide range of factors, and some of them are less verifiable (Więcławski, 2017, pp. 206-207). Therefore, the conditions of the system, of which the regulators are a part, have the greatest impact on state behavior and foreign policy choices (Meibauer, 2017, p. 194).

1.1.3. Clarity

Neoclassical realism underscores another crucial systemic variable: the clarity and transparency of signals and information provided by the international system to states within an anarchic environment (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 46). In a less restrictive international environment, actors can base their calculations on systemic stimuli, where clearer information about system threats and the best responses can be derived from system dynamics (Lobell we al., 2013, p. 24). This openness has three important features: first, the ease with which threats and opportunities can be identified; second, the system provides a timeline for threats and opportunities; and third, whether the policy options are most appropriate (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 46). For example, during the developments in the Middle East in 2011, regional and global actors struggled to analyze these events due to the systemic complexity of the period. Choosing the appropriate reaction was also difficult, as the systemic challenge failed to provide these actors with clear information about whether it was a threat or an opportunity.

Neoclassical realism places significant emphasis on the clarity and transparency of signals and information within the international system as a threat is most evident when the enemy's behavior is clearly threatening, yet the current system often lacks this openness (Schweller, 2006). Intervening variables can complicate the processes of information extraction, evaluation, and government policy-making. Threats from rival states or non-state actors possess distinct characteristics, including pursuing revisionist policies, expressing explicit hostility threatening territorial integrity or national interests, possessing economic and military power, and displaying behavior and capabilities that create a sense of threat (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 46). The challenge arises when actors fail to accurately perceive these threats, leading to suboptimal foreign policy choices that may compromise vital national interests (Steinsson, 2017, p. 606).

Neoclassical realism underscores the crucial role of systemic clarity and transparency in the international system's impact on state behavior (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 46). In an

environment with fewer ambiguities, states can base decisions on clear signals and information, facilitating the identification of threats and opportunities and determining optimal responses (Lobell et al., 2013, p. 24). This openness involves three key aspects: the ease of identifying threats and opportunities, a timeline for these events, and clarification of the most appropriate policy options (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 46). However, a lack of clarity in the international system can hinder accurate threat or opportunity perception, leading to suboptimal foreign policy decisions that may harm national interests (Steinsson, 2017, p. 606). The first element of systemic clarity involves identifying threats from rival states or non-state actors, which may include revisionist policies, explicit hostility threatening territorial integrity or national interests, possession of military and economic power, or other indicators of threatening behavior (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 46).

The second element pertains to the timing of threats and opportunities, a crucial factor in predicting future events and actions. Clear indications of impending actions provide leaders with the information needed to make informed decisions, thereby resolving strategic dilemmas. Lastly, the third element emphasizes the clarity in policy options, a rarity in a constrained international system. Without clear information about appropriate policy responses, states may make misguided decisions that jeopardize their national interests (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 48). For instance, Argentina's lack of systemic knowledge during the Falklands War in 1982 resulted in poor decision-making that ultimately led to defeat. Despite initially inflicting heavy losses on British forces, Argentina's reliance on the USSR and the lack of clarity about appropriate policy options put the country at significant risk (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 48).

1.1.4. Permissive or Restrictive Strategic Environment

By examining US foreign policy in the late 19th century, Rose raises important questions: Why do states, as they become wealthier, deploy their armies beyond their borders, and what drives them to seek international influence? Rose, along with Zakaria, argues that this behavior is driven by states' desire to control their possibilities and environments (Rose, 1998, pp. 156-157). Additionally, in an environment where the element of threat is ever-present, states, while striving to increase their power, concurrently grapple with these threats. The dynamics of foreign policy, arising from the pursuit of power, shape

the goals of states, with the increase in financial power influencing decision-makers' perceptions. Rose contends that leaders face constraints from both domestic and international policy factors. The nature of international anarchy, according to Rose, is not strictly Hobbesian or evil, nor is it Lockean and benign; rather, it is a complex phenomenon. States within this system must navigate their own security needs and mechanisms, often in the absence of clear information. Structural conditions may permit certain actions, providing opportunities for actors to operate within the system's framework. Consequently, actors may exhibit behaviors that lead to systemic events (Schweller, 1998).

Therefore, a key variable in neoclassical realism is the nature and development of the actor's strategic environment. If openness and ambiguity are linked to the scope and breadth of information provided to the actor by the system, the actor's strategic environment encompasses the content of that information. The dynamics of the strategic environment give rise to two types: restrictive and permissive. Identifying the timing and magnitude of threats and opportunities makes it possible to distinguish between these two types of environments. This helps states understand whether threats are imminent, whether opportunities exist, and whether the threats are worth the risk or the opportunities are worth pursuing (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 52).In a restrictive international environment, robust international restrictions undermine governmental action, limiting the range of viable policy options.

However, within these constraints, the international system provides clearer information about global threats, offering distinct signals for suitable responses. Moreover, the restricted international environment offers greater transparency regarding the identity and magnitude of threats to a country's interests (Lobell, et al., 2013, p. 24). Stringent international requirements in such a setting play a pivotal role in guiding the behavior of actors, providing policymakers with a clearer understanding that renders certain strategic calculations invalid. Consequently, actors face limited appropriate and optimal responses, as many options are taken off the table due to a shorter threat range and limited avenues for reaction. In this confined environment, leaders are sometimes compelled to accept challenging and unpleasant choices. Given the openness and urgency of threats with their short duration, leaders may opt to maximize immediate security measures, even at the expense of the state's long-term security and economic goals. The perception of the

constrained international environment significantly influences policymakers' decisions (Lobell, 2011, p. 338). In a permissive environment, actors have more freedom to choose their foreign policy goals and strategies, and the international system provides less clear information about international threats and opportunities. Policymakers have more room for maneuver and can pursue a broader range of foreign policy options. However, the permissive international environment is less transparent about the identity and extent of threats to a country's interests, making it more challenging for policymakers to assess the potential risks and benefits of different courses of action (Lobell et al., 2012, p. 24).

It is crucial to note that a permissive environment does not necessarily lead to better outcomes for states. Policymakers in such an environment may face the challenge of navigating a complex array of options and trade-offs, making it difficult to formulate effective foreign policy. Additionally, a permissive environment can breed complacency and a lack of preparedness for potential threats, with negative consequences in the long run (Lobell et al., 2012, p. 24). Overall, while the nature of the international system can influence the behavior of actors, policymakers' perceptions, goals, and preferences play a crucial role in shaping foreign policy outcomes.

1.2. Unit Level (Intervening) Variables

After reviewing the literature, it is generally agreed that intervening variables refer to the factors influencing foreign policy outcomes. The neoclassical realist perspective incorporates various factors in this regard, such as leaders' perceptions of threats, the ability to mobilize indigenous resources, and guiding belief systems (Ford, 2009, p. 11). Recognizing the importance of local factors is crucial to preventing purely objective reactions to threats in implementing foreign policy. Neoclassical realists consider internal factors as integral to foreign policy, emphasizing the decisive role of internal factors in analyzing foreign policy behavior. Schweller (2004) echoes this perspective, suggesting that systemic pressures interact with domestic policy variables to shape foreign policy behaviors. He emphasizes that states' foreign policy behavior is influenced by their unique structure and political situation, which states evaluate and adapt to. Intervening variables serve as responses within the broader international context, directing, mediating, and redirecting foreign policy outcomes. Consequently, states often respond differently to similar systemic pressures and opportunities due to local policy considerations rather than

systemic factors (Schweller, 2004, p. 164). There are significant discussions about this in the literature. For instance, Brian Rathbun argues that neoclassical realism offers a distinct form of analysis compared to the power-oriented analysis of neorealism. According to Rathbun, this theory serves more profound functions than merely recognizing domestic politics as an intervening variable; neoclassical realism demonstrates how domestic politics is implicated when the imperatives of the system are not fulfilled (Rathbun, 2008, p. 311).

1.2.1. Perception of Leaders

The first intervening variable that neoclassical realists examine is decision-makers' perceptions of systemic pressures. Purely systemic explanations of foreign policy provide a correct perception of the distribution of power among authorities, leading to a reasonable direct translation of these concerns into national policy. Rose shares the same opinion as Robert O. Keohane. According to Keohane, most systems theorists believe in the rationality of the link between system structure and actor behavior. Therefore, taking into account the incentives and constraints imposed by the domestic political environment of the country, how leaders react to events can be predicted (Rose, 1998, pp. 157-58).

The most important factor that neoclassical theorists see in the issue of perception is the examination of state characteristics as a unit. Among these qualities, perception, and especially the perceptions of statesmen regarding their state's position in the international arena, come to the fore. It is important to highlight that the notion of statesmen's perception diverges from the structural features of governments. The perspective held by statesmen is just one element within the overarching structure of government. Consequently, the structure of governments is a broad concept encompassing all interactions within a system, ultimately shaping a specific foreign policy. Directly or indirectly, neoclassical realists observe the way leaders perceive the world, considering the symbolic and objective tools they use to interpret reality and formulate foreign policy. These tools include belief systems, political culture, history, ideology, and similar factors. Thus, statesmen's perceptions of the world and their assessments of their situation in the world are of undeniable importance for neoclassical realists (Carpes, 2014, pp. 37-38).According to neoclassical realism, the main actor of international system analysis is states. Therefore, states have to manage the threats and opportunities arising from the

anarchic system. From this point of view, foreign policy is primarily a reaction to the dynamics in the international system. Foreign policy is used as an effective mechanism to prevent the reaction of the other party or parties to changes in the balance of power. However, the way states respond to these inputs is influenced by variables at the local level. According to neoclassical realism, states' responses to international events are conditioned by variables grouped under three broad clusters: politicians' perceptions, the country's decision-making process, and policy implementation process. Leaders' perceptions of decision-making and policy implementation are affected by the leaders' worldview and belief system, the strategic culture of the country, the relationship between the state and society, and the characteristics of political institutions (Rosa, 2018, pp. 148-49).

1.2.2. Strategic Culture

The reflection of local cultures on security and foreign policy is central to neoclassical realism in foreign policy analysis. In this respect, neoclassicals share considerable overlap with strategic culture. However, within the framework of neoclassical realism analysis, analysts should also consider the strategic culture of countries in domestic policy issues. Snyder first presented this idea in a report he wrote on the USSR, challenging Realism and Neorealism. According to Snyder, different historical experiences and political and institutional relationships have led to different behaviors by actors such as the USSR. Therefore, while the political behavior of smart actors may have undergone some slight changes over time, its main lines are largely preserved. Thus, actors have their own unique strategic culture, and "subcultures" form the core of these cultures (Snyder, 1977, p. 38). When planning foreign policy, actors act with the influence of cultural preferences that have been ingrained in their mental background for years. These cultural components reveal the preferences of states in the medium term and pave the way for the emergence of strategic cultures of states over time. Therefore, the strategic culture formed over a long period is important insofar as it affects the preferences and behaviors of the state (Erdağ and Kardaş, 2013, p. 68; Sadri Alibabalu, 2020). These long-term factors also shape the foreign policy behaviors and long-term attitudes of states, as the mental world of statesmen is affected by subconscious factors and societal factors. Friendships and enmities, cooperation, and rational calculations all contribute to the components of

strategic culture. In general, there appear to be three categories of levels in the strategic culture of states: the macro level, which has geographical, cultural, ethnic, and historical characteristics; the social level, which includes the social, economic, and political structures of society, and the micro level, which includes military institutions and civil-military relations. The sum of these three levels gives rise to the strategic culture of actors. In other words, the convergence of the three levels entails defensive, peaceful, offensive, or neutral policies (Jones, 1990, pp. 35-38).

There are five main lines connecting the general strategy of the state to the strategic culture of that state. First, strategic culture provides politicians and strategists with an ideological and normative pretext or background. Second, it determines the way statesmen and decision-makers perceive the outside world and what is happening in the international system. Third, it serves as a helpful factor for politicians and strategists in choosing appropriate actions. Fourth, strategic culture provides an opportunity to mobilize national resources for goals predetermined by strategy. Fifth, it provides a lens and a medium for the public to discuss national security issues (Wasilewski, 2017, p. 2). In this direction, it becomes possible to decipher the state codes, which is a black box, by making use of neoclassical realism.

1.2.3. Domestic Institutions

The structure of government and political institutions often clarifies the relationship between government and society. A country has official institutions, processes, and a bureaucratic oversight system whose boundaries and powers are determined by law. These rules regulate the parameters of competition in domestic politics and determine who can be involved in the policy-making process and who has veto power. Institutional structures of governments have a significant impact on their ability to respond to ongoing systemic pressures. In democratic states, the most important institutional laws concern the autonomy of the executive branch, its relationship with the legislature and bureaucratic system, and the interplay among these institutions. Important institutional variables affecting foreign policy in democracies include the degree of power concentration in the executive, executive-legislature relations, party system type (two-party or multi-party), voting rules and electoral system, quality of government, and administrative competence. These variables influence governments' responses to external

shocks or changes in the distribution of power in the international system. The institution responsible for shaping the Minister of Foreign Affairs and foreign policy is also significant (Ripsman et al., 2016, pp.75-76). In general, most domestic actors are interested in foreign policy, including ordinary people, legislators, businesses, industrial sectors, trade unions, and other organized economic groups. This is because the government's decisions affect spending levels and access to foreign markets. Additionally, the main institutions and actors of the country, such as the army and aristocratic class, are involved in national security decisions as they can change their social power and privileges. Ethnic groups and the media also show interest in all aspects of national politics.

However, neoclassical realism believes that these actors should have less influence over sensitive policies, particularly in matters of national security, for two main reasons. Firstly, security policies are crucial, and poor management can cost the government significantly, such as losing a war. The government has more access to confidential and essential information about national security and rival states than other local actors, enabling it to make better decisions for the country's long-term interests. Secondly, society as a whole is heavily affected by the costs and benefits of aspects of national security policy. Generally, most segments of society are impacted by the government's responses to foreign and security challenges, and all social strata benefit from the rational decisions of the authorities in the field of national security policy (Ripsman et al., 2016, pp. 179-181). The intervention of one legitimizes the intervention of the other, leading to divisions and weak foreign policy.

1.2.4. State-Society Relationship

Politicians rely on society for financial resources and support to achieve their goals (Dyson, 2010, p. 120). The nature of state-society relations, the mechanisms and processes involved, and their impact on policy-making and implementation are particularly crucial in foreign policy implementation, especially during crises (Ripsman, 2012, p. 181). The relationship between the government and society is influenced by various factors, including historical and geographical factors, domestic policy development, the political understanding of people and elites, the level of development of political culture, social processes, and the government's economic links with the

people. The importance given by leaders to the general public also determines the degree of closeness or distance between the government and society, and these factors vary due to the unique characteristics of all actors involved.

Successful coordination between the government and society can be achieved through consultation in the policy-making process and the participation of various actors from society. However, conflicts between the government and society can complicate the policy-making process, and the government may have to fight against opposition groups or create a negotiation mechanism with the opposition. If society members are not satisfied with the implementation of some policies, and the government considers its performance a violation of its resources and social rights, implementing foreign policy becomes challenging. Foreign policy, especially macro strategy, requires significant domestic material and human resources, and when social groups withhold their assets from the government, government institutions are forced to collect income, while the police ensure internal security. The government must allocate high levels of financial resources to promote all this (Ripsman et al., 2016, pp. 71-72). For neoclassical realists, a country's power is not only military and economic, but the relationship between the state and society also determines its effectiveness. If the government cannot effectively mobilize its population, it cannot use its resources, limiting its power (Oswell, 2013, p. 29).The Soviet Union was able to mobilize society during the Second World War, but this factor was lost later, especially in the 1980s. Despite the country's military power, its exclusive behavior in foreign policy and independence from the people limited the effectiveness of the Soviet Union in foreign policy, and only state institutions were mobilized for military operations.

The relationship between military and civilian institutions indicates the form and extent of interaction between the government and society. These relationships include factors related to the interaction between civil society, political elites, and the military as an institution. The main issue for the military is how the civilian administration manages it and how the army executes the orders of politicians. This balance is more complex and multidimensional in democracies. However, civil-military relations, as a manifestation of state-society relations, have a direct impact on the strategies that governments may pursue abroad (Ripsman et al., 2016, pp. 73-74). In countries marked by high internal dissonance, leaders encounter diminished political risks due to fragmented opposition, facilitating

relatively smoother navigation through foreign policy decisions. However, this discord impedes the effective mobilization of national resources, hindering the leader's ability to garner widespread support for foreign policy initiatives. Conversely, leaders in cohesive nations face higher political risks owing to unified opposition but benefit from streamlined resource mobilization, leveraging the unity within the country to rally support for foreign policy goals. Leaders of countries with high internal dissonance are less exposed to political risks and have difficulty mobilizing national resources for foreign policy goals, as opposed to leaders of cohesive countries (Schweller, 2006, p. 11).

1.3. Dependent Variables

According to neoclassical realists, the dependent variable is the variation in the variety and intensity of the strategies pursued by the government. Imitation, innovation, or continuity in existing strategies is considered one of the most important of these strategies (Taliaferro, 2009, p. 213). The distribution of relative financial power changes the perception of public administrators. Such a perception may also affect the tactics they will follow in domestic politics. However, variables in domestic politics limit statesmen. The result of this is their foreign policies, which neoclassical realists consider the dependent variable, influenced by all sides.

The dependent variable can generally be considered in three categories: short-term, medium-term, and long-term. In the short term, the government may be caught off guard by an event in internal affairs, such as when Ukraine had to implement a policy against Russian aggression without a certain strategy and policy when Russia invaded in 2022. Therefore, short-term dependent variables are used in the analysis of special events. The second variable is considered in the medium term, which analyzes the production of a particular foreign policy over months and years. The purpose of this type of analysis is to examine the strategies and plans of politicians in domestic politics for the near future, not the distant future, with the aim of producing a macro strategy. The medium-term strategy is to "shape the planning parameters of a particular military and economic strategy for particular countries, particular regions, and other actors on the world stage. It is also a future-oriented initiative that includes foreign threats and opportunities as well as the government's specific, political and ideological goals" (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 15). The third stage of the dependent variable involves examining the long-term strategies pursued

by vulnerable governments. The strategy adopted by one government interacts with the policies of other governments, thereby exerting significant regional or global consequences. The distribution of regional power and the strategies employed by other governments can impact long-term dependent variables (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 85).

Neoclassicists discuss the concept of overexpansion, where a state's actions prompt other states to form alliances in a balancing act. The excessive expansion of a state invites other states to align themselves to counter it. Another contributing factor is the escalating cost associated with overexpansion, described by Snyder as "self-limiting" (Snyder, 1991, p. 6). For instance, the rapid expansion of the Russian Empire against the Ottoman Empire in the 1850s drew Britain and France closer together, resulting in the encirclement of Russia. Neoclassical realists prioritize the foreign security policies of states, emphasizing the threats and opportunities that influence each state's policy in the international system. They reject the notion that states must respond in a rigid and mechanistic manner to changing international conditions, as implied by the concept of balance-of-power neorealism. Consequently, neoclassical realism identifies four crucial limitations to the structural realist model, namely leaders' ability to comprehend systemic drivers, a lack of trust in the international system, issues of rationality, and the challenge of mobilizing domestic resources (Ripsman et al., 2016, pp. 19-20).

1.4. Political Psychology

Political psychology is a multidisciplinary field that seeks to apply insights from human psychology to the realm of politics. Drawing on diverse branches such as personality psychology, social psychology, developmental psychology, and cognitive psychology, it delves into the political process by examining both individual and social behavioral characteristics There are three key areas within political psychology: analyzing psychological components in politics, predicting individual behavior and the role of psychological aspects in political processes, and understanding the influence of subjective factors on politics through political psychology theory (Sears et al., 2003).

The study of political psychology is deemed essential because policymakers are inherently human, and their psychological attributes, including consciousness, feelings, moods, traits, and beliefs, cannot be disregarded when analyzing political processes and outcomes. As highlighted by Sears, Leonie, and Jervis (2003), the quest for a

'psychological explanation' in political processes or an approach to understanding political phenomena from a psychological standpoint has historically been a contentious issue. Nonetheless, recognizing the impact of psychological factors on political processes and outcomes is crucial. In contrast to classical psychological theory, political psychology focuses on the behavior of individuals or groups in the political arena and its repercussions on domestic and foreign policy. The primary objective of research in political psychology is to elucidate political processes through the lens of psychological factors. Examples of psychological factors studied in political psychology include the influence of personality on leadership style, the development of biases that distort political decision-making, the roots of racial prejudice, and the ethology of violent communal conflicts. Furthermore, political psychology serves as a multidisciplinary field that explores the convergence of human psychology and politics. It offers a framework for comprehending political processes and outcomes by taking into account the psychological characteristics of individuals and groups within the political arena. Consequently, political psychology becomes a crucial tool for policymakers, analysts, and scholars, facilitating a more profound understanding of the intricate dynamics of politics. However, the analysis of individuals in politics predates the formal establishment of political psychology as a distinct field of study.

The work of Sigmund Freud, particularly his development of psychoanalysis as an independent school of thought, significantly influenced the intersection of politics and psychology. Even beyond his exploration of mass psychology, psychoanalysis introduced methodologies that persist in contemporary political psychology, such as the creation of psychobiographies of political leaders and psychohistory as "psychobiographies" of an era. Freud's approach involves analyzing the behavior and reactions of the subject of research to political decisions. Freud's ideas on the concept of libido and its connection to emotions were also applied to political psychology. In "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" (1922), Freud asserts, "Libido is an expression taken from the theory of emotions." Additionally, in "A Man Named Moses" (1939), Freud introduces the notion of the superego concerning the recuperation of a specific Jewish Geistigkeit, or spirituality, on a symbolic level, reclaiming a narcissism that was abandoned at the level of imaginary identification. As noted by Santner, "Freud's psychoanalytic approach to the

human psyche was groundbreaking and paved the way for further exploration into the intersection of psychology and politics" (Santner, 1999, p. 15).

The Chicago School of Science emerged as an outgrowth of Freud's psychoanalytic theories, with G.D. Lasswell standing out as one of its most influential figures. Lasswell sought to amalgamate psychoanalysis with political science, giving rise to the "behavioral movement." This synthesis proved fruitful, and Lasswell is recognized for initiating the formal study of political psychology. His groundbreaking contributions included the development of systematic content analysis and the ambitious attempt to introduce systematic coding of psychoanalytic sessions into standard psychiatric protocols (Ascher and Hirschfelder-Ascher, 2004). The formal establishment of political psychology as an academic discipline occurred in 1969 with the creation of a political psychology department within the American Political Science Association. Subsequently, in 1978, the International Society for Political Psychology (ISPP) was founded, bringing together professionals from diverse fields such as psychology, sociology, political science, psychiatry, and education to explore the psychological aspects of domestic and foreign policy (Sears, Leonie and Jervis, 2003). The journal "Political Psychology" has been published by the Political Psychology Society since 1979. In 1973, Knutson published the "Handbook of Political Psychology," followed by M. Hermann in 1986 with a book of the same title. In 2003, the "Handbook of Political Psychology," edited by D. Sears, L. Huddy, and R. Jervis, was published by Oxford University, presenting political psychology as a science and providing a framework for future researchers.

A essential body of literature and scholarly research has played a pivotal role in shaping the framework of political psychology. This collective effort has outlined inquiries, subjects, stakeholders, and a professional community that collectively contribute to a cohesive approach to research tasks and orientations. The dynamic nature of political psychology is evident as evolving periods and trends continuously shape the landscape, prompting the field to grapple with elucidating these shifts. Central to political psychology is the examination of key facets within domestic and foreign policy, encompassing leadership dynamics, decision-making processes, crisis communication, refugee crises, concerns of marginalized communities, public trust in governance, ethnic tensions, gender dynamics, and challenges related to climate change. These issues revolve around six fundamental inquiries: The consolidation and evolution of relationships among

political factions. The impact of political ideologies on mass political conduct. Scrutinizing the decision-making mechanisms employed by politicians. Assessing the significance of individual personalities in political arenas. Analyzing leadership styles and their defining traits. Exploring the interplay between political psychology and foreign policy dynamics.

In 1973, Professor J. Davis, a political scientist from the USA, asserted that "political science and practice cannot develop without psychology." Likewise, Professor A. Etzioni emphasized that since politics is "made by people," the "psychological possibilities in studying and influencing politics are endless." In today's world, the role of the individual in politics, the influence of public opinion and mass sentiment, and the impact of propaganda cannot be ignored or underestimated. While political scientists acknowledge the role of psychological factors, they also caution against exaggeration, emphasizing that these factors are influenced by objective conditions. Intensive research is underway to synthesize psychology and politics, providing insights into the psychological aspects of political phenomena.

The post-bipolar world has allowed international relations researchers to move beyond classical theory and consider the set of psychological factors that underlie "political psychology." In the context of political psychology scientists, the term "political psychology" signifies the practical application of psychology and psychological knowledge in politics. A certain amount of psychological knowledge is transformed into a specialized "political psychology" to address specific problems. This approach reflects the overall methodology of political psychology, which has a highly practical orientation and emphasizes selectively chosen facts, such as leadership style and traits. These factors become clear when examining the so-called psychological-political content analysis, which involves using psychological knowledge to mentally reproduce real or probable political processes and situations. The understanding of psychological-political content analysis encompasses an analysis of policy changes that may be influenced by certain subjective moments. Theorists and practitioners of political psychology actively apply this approach in three main fields: foreign policy, domestic politics, and military affairs.

Individuals generate a substantial volume of written and spoken material that can be subjected to content analysis of cognitive characteristics (Lee & Peterson, 1997). In the realm of international relations, psychological content analysis serves as a method within

political psychology, focusing primarily on the psychology of leaders whose decisions impact the political process and its outcomes. Its principal objective is to anticipate and prevent conflicts, analyzing individual characteristics in politics to predict politicians' behavior and provide specific recommendations regarding their traits. Modern political psychology employs diverse methods to scrutinize individuals in politics and elucidate their psycho-political characteristics and behavior, including leadership style, perception, thinking patterns, approaches to problem-solving, and distinctive decision-making systems. Linguistics, mathematics, and statistics are commonly applied in content analysis.

Content analysis entails translating verbal information, such as spoken text, into objective non-verbal forms, such as individual traits. It is a rigorous scientific method that necessitates the systematic and reliable fixation of specific words in documents, followed by the quantification of the gathered data. The content analysis procedure involves defining categories outlined by the coding scheme, after which the content elements are categorized. The type of data obtained is largely contingent on the categories stipulated by the coding scheme. Content analysis facilitates the development of a comprehensive understanding of the psychological characteristics of individuals in politics. Therefore, all definitions of content analysis underscore its objective nature. Objectivity is construed as mandating each step to be undertaken solely based on clearly formulated rules and procedures prescribed by coding programs, such as Profiler Plus. The formation of a statistical reference group derived from prior results by different researchers serves as a crucial validation mechanism. Consequently, content analysis emerges as a precise and reliable research technique. Content analysis undeniably stands as a powerful instrument for comprehending the psychological facets of political figures. Its inherent objectivity and strict adherence to a scientific methodology make it invaluable for both forecasting and preventing conflicts, as well as scrutinizing individual traits within political realms. The method's systematic approach provides a reliable means to predict patterns, decipher motivations, and uncover underlying ideologies, thus serving as a robust tool for conflict prevention.

Indeed, a more profound exploration and advancement of content analysis techniques hold the promise of yielding deeper insights into the intricate psychology of leaders and the complex fabric of their decision-making processes. This continuous exploration and

enhancement have the potential to unveil more nuanced understandings of political behavior, offering valuable insights for proactive measures in navigating complex geopolitical landscapes. Moreover, it can contribute to the development of better-informed strategies for effective governance and diplomacy. In essence, the refinement and evolution of content analysis contribute significantly to the ongoing pursuit of a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between psychology and politics. This continuous improvement not only enhances our ability to analyze and predict political behavior but also provides a foundation for the development of strategies that promote stability, cooperation, and effective leadership in the ever-evolving political landscape.

1.4.1. When Leadership Matters. Why Study Individuals?

The examination of leadership as a crucial factor in foreign policy can be traced back to the early days of the State. Thucydides, detailing the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta, acknowledged the fundamental importance of individual leaders and their styles in foreign policy analysis (Preston, 2022, p. 255). One of the earliest and most influential works on leadership and foreign policy is Niccolò Machiavelli's "The Prince," penned in the 16th century. Widely considered the bible of realpolitik, this book has rendered the term "Machiavellian" synonymous with cunning yet amoral statecraft (Wivel, 2017). Machiavelli delineated key characteristics of leadership behavior, including mistrust in human nature, a lack of conventional morality, opportunism, and a limited emphasis on interpersonal relationships (Drory & Gluskinos, 1980, pp. 81–86). He underscored the significance of individual traits in acquiring and consolidating power, with the concentration of power in the hands of the ruler being a distinctive feature of authoritarian states. Hans Morgenthau and Reinhold Niebuhr are notable scholars who have focused on the role of political leaders in international relations. They posited that the desire for expansion and the pursuit of power are pivotal factors driving state behavior, rooted in the inherent nature of humanity. Niebuhr highlighted the subjective nature of history, contending that individuals are not disinterested observers as scientists are supposed to be with nature. Instead, humans shape and create history, bringing their own perspectives with vested interests and values (Rice, 2008, p.255).

Morgenthau's perspectives on leadership revolved around the ability of political leaders to externally discern aggressive intentions, anticipate an adversary's reactions, make

judicious decisions, and internally implement policies that effectively respond to threats. Furthermore, leaders needed to persuade people about the necessity of sacrificing themselves for a just cause and engage in statecraft that garnered broad public support (Zhang, 2017, pp. 512–530). Realism, a foundational theory in international relations, elucidates the nature of the desire for power but does not explicitly consider the role of personality in decision-making. Specifically, realism does not incorporate human nature into the study of individual characteristics; rather, it posits that human nature underlies the drive to expand power. Humans are inherently social beings who can only exist in a political or social context. The study of leadership in foreign policy is crucial for comprehending the behavior of states in the international system. Scholars like Machiavelli, Morgenthau, Niebuhr, and others have provided valuable insights into the characteristics of effective leaders and their role in shaping foreign policy decisions. While realism remains a useful theory for explaining state behavior, it does not fully capture the complexities of individual decision-making and the impact of personality on foreign policy. In the later bipolar world, Kenneth Waltz, the founding scholar of neorealism, questioned the significance of individual decision-making and its role in international politics.

Neorealism posits that individuals in politics operate within a constrained scope, often influenced by the international system, and subject to the biases and constraints of states and their leaders, who have limited knowledge and are affected by social and institutional factors. Neorealism highlights the anarchic nature of the international system as a central point, pushing states to seek security. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of the bipolar system challenged Neorealism's assumptions about states mechanically responding to the distribution of material capabilities in an international system. This led to a re-examination of previous theories of international relations (Balci et al., 2018, p. 4). This historical shift prompted a renewed focus on the role of the state in international relations, exploring motives, structure, strategies, decision-making, and the significance of individuals. Neoclassical Realist theorists argue that the "impact of power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex because system pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level" (Rose, 1998, p. 146). Neoclassical realism analysis is valuable for understanding why, when, and under what conditions the same states behave differently, and how decision-making dynamics depend

on systemic and unit-level factors. At the unit level, one of the crucial variables is the individual political leader (Dyson, 2010, p. 12).

The study of unit-level variables aims to trace the interdependence between stimuli and interpretations within the system structure, specifically how individual-level variables, such as individuals, react to institutional and socio-political filters. Neoclassical scholars contribute to a redefinition of the role of leadership by proposing a combination of explanatory variables, including system response, the influence of individuals, mobilization of indigenous resources, rational or irrational decision-making, leadership style, and strategic culture. The concept of personality plays a central role in this framework, being used to evaluate various political behaviors, from understanding the psychology of political leaders to analyzing psychopathologies in individuals committing politically motivated atrocities or shaping attitudes towards race, ethnicity, politics, and obedience to authority (Cottam et al., 2015, p. 26).

Neoclassical scholars pave the way for a re-evaluation of the role of leadership, emphasizing a combination of variables such as reactions to systems, the role of individuals, the foreign policy executive, domestic resource mobilization abilities, rational or irrational decision-making, leadership style, and strategic culture. In contrast to neorealism's nominal treatment of individuals in politics, this perspective argues for a more nuanced understanding. The crisis in the theory of international relations and the subsequent search for new non-structural, intra-state factors in world politics validate the importance of redefining the role of individuals. "Politics is a matter of human behavior, and behavior is a function of both the environmental situations in which actors find themselves and the psychological predispositions they bring to those situations" (Greenstein, 1987, p. 7).

The impact of psychological predispositions on an individual's decision-making and understanding cannot be understated. The primary role of a state leader is to make decisions at various levels, which involves presenting domestic and foreign policy agendas during the election process. Leaders in power tend to apply their vision of rational policy, and analyzing the individual traits of actors is crucial in explaining events in the political world, including those in the United States or Russia. The past century, with dictators such as Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini, and Mao Zedong, has provided extensive ground for numerous studies on their methods of government and decision-making

processes. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Russian revolution are incomplete without interpretations of personalities like Gorbachev, Lenin, and Trotsky. It is widely recognized that personality is a significant factor in determining political behavior and is a major actor in the state's decision-making process. However, the study of personality in politics is not appealing to many international relations researchers who tend to concentrate on impersonal determinants of political events and outcomes. While researchers acknowledge the importance of individual action, they tend to analyze rationality and neglect personal characteristics, arguing that the behavior of actors can be inferred from the logic of the situation. This approach is criticized for a lack of systematic intellectual progress and self-conscious attention to evidence, inference, and conceptualization.

The main arguments against studying personalities in politics and the influence of their characteristics on the decision-making process are that the state structure in Russia is a complex political process involving many actors, psychological traits such as beliefs or perceptions have little political impact on decision-making, social and biographical characteristics of political actors are more important, and individuals cannot significantly influence political outcomes. However, individuals can make a decisive difference in a state's foreign policy by setting goals and objectives, choosing how to pursue them, and shaping the decision-making process. Studies of foreign policy often neglect the personal traits of leaders, but it is essential to understand how leaders' cognition is influenced by their domain-specific knowledge and experience. Leaders with specific knowledge or experience in foreign policy differ from other leaders and the public at large. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize the significance of individual traits in the study of politics to provide a comprehensive understanding of political behavior and decision-making. Criticism of the study of personalities in politics and the impact of individual characteristics on the decision-making process revolves around four key arguments. Firstly, it is argued that the state structure in countries such as Russia is a complex political process involving multiple actors, with foreign policy decisions being determined by the political environment rather than individual characteristics. Secondly, it is argued that psychological traits such as beliefs or perceptions have little political impact on decision-making. Thirdly, it is suggested that the social and biographical characteristics of political actors are more significant than their psychological traits.

Finally, it is argued that individuals in power cannot significantly influence political outcomes. Despite these arguments, there are several key areas where individuals can make a decisive difference in a state's foreign policy. Firstly, individuals can set the goals and objectives for the state. Secondly, individuals can choose how these goals are pursued, determining whether to pursue goals through multilateral means and as part of international institutions, or to act alone. Thirdly, individuals can shape the decision-making process, determining whether there is a wide canvassing of views within the elite and public, and an attempt to make policy based upon consensus, or whether the leader makes policy based on their perception of the national interest, with little regard for the views of others.

Indeed, within the realm of foreign policy studies, there is a discernible tendency to overlook the individual characteristics and traits of leaders, an aspect that holds significant sway over decision-making processes. Yet, a burgeoning recognition is emerging regarding the substantial impact of leaders' cognitive frameworks, shaped by their domain-specific knowledge and experiential insights. Leaders' personal characteristics, perceptions, and strategic choices significantly influence a state's behavior in the international system. This is why studying individuals gains prominence as it highlights how leaders' beliefs, experiences, and cognitive frameworks mediate between systemic pressures and actual foreign policy decisions. Leaders act as key agents in interpreting and responding to external stimuli, often adjusting strategies based on their assessments and understanding of international relations. Consequently, understanding individual leaders becomes central to comprehending the nuances and deviations in foreign policy behaviors from what structural factors might predict.

Advancing the study of leadership, the leadership trait analysis descriptions dataset (Hermann, 1980) provides a rich source of information on leaders' background characteristics and experiences. The LTA dataset enables empirical tests of how behavioral characteristics, such as distrust of others, self-confidence, in-group bias, complex complicity, need for power, task orientation, and belief in the ability to control events, and experiences in office, such as traumatic events, role change, openness/closeness to information, and position in office, affect foreign policy outcomes. General theories of international relations often focus on power politics without in-depth analysis of identities and individuals in politics. Similarly, studies of individuals are

limited by psychological approaches and restricted to explaining the place of leadership in policymaking. These approaches have been criticized for failing to comprehend the individuals who engage in political activity when foreign policy is considered a deterministic response to structural issues in the international system. Structural theories have also been criticized for presenting a dichotomous view of international relations and for failing to recognize the importance of leadership in explaining decisions in foreign policy. In contrast, it would be a mistake to argue that personalities always matter for political outcomes, even though they may sometimes be significant. In fact, Kurt Lewin argued "during the 1930s and 1940s that to understand behavior, it is necessary to consider both a person's personality and the context in which the behavior is observed" (Cottam et al., 2022, p. 28).

The situation that a leader faces during their time in office is not only influenced by their internal personal characteristics but is also generally based on their reactions and interpretations of both situation-forming aspects and various factors from the system or unit levels. Therefore, it is important to analyze these factors. The neoclassical realism framework and leadership trait explanation can be used to demonstrate the significance of examining foreign policy as a decision-making process that combines the impact of structural variables with human subjectivity. Modern research methods emphasize all factors when individuals have the personal power resources associated with their position in the political system, such as different role changes, cabinet positions, and audience. These factors can indicate the ability of individuals to exert power, which influences their leadership style and, as a result, impacts domestic policy processes and foreign policy.

The similarities indicate that public perceptions differ in foreign policy interpretation, just as leaders exhibit variation in their traits, and a leader's decision-making plays a crucial role in shaping foreign policy. The key evidence here lies in understanding the divergence in foreign policy choices. It is evident how both domain-specific knowledge and experience influence the leader's perception, highlighting the distinction between leaders and the mass public in their specific interpretation of foreign policy choices. The application of leadership trait analysis in behavioral research has significantly advanced the exploration of the cognitive aspects of leadership and its impact on foreign policy. These studies have unveiled a spectrum of positive and negative attributes associated with different leadership styles. For instance, M. Hermann's research highlights that during

international crises, when a state's values are imperiled and decision-making time is constrained, authority tends to coalesce around individuals or groups bearing ultimate responsibility for upholding governmental stability (Hermann & Hagan, 1998, p. 124).

Dyson found "that the more expert presidents employed analogies drawn from their own experiences slightly more than did the less expert presidents. Interestingly, they found that both types of leaders tended, for the most part, to draw analogies from generally available knowledge rather than from their personal policymaking experiences" (Dyson, Preston, 2006, pp. 265-288). These analyses assist qualitative analyses by delving into the essence of leaders' beliefs. Such ideas, according to academic research, have an impact on foreign policy choices. The cognitive benefits of domain-specific experience and knowledge shed light on how leaders influence particular foreign policy outcomes and demonstrate how leadership style has the potential for structural impacts on foreign policy.

Undoubtedly, the study of complex processes such as decision-making to intervene in a war cannot be based solely on the study of personal characteristics. Focusing on personality characteristics without taking into account situational variables in a complex analysis of prerequisites can lead to the opposite effect - concentrating on one variable in the analysis system can distort and limit the explanation of events. The prerequisites for difficult decision-making cannot be explained solely by the desire for the spread of power. The perception and choice of response by individual actors are often not logical and difficult to explain, in which case considering different variables can be seen as reasonable responses to the same circumstances. Thus, by studying the conditions and reactions of the individual, a platform is provided that gives shape to the influence of individuals in politics. Since the leader does not act with complete independence from prevailing state conditions, there is a risk of imposing a role of a leader in state policy and international outcomes as his choices and outcomes have been effectively predetermined by structural factors. The study of how leaders influence foreign policy is an area where scientific research has made progress. Recent scholarship sheds light on how leadership style shapes foreign policy.

Despite this, to fully understand the picture of what is happening, it is necessary to accurately determine the research vectors. Personality does matter in decision-making, but equally important are the conditions and reactions of the leader when making

decisions. Decisions and consequences are systems, which is why I have divided the study period into four timelines. The main purpose of this work is to analyze Putin's reactions to systemic constraints and the role of his characteristics in interpreting these constraints during his period in power. “A foreign policy maker's mind is not a tabula rasa; it contains complex and intricately related information and patterns, such as beliefs, attitudes, values, experiences, emotions, traits, style, memory, national and self-conceptions” (Hudson, 2005, pp. 1-30).

Both political psychology and neoclassical realism suggest that individual traits and perceptions of the international environment can help explain why decision-makers make certain political choices. By examining these factors, researchers can provide insights into why some policies are more successful than others and how decision-makers can be influenced to make better choices. Furthermore, by using objective empirical evidence, decision-makers can be confident that they are making informed decisions based on facts rather than subjective opinions. Neoclassical realism suggests that a state's foreign policy choices are influenced by both the objective distribution of power and the subjective perceptions of decision-makers about their state's relative position within the international system. By analyzing the LTA results of Vladimir Putin using this framework, we can gain insights into how his political personality shapes Russia's power and position, influencing his foreign policy choices.

1.5. Application to Russian Foreign Policy

One of the central studies in this dissertation revolves around the application of the principles of neoclassical realism and political psychology to understand Russian foreign policy, especially in the context of specific cases. A fundamental aspect under scrutiny is the exploration of how understanding the personality of Vladimir Putin contributes to the interpretation of Russian foreign policy. The main focus of this dissertation is to delve into the intricacies of Russian politics during Putin's reign. To do this, it is necessary to analyze the international landscape that has shaped modern Russian foreign policy through neoclassical realism framework. Understanding the conditions that prevailed during Putin's rule becomes key, highlighting the need to carefully study his reactions, interpretations and outcomes of the international system.

By examining key aspects of Russian foreign policy through the framework of neoclassical realism, it is possible to reveal some of the foundations of Russia's political behavior in the international system. It also provides a deeper understanding of why the study of a political figure such as Putin in relation to the world, his intellectual views and decision-making process with his multifaceted perceptions and responses to system challenges is necessary for understanding Russian foreign policy. A more thorough analysis requires new approaches that will allow us to better understand Putin and Russian foreign policy. Leadership trait analysis is emerging as a valuable tool for understanding leader behavior, providing a useful method to complement neoclassical realism. Thus, integration with the neoclassical realism framework could potentially open up a more complete framework for deciphering Putin's behavior in Russian foreign policy.

The study of foreign policy decision-making stands as a critical area within international relations research. 'Foreign policy analysis includes the process and resultants of human decision-making with reference to or having known consequences for foreign entities' (Hudson, 2005). Scholars have long sought to identify the factors influencing a state's foreign policy choices, including the impact of individuals making these decisions (Snyder et al., 2002). However, concerning the examination of Russian foreign policy, most studies tend to focus on structural explanations, disregarding the role of individual leadership perceptions. Traditional foreign policy debates in Russia have endured the seismic shifts that occurred after the collapse of the Soviet system.

Despite the dissolution of the USSR, Russia's foreign policy trajectory has not evolved in isolation from its historical context. Therefore, understanding Russia's post-communist behavior necessitates considering its historical roots (Tsygankov, 2013, p. 30). The persistence of traditional foreign policy debates suggests an ongoing effort to define Russia's role in the international arena. The historical legacy of the Soviet Union, characterized by an expansive geopolitical influence, continues to shape Russia's perceptions of its place in the world. This legacy influences its aspirations, and the struggle to reconcile the desire for "great power" status with the vulnerabilities stemming from the collapse of the Soviet Union creates complex dynamics in Russian foreign policy.Based on its state structure, institutions, and strategic culture, Russia's historical response to national challenges has been characterized by effective solutions attributed to its 'autocratic past, weak democratic institutions, and the tradition of power

personalization by figures like the tsar, the leader of the Politburo, or more recently, the President' (Khrushcheva & Hancox, 2006). The country's foreign policy has been historically influenced by conflicting beliefs rooted in its imperial past and memories of the Soviet Union's collapse. On one hand, Russia perceives itself as the successor to the expansive Soviet Union, aspiring to 'great power,' particularly within its immediate geopolitical sphere.

On the other hand, it remains acutely aware of its vulnerability to Western interests, viewing threats from the West as the foremost challenge to its security and sovereignty (Kanet & Sussex, 2015). Russian foreign policy and strategic culture have been profoundly shaped by a complex interplay of beliefs deeply entrenched within its historical narrative. This intricate tapestry is woven from conflicting perceptions regarding national greatness and vulnerability, intricately tied to Russia's imperial legacy and the seismic repercussions of the Soviet Union's collapse. This historical backdrop engenders a multifaceted approach to international relations, where Russia grapples with notions of past grandeur while navigating the present-day vulnerabilities that emerged from the dissolution of the Soviet era. This clash of historical perspectives lays the foundation for Russia's intricate foreign policy landscape, where the echoes of past imperial glory intersect with contemporary challenges, influencing the country's foreign policy (Mancoff, 2009). These ideas form the basis of Putin's perception of the world and the international community. On one hand, he does not recognize the United States as the sole hegemon; on the other hand, he feels vulnerable after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

It is this perception that shapes Putin's vision of national identity, domestic and international perceptions of Russia's capabilities, and its reconstruction policies in the post-Soviet space, and provides a critical lens through which to view the dynamics of Russian foreign policy. This perspective highlights the multifaceted nature of foreign policy decision-making, in which considerations of identity, both domestic and international perceptions, and regional self-confidence collectively shape the foreign policy contours of Putin's Russia. "Questions about national identity, along with perceptions at home and abroad about Russia's capabilities and policy of reassertion in post-Soviet space extended to its positioning in the international system, underlining the country's foreign policy" (Freire, 2012).

Despite extensive research recognizing the leadership's key role in shaping policy outcomes, particularly evident in Western political research, a noticeable gap remains in studying how individual perceptions and system variables influence Russian foreign policy decision-making. This discrepancy, especially in the Russian context, where the role of key individuals in power is often overlooked, highlights a significant gap in scholarly analysis compared to prevailing approaches in Western policy research. However, an alternative explanation focuses on individuals, ideas, and domestic institutions as crucial factors shaping Russian international behavior (McFaul, 2020). Post-Cold War, Russia grappled with the expanding influence of the United States in regions surrounding its borders, leading to tensions in areas like Georgia, Central Asia, and Ukraine. The U.S.'s dominance prompted Russia's military intervention in Georgia in 2008, signaling its determination to challenge U.S. dominance (Balci, 2019). This vision of grandeur is intertwined with a stark awareness of vulnerability to Western interests, considering external influences as the foremost challenge to its security and sovereignty. Russia's stance toward the U.S. is strongly influenced by the degree of external validation of its self-image as a great power. This nuanced landscape for Russian foreign policy necessitates a delicate balancing act between asserting great power ambitions and safeguarding against perceived Western threats, profoundly influencing its strategic decisions on the international stage (Arbatov, 1993).

A characteristic of Putin's leadership style is his tendency to pretend that he does not recognize the hegemony of the West. The only time Putin acknowledges the West's significant role in the international arena is when he attributes mistakes to them. In fact, Putin initiated his rule with cooperation from the West. However, after gaining economic strength, he articulated distinct positions at the Munich conference, clearly delineating where he and Russia stand apart from the West. It's paradoxical that Russia's position in the international arena heavily relies on its connections with Western partners, especially in terms of security, diplomacy, and economics. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the new Russian authorities hoped for cooperation based on equality and a common understanding of global goals (Lukin, 2016). The strategic outlook is based on the belief that Russia can sustain its role as a significant regional power and possibly reclaim its former leading position in the global landscape, much like it had during the time of the bipolar world.

Russia's foreign policy consistently revolves around realist goals: gaining maximum power, security, and economic advantage relative to the West, but with their cooperation as a great power balance. 'Russian great power balancers may be called broader defense realists, who advocate maintaining a sphere of influence in the territory of the former Soviet Union and striving to contain U.S. global pre-eminence' (Kuchins & Zevelev, 2012). Russia aims to gain prestige and be acknowledged as a major power by the West, similar to the era when direct political engagement boosted its global standing. The pivotal moment that brought attention to Vladimir Putin as a significant actor in Russian foreign policy was his renowned Munich speech. During this address, Putin explicitly articulated his vision for Russian foreign policy, challenging the prevailing notion of a stable unipolar world and advocating for a multipolar global order. His aim was to empower rising powers and fundamentally alter the dynamics of the international system. Putin's Munich speech marked a significant shift in global discourse as he questioned the existing one-polar structure, calling for a more equitable global order that reflected Russia's aspirations. This rhetoric aimed to challenge Western dominance and create a platform for emerging powers to assert their influence (Putin, 2007). Subsequent to the Munich speech, Putin's foreign policy actions highlighted Russia's strategic approach to promoting multipolarity while engaging in conflicts strategically to safeguard its interests and carefully manage potential clashes with the West (Makarychev & Morozov, 2011). This approach demonstrated Russia's desire to recalibrate global power dynamics without inciting direct confrontations detrimental to its interests.

Putin's Munich speech outlined the fundamental principles of his dichotomous perception of the international environment, challenging the West's position in international relations. He urged the global community to operate within their respective spheres of influence, aiming for a redistribution of power in a new system that included fully empowered actors (Lo, 2015). Notably, Putin maintained a wait-and-see position, choosing to threaten rather than directly attack or deprive the West, indicating a calculated approach to maintain control over events based on his average belief in ability to control events and average need for power. Putin's personal vision, as reflected in his Munich speech, diverged significantly from the prevailing international system at the time, suggesting his intent to establish dominance in the region and restore Russia's status as a Great Power (Mankoff, 2009). This vision made Putin particularly wary of Western

influence within territories he deemed under Russian interests among post-Soviet countries, perceiving such influence as a direct threat (Stent, 2019).

The relationship between Russia and NATO experienced a notable shift from 2008 to 2012, primarily influenced by perceived anti-Russian sentiments in the post-Soviet region following various "colour revolutions" (Finkel & Brudny, 2014). Vladimir Putin's leadership played a crucial role in shaping this trajectory, with critical junctures in his interactions with the West serving as turning points. During this period, Putin perceived a series of anti-Russian sentiments in the post-Soviet region, especially in the aftermath of the "colour revolutions," which contributed to a transformation in Russia's foreign policy approach. Instances that symbolized perceived betrayal by Western partners significantly shaped Putin's view of the collective West. This perception of betrayal highlighted a fundamental tension in Putin's leadership style, characterized by a willingness to engage with the West but strictly on his own terms (Nikitina, 2014). Initially marked by positive gestures and attempts at partnership, the relationship underwent a shift due to underlying tensions and conflicting interests. As predicted by neoclassical realism, disagreements arose over key systemic issues such as NATO enlargement, the deployment of missile defense systems in Eastern Europe, and differing perspectives on regional security dynamics. These disagreements gradually strained relations between Russia and NATO, contributing to a deterioration in their interactions. The historical context, including the long history of Soviet-NATO confrontation during the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, played a crucial role in shaping Russia's response. The relative weakness and instability of Russia in the 1990s further heightened sensitivity to any action that showcased the growth of relative U.S. influence, especially in Europe (Marten, 2023). The period from 2008 to 2012 witnessed a significant shift in the relationship between Russia and NATO, marked by perceived anti-Russian sentiments in the post-Soviet region, critical junctures in Putin's interactions with the West, and underlying tensions over key systemic issues, leading to a deterioration in their overall relationship.

The conflict in Georgia in 2008 heightened tensions between Russia and NATO, resulting in a strained relationship reminiscent of Cold War dynamics. During this period, Putin exhibited an increasing ambition for regional leadership while seeking to reduce constraints imposed by the international system. Putin's approach to conflicts during this

time aligned with his ambition, aiming to resolve disputes to safeguard Russian interests while preferring to avoid direct confrontations with NATO unless absolutely necessary. Considering Putin's political personality, it is noteworthy that the war in Georgia served as a personal affirmation for him that the West harbors specific geopolitical intentions in the post-Soviet space. This interpretation is influenced by Putin's personal perception, characterized by a low level of conceptual complexity and a binary view of allies as friends and adversaries as enemies. “Counting on Western non-intervention both in Georgia and in Ukraine and permissive international environment, Russia showed a new image of itself as a country capable of taking military action in defense of its national interest and above all willing to accept the political and military risks entailed by the use of force at a price that has proved comparatively acceptable” (Pisciotta, 2020).

The escalation of tensions between Georgia and its breakaway regions heightened geopolitical strain, revealing Russia's assertive stance in safeguarding perceived spheres of influence. Russia's rapid military intervention and subsequent recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states deepened global divisions, eliciting widespread condemnation from the West for violating Georgia's sovereignty. Despite facing international disapproval, Russia remained steadfast in its actions, indicating a readiness to endure the consequences. The military intervention in Georgia marked a significant departure in the post-Soviet landscape, illustrating Russia's deliberate efforts to reshape the evolving status quo following the USSR's collapse. This intervention aimed at regaining control over territories that were once part of the Soviet Union and inaugurating a more assertive foreign policy, which included the use of force to achieve regional objectives (Pisciotta, 2020). This strategic move represented the first instance of discontinuity within the post-Soviet sphere, highlighting Russia’s determination to assert influence and recalibrate regional dynamics to its advantage. On a personal level for Putin, this intervention served as confirmation that the West harbors strategic goals in the region. His inherent distrust of others, coupled with a belief in the efficacy of military action, reinforced his conviction that taking such measures is essential to ensure Russia's preservation of its dominant position in the region.

Putin's management of the conflict in Georgia illustrated Russia's assertive approach in neighboring territories, demonstrating Moscow's willingness to intervene decisively within what it considered its sphere of influence. However, beyond the immediate

military success, the aftermath of the conflict served as a catalyst for strategic recalibration within the Kremlin. This pivotal moment gave rise to the adoption of the concept of hybrid warfare, characterized by the blending of conventional military tactics with non-traditional methods such as propaganda, economic pressure, and proxy support (Person, 2019).

Recognizing the limitations of relying solely on military power, Putin pursued a multifaceted foreign policy approach, leading to the delegation of the task of reformulating Russia's military doctrine to Dmitry Medvedev. This decision marked a strategic shift, acknowledging the necessity for a more comprehensive strategy beyond conventional military tactics (Haas, 2010). The update of Medvedev's military doctrine following the Russian-Georgian conflict and Putin's Munich speech played pivotal roles in shaping Russia's foreign policy. These events highlighted the need for a strategic reassessment, emphasizing the importance of safeguarding Russian interests in the face of regional challenges. The updated doctrine highlighted key elements such as the protection of Russian sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the safeguarding of its citizens. It identified potential threats to Russia's national security, including NATO expansion, missile defense systems, and instability in neighboring regions (Klein, 2010). The doctrine underscored the significance of maintaining a nuclear deterrent while also stressing the modernization of conventional forces. "To highlight its military strength and to maintain its nuclear parity with the US, the RF reserves the right to use nuclear deterrence. The originally planned VD contained an except clause for the first use of nuclear weapons in response to broad-based aggression against the RF, and it also contained provisions for the preemptive use of nuclear weapons" (Haas, 2010; Tichý, 2018).

While Medvedev oversaw the adoption and updates to the military doctrine, Putin actively advocated for a unified trade union among post-Soviet countries, rooted in fostering economic cooperation. This approach involved a multifaceted strategy, leveraging both soft power initiatives and preparedness for potential military action, to uphold and strengthen Russia's position in the region (Tsygankov, 2006). Putin's commitment to bolstering economic ties and political collaboration within the former Soviet bloc was evident in his proactive advocacy for a unified Eurasian union, announced in August 2009. This initiative aimed to consolidate regional influence by

proposing economic integration and emphasizing shared cultural ties, establishing a network of interdependencies and positioning Russia as a central figure in regional affairs (Sergunin & Karabeshkin, 2015).

The strategic move went beyond enhancing Russia's influence; it also aimed at counterbalancing Western initiatives in the region and shaping a geopolitical sphere more aligned with Russian interests (Huseynov, 2016). Drawing from neoclassical realism, Putin capitalized on the permissive strategic environment in the international system, seeking to establish regional cooperation with Russia at its center. The intent was to foster a stronger regional identity while solidifying Russia's leadership role, demonstrating a deliberate effort to establish a framework that aligns with Russian objectives and reduces Western influence. The Kremlin shifted its focus, aiming to strengthen ties with post-Soviet countries through proposed alliances based on economic, cultural, and ideological principles.

A significant outcome of this geopolitical realignment was Russia's increased influence in economic organizations. Utilizing asymmetrical power dynamics, Moscow applied pressure on neighboring countries to join institutions like the Eurasian Economic Union. This expansion of economic alliances served as a tangible manifestation of Russia's attempt to position itself as a counterbalance to the U.S.-led global order. Inspired by A. Dugin's philosophy, the Eurasian Union aimed for a foreign policy using soft power tactics to secure and promote Russia's interests in neighboring regions. However, despite Russia's primary goal of restoring economic influence in the post-Soviet space, challenges emerged, and the ambitious vision faced setbacks as post-Soviet countries abandoned the idea due to issues like corruption, emphasis on national values, cultural differences, and disparities (Sergi, 2018; Stronski, 2020).

Neoclassical realism highlights that the offense-defense balance in military technologies in the international system prompted Russia to shift from a policy based on hard power to a greater emphasis on soft power strategies. The Eurasian Union, despite its limitations, held a pivotal position within Russia's foreign policy strategy, serving as a cornerstone for bolstering Russian soft power and maintaining influence in the post-Soviet realm. However, these endeavors faced challenges. While initiatives like the Eurasian Union strengthened ties with some neighboring countries, they struggled to counter the appeal of national sovereignty in other former Soviet states. Additionally, the political and

ideological aspects of the Eurasian Union, influenced by Alexander Dugin's philosophy, encountered resistance in some nations due to perceived authoritarian tendencies and the promotion of Russia's central role based on notions of Russian superiority. Grounded in ideas of geopolitics, Dugin's theory asserts a distinct civilizational space for Russia as a leading continental – and potentially global – power. In absolutizing "zero-sum" strategies and portraying the world as a place where "might makes right," the theory encourages Russian elites to employ a mixture of military and non-military means to subvert, destabilize, and misinform "rival blocs," thereby helping to establish Russia’s dominance in Eurasia (Kalinin, 2019).

Putin's strategic response demonstrated a keen recognition of pivotal events as catalysts for a significant shift in Russian foreign policy. This response was shaped by a consideration of both domestic and international factors, acknowledging the changing dynamics in the global geopolitical landscape and their impact on Russia's regional influence. These developments prompted a recalibration of Russia's approach, incorporating a combination of soft-power initiatives and military preparedness to assert and safeguard its interests in the face of evolving challenges. However, by 2014, Russia found itself compelled to resort to conventional military force, notably in regions such as Ukraine. This military intervention was a response to the perceived reduction in political control following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The shift towards military intervention stemmed from Russia's perception of external threats and the imperative to maintain influence in areas where its direct control had diminished. This strategic shift, driven partly by internal and external systemic pressures, notably heightened tensions with the West and drew widespread international condemnation. The reliance on military measures to safeguard interests in regions where political control had weakened underscored the intricate interplay between domestic constraints and international exigencies. This complex dynamic significantly impacted Russia's relations with other nations and contributed to reshaping the global geopolitical landscape (Dutkiewicz & Trenin, 2011). The scenario of Russia employing military strategies to assert influence in neighboring regions has significantly strained its relationships with the West, resulting in condemnation, the imposition of economic sanctions, and continuous geopolitical tensions. Neoclassical realism emphasizes that economic sanctions can influence the policies of actors and provoke a systemic response. The use of conventional military

power not only challenged the sovereignty of neighboring states but also triggered heightened scrutiny of Russia's foreign policy goals and its position on the international stage.

Under Putin's leadership, the pursuit of reestablishing Russia's status as a global power became increasingly evident, particularly following his return to the presidency in 2012 for his third and fourth terms (Kramer, 2019). This period witnessed a more assertive approach in promoting Russia's influence and interests, marked by a more pronounced use of military capabilities in the pursuit of strategic objectives (Van Herpen, 2015). Russia's annexation of Crimea and its involvement in eastern Ukraine in 2014 showcased its determination to counter what it perceived as Western encroachment in the region. This was driven by a desire to safeguard what Russia considered its rightful sphere of influence. Putin's administration pursued a realist policy, applying pressure on Ukraine, supporting separatist movements in eastern Ukraine, and ultimately annexing Crimea, leading to widespread international condemnation. Putin's foreign policy approach towards Ukraine notably exacerbated tensions with the West, especially with the United States and the European Union. The international community strongly criticized Russia's actions, responding with economic sanctions imposed as a consequence of these moves in Ukraine. Therefore, economic sanctions became an important tool or the only element in the interactions of the system, especially towards Russia's offensive. However, it could not entirely determine Russia's strategic behavior (Gould-Davies, 2023).

The subsequent intervention in Syria, facilitated by a permissive systemic environment and a lack of significant response from great powers or international institutions, not only demonstrated Russia's capability to extend its involvement beyond regional boundaries but also highlighted active Russian diplomacy aimed at securing a peace settlement. This diplomatic effort not only contributed to shaping the outcome of the conflict in Syria but also enhanced Russia's image as a major global power, gaining recognition not only in the Middle East but across the international community (McFaul, 2020). Putin's leadership style and his foundational principles in shaping foreign policy had a profound impact on Russia's intervention in Syria. Diverging from potential alternate strategies, Putin's strong opposition to regime change and his endorsement of autocratic leaders played a pivotal role in the decision to engage militarily to safeguard Assad's regime. Despite potential alternative approaches that might have aligned with Russia's interests,

such as supporting the Syrian opposition, Putin chose direct military involvement to ensure the survival of the Assad regime. This decision was heavily influenced by Putin's steadfast principles and vision for maintaining stability and supporting established regimes, even at the cost of international critique and conflict involvement (Averre, Davies, 2015). As neoclassical realism suggests, the multipolarity of the international system permitted Putin to take strong measures based on his worldview and thoughts. Therefore, his strategic mindset led him to focus on Ukraine after the Syria intervention.

The assertion posits that Russian foreign policy cannot be solely attributed to systemic factors, indicating that Putin's interpretation of events primarily influences his decisions in the invasion. Russian foreign policy underwent significant changes during Vladimir Putin's rule, with these shifts often corresponding to political events experienced by the president. This has become particularly evident during various military interventions under President Putin. The trajectory of Russian foreign policy is influenced by a combination of external, internal, and individual factors. His distinct vision of international dynamics steered him away from a full-scale war in Ukraine in 2014, opting for a hybrid approach instead. Based on neoclassical evaluations, Putin's strategic involvement in international conflicts, notably the successful support of Assad in Syria, aligns with his priorities, granting him leeway to execute the 2022 Ukraine invasion. These deliberate actions underscore Putin's personalized approach to Russian foreign policy, emphasizing elements such as individual perception, ideological considerations, and factors deemed crucial by Putin himself, thereby shaping Russia's international conduct (Hill, 2015). Numerous factors contribute to these historical strains. Russia's discontent with NATO's eastward expansion is a central concern, viewed as encroaching upon its sphere of influence. Conflicting interpretations of sovereignty and democracy in post-Soviet states have further exacerbated tensions. Neoclassical realism theorists suggest that being close to conflict areas is key to states' behavior. Conflict zones in neighboring regions, like Georgia and Ukraine, serve as arenas where Russia asserts its influence, drawing Western condemnation and intensifying historical animosities, leading to a chain of other issues (Toal, 2017).

Putin's foreign policy extends beyond the immediate region, notably into the Middle East. His pivotal involvement in the Syrian conflict, backing Bashar al-Assad's government and intervening militarily against opposition factions, exemplifies this broader

engagement. Concurrently, Putin has actively fostered stronger diplomatic ties with Middle Eastern nations such as Iran and Turkey, forming a multifaceted engagement strategy (Trenin, 2016). Moreover, Putin's vision challenges the predominant Western-centric global order, arguing that it disproportionately favors Western powers, conflicting with Russian interests. In response, Putin has sought closer alliances with non-Western powers, particularly China, advocating for a more balanced, multipolar world order that challenges Western hegemony and ensures equitable power distribution among global players (Bolt & Cross, 2018).

Understanding Putin's leadership style is instrumental in deciphering his foreign policy decisions and Russia's global stance. His assertive foreign policy, characterized by interventions in Georgia, Syria, and Ukraine, the consolidation of the Eurasian Union, and the utilization of hybrid warfare tactics, reflects a deliberate attempt to counter Western influences, reclaim historical significance, and assert Russia's global standing. Putin's complex relationship with the West is deeply rooted in Russia's aspiration to regain its former superpower status, leading to clashes over geopolitical objectives and historical tensions. His vision diverges from the prevailing Western-centric world order, advocating for a multipolar system and forging closer alliances with non-Western powers. Analyzing Putin's leadership offers insights into Russia's foreign policy aspirations, aiding in navigating the intricacies of international relations and understanding the geopolitical landscape shaped by his decisions and actions. This approach allows for a nuanced perspective on the motivations driving Russian foreign policy, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the global dynamics influenced by Putin's assertive and strategic approach.

Conclusion

This chapter argues that conventional theoretical frameworks in international relations have limitations when it comes to explaining the influence of individuals on shaping a state's foreign policy. While mainstream neoclassical realism emphasizes systemic and domestic factors in shaping foreign policy, integrating neoclassical realism with a political psychology assessment acknowledges the crucial role played by an individual leader's personality, beliefs, and cognitive processes in making foreign policy decisions. Thus, incorporating a political psychology assessment provides an additional layer of insight necessary for understanding the dynamics of Putin's Russia. In the context of

Putin's leadership style on Russian foreign policy, merging neoclassical realism with a political psychology assessment enhances the understanding of actor-specific behavior. Putin's unique leadership style emerges as a result influenced by both systemic and domestic factors, highlighting the intricate interplay between broader geopolitical conditions and individual attributes in shaping Russia's international actions. Moreover, it's essential to recognize that a state's structure isn't solely represented by a single leader or society but comprises a complex network of interconnected structures and components. Therefore, employing diverse analytical perspectives allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted processes and outcomes in international relations.

As a result, this chapter presents a systematic framework that evaluates the role of individuals within international relations theory, focusing specifically on Putin's impact on Russian foreign policy. This multidimensional approach aims to illuminate the intricate connections between individual leadership, systemic forces, and the complexities of state behavior in the realm of global affairs. Undoubtedly, Putin's pursuit of security reflects realism, yet how he approaches it aligns with his perceptions and vision of foreign policy to attain both domestic and external state objectives. However, this work argues that solely attributing Russian foreign policy to Putin's personality might be insufficient. To comprehensively understand the premises of Putin's actions, it's imperative to analyze four pivotal cases of Russian foreign policy through the multidimensional method. While the neoclassical framework aids in explaining initial actions, understanding Putin's reactions necessitates incorporating elements of political psychology. Putin's vision of international relations became evident through his Munich speech. Subsequently, across these critical cases, Putin’s leadership style displayed a degree of variability—from staunch criticism of NATO during the Georgian and Crimean crises to instances of cooperation and joint efforts with NATO in Syria, followed by a complete departure from Western partnerships during the Ukraine crisis of 2022.

CHAPTER 2: LEADERSHIP TRAIT ANALYSIS

This chapter delves into the methodology of leadership trait analysis, exploring the significance of psychological assessment as a research method in political science. The discussion commences by surveying the central claims and assumptions related to the assessment of individuals in policy outcomes. The focus then shifts to the leadership trait analysis methodology, providing a foundation for comprehending individuals in political processes. In contrast to bibliographical research, the assessment of individuals in policy outcomes allows for a nuanced understanding of individuals during decision-making, emphasizing relevant predispositions towards the international environment. The chapter proceeds to elucidate how political individuals can be studied during decision-making, presenting a methodology to define leadership style. The overarching aim is to demonstrate that the at-distance measures approach enriches political science research. Therefore, the approach proposed here combines with the neo-classical realism framework in the second chapter. This framework explores how results from at-distance measures, when integrated with political theory, could elucidate the subjective factor and hold potential in explaining foreign policy. The synergy between these methodologies is expected to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play in the realm of international relations.

2.1. Psychological Assessment of Individuals in Politics

Every political process and outcome is influenced, either predicted or unpredicted, by individuals in politics. To understand the history of the twentieth century, it is necessary to analyze the policies of leaders such as Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini, and Mao Zedong, who have left an indelible mark on history. These leaders, with varying degrees of absolute power and their governing methods, have been the subject of extensive research. To comprehend the decision-making processes during World War II, one must understand the leadership styles of Stalin and Hitler. The fall of the Soviet Union cannot be scrutinized without considering the actions taken by Gorbachev, and the Russian Revolution cannot be understood without examining the contributions of individuals such as Lenin and Trotsky. While some may admire these leaders, others may criticize them. Nonetheless, it is evident that individuals in politics shape historical events, and a leader in power makes all significant decisions.

Political leaders make decisions every day, ranging from the mundane to the crucial. Whether these decisions pertain to foreign or domestic affairs, they ultimately fall within the purview of the leader's responsibility. Therefore, understanding the personality traits and decision-making processes of political leaders is critical for comprehending international events and outcomes. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in understanding the psychological assessment of political leaders and how it affects state decision-making processes in international relations. This interest is rooted in the belief that the personality traits, values, and beliefs of leaders play a significant role in shaping foreign policy decisions. Indeed, scholars have long recognized that the personalities of political actors can have a profound impact on political processes and outcomes.

This chapter highlights the key role of psychological assessment in understanding the dynamics of decision-making in the political sphere. Psychological assessment serves as a valuable tool for studying leadership qualities, personality characteristics, cognitive functions, and decision-making methodologies used by policymakers. Through in-depth analysis of leaders' psychological assessments, it is possible to gain a clearer understanding of their motives, cognitive models, behavior, and their subsequent influence on foreign policy decisions. It begins by describing the meaning of psychological assessment, explaining the diverse range of tools and methodologies used in the process. Emphasizing the focus on leadership quality analysis, an important indicator used to evaluate the psychological aspects of political leaders in the field of international relations, the chapter is devoted to identifying and assessing the personal qualities and behavior patterns of a leader. This analysis reveals their distinct leadership style and decision-making paradigms. Each trait is examined in detail, including its definition and how it is measured. The methodology used to assess these traits is also discussed. In addition, technical tools such as data collection, sorting, framing, and result calculation are explained in subsequent chapters. To illustrate the application of leadership traits analysis, the chapter proposes a case study of Vladimir Putin. The analysis of Putin's personal traits is framed in tables with special attention given to critical cases and timelines. Comparisons are made across different cases to gain a deeper understanding of Putin's decision-making processes and leadership style. This analysis can provide valuable insights into the behavior of political leaders and how they approach international relations.

2.1.1. Rationality and Personality in Foreign Policy Decision-making

Foreign policy decision-making is a complex process that involves multiple actors and factors. Among these, the role of individuals and their rationality has been a subject of significant debate and discussion. The rational actor approach, which assumes that individuals act on behalf of a state and make decisions based on a logical assessment of the costs and benefits of available options, has been one of the dominant paradigms in the study of foreign policy decision-making. This approach implies that individuals have no special significance in historical processes and are acting solely on behalf of the state. According to the rational actor model, individuals or states are considered rational actors who make decisions based on a logical assessment of the costs and benefits of available options. This paradigm suggests that actors have clearly defined preferences and objectives and seek to maximize their actions to align with state interests.

During a political crisis, the question of whether a leader is acting rationally or not is often raised. Numerous studies in international relations and political psychology indicate that individuals can find themselves in predicaments in the rational calculation of decisions they make and the outcomes they produce. This suggests that political decisions and outcomes reflect not only the rationality of a state but also the individual characteristics of the decision-maker. The principle is that due to personal interpretations of events, political individuals have the possibility to miscalculate outcomes and results. A strict methodological definition of rationality, as proposed by positivist science, is that a theory should not treat a person as an individual with his or her own psychology and preferences. Instead, it should seek to turn individual behavior into that conducted by anyone in a similar situation (Mercer, 2005; Winter, 2003).

The most basic rational-actor explanations assume that each actor has similar interests. If this were the case, individuals could fill in for one another in different roles without significantly changing history. "Cognitive theories assume a model of bounded rationality, in which the decision-maker is guided by their system of beliefs in the identification of options, ends/means calculations, and choice of action (Simon, 1985, p.14). Bounded rationality, in turn, is a step towards taking into account psychological factors, as it emphasizes the limitations of rationality in most cases" (Pursiainen & Forsberg, 2017, pp. 77-106). Indeed, "while human beings strive mostly for some kind of rationality in their actions, psychological approaches discuss the limits of rationality and

reveal some features in human behavior, which, from a very strict rational choice approach, may appear as anomalies" (Pursiainen & Forsberg, 2017, p. 234). Psychological approaches offer a promising way to understand the role of individuals in foreign policy decision-making. By taking into account personal characteristics and situational factors, these approaches can help us gain a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of foreign policy outcomes. For example, personality traits such as risk-taking propensity, cognitive biases, and emotional intelligence can all play a significant role in shaping a leader's decision-making process. There are numerous international relations and psychological theoretical works dedicated to understanding the complexities of individuals in foreign politics.

General theories of international relations explain the political environment focusing on power politics without an in-depth analysis of the role of individuals. Similarly, studies of individuals are limited to behavioral approaches and do not adequately explain the policy-making process. International relations scholars have raised questions about the phenomenon of a political leader in the formation of foreign policy outcomes. Despite the public presence of politicians, it is still not clear how leaders make decisions and calculate risks. Some questions that arise are: how can the phenomenon of political leadership be studied? How do leaders make choices in different cases? Do individuals' psychological attributes have the potential to affect the decision-making process, such as stress, emotions, ideological prejudices, and traumatic events? How do individual decision-makers develop an effective, sustainable, and sometimes flexible system of decisions that aligns with their values or rational choice? When do states' interests prevail over individual ones?

Overall, comprehending the influence of individuals on politics and decision-making demands a deeper exploration of psychological factors and personal traits. This study can yield fresh perspectives on the intricacies of foreign policy outcomes and enhance our grasp of how individuals shape history. The inquiry into individual rationality underscores the need for a more nuanced approach to understanding foreign policy decision-making. Considering the rationality of individuals allows us to uncover why specific foreign policy choices are made and anticipate their potential outcomes. The examination of individual rationality significantly contributes to the field of international relations by emphasizing the pivotal role of individual decision-makers in shaping foreign

policy outcomes. By considering the psychological and cognitive aspects affecting decision-making, we can attain a more sophisticated comprehension of global events and enhance our capacity to forecast and elucidate foreign policy results.

To understand the place leadership plays in foreign policy, one of the most popular methods is studying the biographies of leaders. However, this retrospective view can be challenging to define as scientific or theoretical since it is based on subjective assessments and does not always rely on empirical data. In contrast, psychological assessment can provide a more systematic and empirical study of a leader's behavior, motives, and beliefs, but it has limits in its descriptions of particular psychological assessments that can influence political decisions. Psychological approaches aim to facilitate understanding of the complexities of individuals in politics, including leaders in foreign policy decision-making. These approaches have been developed alongside an increasing recognition among political and organizational leadership students that leadership is a more complicated concept than previously thought (Hermann, 1980).

While general theories of international relations often focus on power politics, they do not always provide an in-depth analysis of the identities and characteristics of individuals involved in decision-making processes. The psychological approach, on the other hand, can question the limits of rational choice and offer insight into the impact of personal characteristics and situational factors on foreign policy decisions. Therefore, understanding the connection between the psychological features of politicians and their actions in a political environment can help shed light on the processes involved in foreign policy decision-making. The main task of this study is to examine how political processes vary between a leader's behavior and foreign policy outcomes using a distance methodology and a political theories framework. The system of decisions of a politician has a complex long-term sequence that depends on not only the reputation of an individual but also the reputation and place of the state in the world order. An individual in politics constructs the environment through a personal vision of emerging situations, which is his political style. Thus, the decisions have the character of a self-conscious system. In this case, the international system provides a framework for the possibility of action, in turn, without having consciousness. By understanding the consciousness of the individual who makes the decision, it gives a frame to understand the motives of foreign policy decisions. The study of individuals in politics as major decision-makers could open international

conflicts and explain international conflicts in a completely new way by examining the place of behavioral characteristics of a leader. Thus, psychological research sets the ground for an in-depth analysis of individual choice, the importance of emotions, and behavioral pre-conditions before and after decision-making. A system of decision-making has a complex long-term consistency with influence on not only the image of an individual but also the image of how particular leadership is important in foreign policy.

The individual in politics shapes the environment based on their personal vision of the situation, which, in turn, forms their political style. Therefore, the system can be viewed as self-aware. To gain a better understanding of foreign policy processes and outcomes, it is crucial to study the roots and motives of decision-making, including individual power considerations and implementations. This involves exploring a range of questions, such as how the leader's cognitive set of personal characteristics, beliefs, task orientation, in-group bias, and other traits affect their decision-making process. The domestic political environment often influences foreign policy outcomes, especially when states of equal power act differently in international relations. While political systems have different hierarchical structures, they all have an executive branch responsible for formulating decisions, which are then executed by individuals in power. In many cases, individuals centralize around the figure of a leader who becomes the face of state politics. As a result, the power dynamics of individuals in various processes balance and shape political outcomes.

The perception and actions of a leader often encapsulate the spirit of an era and wield significant influence over its trajectory. Consequently, it becomes crucial to accord substantial attention to leadership within diverse contexts while continuing to refine theories and methodologies in this area. The study of political leadership serves a paramount purpose: unraveling the pivotal role that leadership assumes in shaping various facets within the public domain. It delves into the impact of leadership not only within the formal structures of political systems but also across an array of arenas such as political parties, populist movements, intricate political networks, and critical moments during periods of crisis. Understanding political leadership within these contexts enables a more comprehensive grasp of how leaders exert their influence, how their decisions reverberate through societies, and how they leave an indelible mark on historical timelines. By scrutinizing leadership across these diverse spectrums, we gain insights into

its multifaceted nature and its profound impact on shaping the course of events within the public sphere.

2.1.1. Assessment at-Distance Methodology

The specificity of the field of international relations lies in its focus on political structures rather than the role of individuals in politics. This chapter aims to contribute to the theoretical discussion between scholars of two methodological approaches that unfold within the frameworks of political science in general and the role of individuals in the process of foreign policy decision-making in particular. To understand the political behaviour of individuals, it is necessary to explore subjective factors. The cognitive methodology provides a way to understand individuals' features in political perception. By analysing input data, the internal logic of behaviour becomes more evident than perceived characteristics. While the cognitive methodology is not universally applicable to describe individuals in politics, it serves as a link between cognitive constructs and a leader's behaviour, as determined by several empirical studies. Advocates of this approach assume that political processes, in general, and the process of making foreign policy decisions, in particular, depend largely on individuals in politics rather than on political institutions. Content analysis aims to identify the concepts used by politicians in their speeches, determine the personal characteristics of the leader, their role in the decision-making process, and the consequences of their actions. Content analysis is a methodology that identifies and calculates the frequency of references to certain semantic units in the data being studied.

The quantitative characteristics of the text obtained in this way make it possible to draw qualitative conclusions, including the latent and implicit content of the data. Therefore, the method of content analysis is capable of explaining both qualitative and quantitative analysis as a research methodology. This methodology uses linguistic information about the characteristics of the text to identify its semantic features. From a linguistic perspective, the essence of content analysis is to make plausible assumptions about the content plan based on the foreign (quantitative) characteristics of the text at the level of words and phrases, and as a result, draw conclusions about the factors that affect the decision-making process. Political psychology as a research tradition provides a means to explore whether leaders' personalities and styles matter in foreign policy decision-

making. Despite the significant amount of research conducted on Putin, there is a lack of research on how he, as an individual, plays a significant role in critical cases. Therefore, it is worth exploring personal traits research to assess Putin's behaviour in response to situational demands during the Georgian, Syrian, and Ukrainian invasions. Two established research methodologies can be used to explain individuals in politics: “at-a-distance” approaches to assessing a leader's trait profiles and the broader political psychology theory. At-a-distance techniques draw a leader's traits using their words as data, and existing literature explains how to interpret and construct a leadership style profile. In contrast, the literature on personality and classical theory can provide many insights into various effects on a leader's behaviour. This paper primarily follows the former approach, but it also links with personality theories. Underlying this assumption is that a speaker's words reflect their personality (Dille & Young, 2000).

Margaret G. Hermann's leadership trait analysis is an approach in political psychology that uses the "at-a-distance" technique to analyze leaders' personalities and styles. This method involves using computer-assisted analysis of individual speeches and interviews to construct a political leadership style, which is then compared with a reference group of previous studies on world leaders. The leadership trait analysis technique relies on quantitative methods conducted remotely to discern psychological traits from a leader's verbal conduct. It hinges on the principle that a leader's spoken expressions serve as a lens into their distinctive leadership style and underlying personality traits. Analysts scrutinize language patterns, vocabulary choices, speech cadence, and recurring themes in a leader's communication to extract insights. For instance, assertive language and emphasis on control may suggest traits associated with dominance, while an emphasis on collaboration could indicate openness and empathy.

This involves collecting speech data from public addresses, interviews, or official statements, using computational tools to analyze linguistic markers, sentiment, and patterns indicative of psychological traits. However, it's important to consider the limitations, such as the influence of context, non-verbal cues, and the strategic use of language, which can impact the accuracy of trait assessments based solely on linguistic analysis. Nonetheless, this technique offers a structured framework to understand a leader's behavioral tendencies and psychological predispositions by examining nuances within their verbal expressions. While this approach has some limitations, including

potential issues in the selection of reference groups the absence of access to non-verbal cues, and language difference issues it has proven effective in understanding the role played by leaders in the decision-making process of foreign policy. This technique empowers researchers to discern the psychological characteristics and leadership styles of political leaders, thereby enabling predictions of their likely responses to diverse circumstances. Policymakers can leverage this knowledge to formulate strategies and policies.

The leadership trait analysis approach stands as a crucial instrument within the realm of political psychology research, offering profound insights into the dynamics of foreign policy decision-making. Its application has significantly enhanced our understanding of how individual leaders influence and shape international relations. By delving into the nuances of a leader's verbal conduct, this methodology reveals underlying personality traits and leadership tendencies that play pivotal roles in driving foreign policy strategies and shaping global affairs. Through this lens, analysts can identify patterns, tendencies, and inclinations within a leader's discourse, shedding light on their decision-making styles, preferences, and attitudes toward key foreign policy matters. Consequently, this approach helps elucidate the intricate interplay between personal leadership traits and broader geopolitical outcomes. Understanding the individual psychology of leaders provides a more comprehensive comprehension of the complexities inherent in international relations, ultimately contributing to more nuanced and informed analyses of global political landscapes.

2.2. Leadership Trait Analysis

In the 1970s, Margaret Hermann developed a method for studying the psychological characteristics of individuals and their impact on foreign policy outcomes, known as Leadership trait analysis. This approach relies on the "at-a-distance" method to identify how an individual's characteristics affect foreign policy patterns. Hermann's work aimed to answer the question of how to study political personalities through the development of leadership styles. The LTA was used to analyze the personalities of numerous leaders, including "U.S. presidents, British Prime Ministers, sub-Saharan African leaders, Iranian leaders, Soviet Politburo members, and heads of international organizations such as the

European Union and the United Nations" (Dyson, 2006; Hermann, 1984, 1987; Kille & Scully, 2003& Mastors, 2000; Preston, 2001; Taysi & Preston, 2001).

Leadership trait analysis is a content analysis technique used to measure individual characteristics by analyzing the words spoken by world leaders. This method helps to organize the chaotic and idiosyncratic nature of human personality into more ordered categorizations aimed at understanding and predicting the behaviors of prominent individuals (Dyson, 2007, pp. 647-666). The origins of this methodology lie in attempts by psychologists and scholars of policymaking and international relations to understand government policy choices by studying the verbal behavior of key government leaders. Margaret Hermann began researching the psychological characteristics of individuals and their effects on foreign-policy matters in the 1970s (Hermann & Cantor, 1974), with one publication discussing methods (Hermann, 1974) and two others investigating the effects of characteristics on foreign-policy patterns (Hermann, 1977).

In 1980, Hermann introduced the concept of leadership trait analysis and explained its practical application. According to Hermann, it is crucial to distinguish and classify political leaders based on their approaches. Two leaders may share the same stance on a particular foreign policy issue, but one of them may see the problem in a simplistic, black-and-white way, while the other may have a more nuanced perspective. The first leader may be more receptive to criticism and alternative viewpoints than the second. Hermann recommends using simple content analysis to assess the complexity of political individuals. Specifically, researchers should examine the words used in the speeches and other narrative sources of the political leader. The relevance of the quantitative at-distance methodology is well established in recent political science literature, particularly in the works of S. Dyson, who analyzed the foreign policy views of British leaders, such as Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair. This methodology provides new insights into explaining foreign policy behavior by examining the personal characteristics of political leaders. Hermann's approach focuses on counting specific words and phrases to identify seven different psychological characteristics (Hermann & Preston, 1994, pp. 75-96). The development of content analysis methods has led to the formation of two distinct approaches: quantitative, which involves recording the frequency of specific words and conducting mathematical (statistical) analyses, and qualitative, which involves a more interpretive analysis of the content.

The content analysis methodology was developed to meet the need for independent, at-a-distance research principles. With advancements in content analysis software and open access to speech transcripts, researchers from various backgrounds and disciplines can investigate the psychological characteristics of world leaders. This methodology ensures that results are not influenced by the researcher's personality or ideological views, or by when or where the study is conducted. Furthermore, researchers can conduct the analysis online, exploring current leaders and participants in international processes, or offline, examining political leaders who have already left the political scene but left their mark on history. Thus, the at-a-distance methodology has the potential to provide a platform for independent experts and scholars to conduct their work. Hermann's leadership trait analysis research program was initially presented in a project that included a large number of cases, featuring forty-five different leaders, which was a notable contribution in the literature at that time (Rhodes & Hart, 2014, pp. 117-132). Hermann employed various dependent variables in the study to characterize a leadership style. According to Hermann, researchers should analyze different periods of a leader's tenure in office, taking into account contextual factors and examining changes in leadership traits. This is crucial because a change in context can lead to a change in leadership traits (Malici, 2006, p. 130). Comparing leaders in different positions and tenures in office can indicate significant changes.

The idea that a change in leadership traits can occur when a leader accepts a new institutional role is based on the assumption that a leader's behavior reflects their tasks according to their institutional position (Cuhadar et al., 2017, pp. 29-54). The advantage of using the LTA framework in analyzing the relationship between personalities and roles, coupled with the methodological rigor of the content analysis scheme associated with LTA, is that it offers clear expectations for which traits of leaders matter and how they relate to their context, institutional framework, costs and advantages of different policy options, and other political players in theoretically meaningful and predictable ways.

The results of LTA analysis indicate the possibility of change in leadership and the decision-making process, as well as revealing factors that affect the leader's traits and leadership style. For example, spontaneous material when the press captures a leader can provide information about the stability or sensitivity in turn of his or her leadership style.

Hermann notes that if the traits do not change while the situational context is changing, the stability of the traits can be seen as a personality characteristic itself and is the leadership style of a leader (Hermann, 1980, pp. 7-46). "The value of the wide application of the technique is that it is possible to compare each new leader analyzed against a previously established reference group, giving substantive meaning to the generated data" (Dyson, 2006, p. 293). The results of LTA analysis indicate the possibility of change in leadership and the decision-making process, as well as revealing factors that affect the leader's traits and leadership style. For example, spontaneous material when the press captures a leader can provide information about the stability or sensitivity in turn of his or her leadership style. Hermann notes that if the traits do not change while the situational context is changing, the stability of the traits can be seen as a personality characteristic itself and is the leadership style of a leader (Hermann, 1980, pp. 7-46).

2.2.1. Data Processing

Content analysis serves as a potent tool for researchers investigating the role of leadership, enabling the transformation of qualitative text data into systematically constructed, replicable quantitative data. This approach facilitates meaningful scientific analysis of the words and language used by political leaders, offering valuable insights into their decision-making processes, beliefs, and values (Winter, 1977, pp. 17-44). "The verbal material of a leader is assumed to contain information relating to the psychology of those leaders, as it is an indirect manifestation of the mind" (Renson, 2009, pp. 649-650). One notable advantage of content analysis is its ability to collect data without requiring a direct interview. The words extracted from interviews or various types of speeches form the basis for assessment. Researchers can employ this method to analyze both spontaneous expressions and prepared statements made by political leaders, with the former being more suitable for capturing the natural response of a leader (Hermann, 1980, pp. 7-46). To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the analysis, Hermann proposed that researchers categorize data by time, audience (domestic, foreign), topic, and degree of spontaneity. This categorization helps illustrate the relative sensitivity or insensitivity of the observed individual's context. Additionally, to ensure that the description of a leadership style is not content-specific, researchers should analyze interview responses

spanning the leader's tenure in office, occurring in different interview settings, and focusing on a variety of topics (Hermann, 1980, pp. 7-46).

Despite its numerous advantages, content analysis does have limitations. One notable limitation is the potential for relevant differences between spontaneous and prepared statements. Some studies suggest that using interviews may be more reliable in certain cases (Dille, 2000; Schafer & Crichlow, 2000; Schafer & Walker, 2006). Furthermore, not all researchers may have the opportunity to conduct direct interviews with politicians. Many politicians may be unwilling to participate in psychoanalysis or hesitant to have the results made public (Dyson, 2009, pp. 1-12). Nevertheless, content analysis remains a valuable methodological technique for researchers investigating the public communication of political leaders. By scrutinizing the words and language used by political leaders in interviews and speeches, researchers can extract valuable insights into their decision-making processes, beliefs, and values. While acknowledging its limitations, content analysis continues to stand as a powerful tool for researchers aiming to enhance their understanding of the psychology of political leaders.

2.2.2. Method

Leadership trait analysis is a methodological approach developed by Margaret Hermann, designed to understand an individual's leadership style and decision-making processes through the analysis of political behavior and psychological traits. This at-distance technique aims to determine a leader's internal psychological factors, including their unconscious personality, which can influence decision-making and overall political outcomes. LTA is a scheme that is not static but depends on the specific period and variety of decisions made by the leader during that time. By analyzing a leader's traits and behavior over time, researchers can conclude their overall leadership style and how it affects decision-making in various contexts. This approach helps shed light on why certain leaders make particular decisions and how their leadership style may impact their country or organization. Initially relying on hand-coding techniques, LTA research has evolved to use computer programs for coding leaders' speeches, allowing for more reliable assessments at greater speed and volume.

The study has identified seven personality traits associated with a leader's inclination to either challenge or respect constraints within their surroundings. These traits influence

their receptiveness to information and advice, the composition of their advisory systems, the quality of their decision-making process, and the policies they adopt for their country or organization. The LTA method involves a structured framework that counts specific words and phrases as indications of seven different psychological characteristics. These characteristics include conceptual complexity, need for power, distrust, self-confidence, in-group bias, task focus, and belief in the ability to control events. Each trait is associated with two dictionaries of words, one indicating positive manifestations of the trait and the other indicating negative manifestations.

These traits can combine in various ways to produce specific behaviors by leaders, contributing to a typology encompassing eight distinct leadership styles. This typology provides a comprehensive profile of how leaders organize interactions and the norms, rules, and principles guiding such engagements. The flexibility of the LTA scheme allows researchers to tailor their analysis to suit different research questions and contexts, focusing on specific traits or decision-making processes that are most relevant to their research question. This targeted approach can reveal insights into a leader's behaviour and decision-making, providing a more comprehensive understanding of their leadership style. One advantage of the leadership trait analysis approach is its ability to collect and analyse data from diverse sources such as interviews, speeches, and public statements. Specialized software like Profiler Plus has been developed by Social Science Automation to make the data collection process more efficient. It uses Hermann's framework to identify key personality traits and factors that can influence a leader's decision-making. By quickly identifying patterns and trends in the data, this software enables researchers to gain a deeper understanding of an individual's leadership style.

2.2.3. Conceptual Complexity

Conceptual complexity, as measured in leadership trait analysis, refers to the degree to which an individual perceives other people, politics, and things. It reflects the individual's ability to construct sophisticated definitions and demonstrate flexibility in responding to objects and ideas within their environment. Those with higher conceptual complexity perceive their surroundings more intricately, allowing for nuanced understandings and flexible responses. Conversely, individuals with lower conceptual complexity tend to have a more limited and binary understanding, often relying on simplistic concepts such

as good-bad or black-white and having ambiguity in decision-making. In content analysis, the focus is on specific words that indicate the categorical nature of concepts used by an individual. Words suggesting high conceptual complexity might include terms like 'approximate', 'possibilities', and 'trends', while those indicating low conceptual complexity could include terms like 'absolute', 'no doubt', and 'certainly irreversible'.

The analysis involves calculating the percentage of high and low complexity words used, with the overall score representing the average word usage. Political leaders with high conceptual complexity scores are seen as broad thinkers who prefer gathering extensive information and seeking diverse opinions before making decisions. They are open to new data and perspectives, processing information in a nuanced manner. These leaders perceive international politics and actors in shades of grey, avoiding black-and-white thinking. They tend not to rush into instant decisions and prefer careful consideration of their options. On the other hand, leaders with low conceptual complexity are guided by immediate reactions, prioritizing action over careful planning. They may rely on stereotypes and template solutions when processing contextual information.

Conceptual complexity is indeed a crucial psychological construct that sheds light on an individual's ability to perceive and react to their environment. Content analysis serves as a valuable tool in gauging conceptual complexity, enabling researchers to discern the thinking style of an individual. Leaders with high conceptual complexity exhibit a broad thinking style, characterized by nuanced and complex processing of information. On the other hand, leaders with low conceptual complexity lean towards more simplistic thinking patterns. The understanding of conceptual complexity holds significance in the realm of leadership, contributing to the development of effective strategies and the enhancement of decision-making processes. Leaders with higher conceptual complexity are often better equipped to navigate complex situations, consider multiple perspectives, and make well-informed decisions. Recognizing and assessing conceptual complexity can thus inform leadership development initiatives and provide valuable insights into how leaders approach and address challenges in their roles.

2.2.4. Need for Power

The need for power draws upon the psychology of motivation in human action and indicates the desire to establish, maintain, and restore one's power — in other words, the

desire to control, influence, or exert power over other people or groups (Winter, 1973). Content coding of this indicator focuses on verbs indicating actions aimed at establishing, maintaining, and restoring power. The proportion of instances of these action verbs in political discourse reveals how an individual or a group, with whom the individual identifies, executes specific behaviors. The leader's total score is determined by calculating the average percentage of these action verbs in their total survey interview responses. The index of revealed information characterizes the leader's immediate approach. For instance, when the need for power is high, the leader creates conditions for manipulation, aiming for control and influence. This Machiavellian approach involves a desire to manage people, with full concentration on the leader's personality. Other people and groups are viewed as tools to achieve their own goals, and cunning and deception are seen as part of the political game. Such leaders may be charming, follow clear rules based on personal ideas and preferences, and combine conflicting qualities. They could be charismatic exploiters who disregard the needs and goals of their followers. These leaders push the limits to test the possibilities before adhering to a certain course of action and intuitively build opportunities through negotiation skills.

On the other hand, leaders with low scores in the need for power do not actively seek responsibility and may be content with one of several individuals who have influence. They remain calm about the public success of others and genuinely care about the environment they work in and their followers. In such cases, the interests of the group take precedence over their personal interests. Leaders with little need for power distribute power among the group, fostering a collective spirit and conformity to group norms. This power distribution without focusing on one individual lays the foundation for building a collective spirit and group responsibility for political outcomes. The goal of such leaders is to build trusting relationships with their followers. The need for power is a fundamental motivation driving leaders' behavior in politics and other fields. Analyzing the frequency of specific words or actions allows us to determine the expected behavior of a leader. Leaders with high needs for power may resort to manipulation, while those with low needs prioritize the interests of the group. Studying the need for power provides insights into leaders' behavior and informs their leadership styles.

2.2.5. Belief in the Ability to Control Events

Belief in the Ability to Control Events is a perception system wherein the leader evaluates their ability to control and influence a situation. In the content analysis compilation, the counting system takes into account verbs or action words. The hypothesis posits that when leaders assume responsibility for organizing or initiating a particular case, it forms a task in their mindset, influencing individual perceptions about the outcome. The focus here is on the initiatives put forth by the leaders of the group and their behaviors. The percentage of cases where verbs in an interview response indicate that the speaker or the group has taken responsibility for planning or initiating an activity determines the score for this trait. The overall score for any leader is the average of that normed score from individual surveyed interviews. Leaders who believe they can influence events in the world are actively engaged in global political processes. With high levels of confidence in control over events, they are concerned about the results of decisions made and their implementation. They track the implementation process and believe that personal control guarantees the effectiveness of decision implementation. Leaders holding this belief are less likely to delegate authority to solve problems and more likely to initiate action and policy rather than wait for others to make proposals. A low score on this variable indicates an external locus of control: individuals believe themselves and their state to be subject to the actions of others and broad historical trends, perceiving that they are relatively unable to alter the course of events (Dyson, 2006, p. 29).

Leaders with high confidence in their ability to control events are unafraid of responsibility, as they firmly believe they can shape the course of events. Such leaders possess strong internal confidence in their influence on the international stage and are less inclined to compromise or negotiate with others. In contrast, leaders who perceive they lack influence tend to be more cautious, waiting to see how situations develop before taking action. They are less likely to take the initiative, preferring to delegate accountability for bold decisions to others. These leaders actively seek leadership opportunities only when there is at least a 50% chance of success. Consequently, when faced with setbacks, they may deflect responsibility, blaming others for their passivity. The Belief in the Ability to Control Events perception system is a crucial factor influencing leaders' behavior across various domains. This perception system shapes the initiatives undertaken by leaders, their behavior, and individual perceptions about the

outcomes. Leaders with high confidence in their ability to control events are more likely to take the initiative and actively engage in global political processes, while those who perceive a lack of influence are more prone to passivity and delegation of responsibilities to others.

2.2.6. Task Focus

Task focus is a pivotal trait in the leadership traits analysis framework, reflecting the extent to which a leader concentrates on accomplishing tasks and achieving objectives. This trait delves into a leader's approach to specific tasks, gauging whether they prioritize task completion and direct the group's resources toward implementation or prefer building a team with a focus on fostering a motivational environment that nurtures collective spirit and unity around a shared goal. The coding for determining a leader's task focus utilizes words identical to those employed in gauging conceptual complexity, responsible for identifying the leader's emotions, desires, and satisfaction. Specific words, including plan, position, recommendation, achievement, and tactics, are examined to determine a leader's level of task focus. The frequency of using these words provides insights into individual traits and the concentration of efforts dedicated to addressing foreign policy challenges.

In contrast to task focus, relationship focus is a measure of a leader's emphasis on fostering relationships within the group rather than solely concentrating on task completion. This trait gauges the extent to which a leader prioritizes building connections and fostering a sense of camaraderie. Words associated with relationship support, such as cooperation, forgiveness, harm, suffering, liberation, and amnesty, are used to indicate a leader's relationship focus. The leader's relationship focus score is determined by calculating the percentage of relationship-oriented words in their interview response relative to the overall word count. The average proportion of answers related to relationship-building in the interview questions contributes to the final relationship focus score. Leaders with a high task focus are seen as realists who prioritize problem-solving, considering the problem as central and its resolution as the primary objective. They view the group as a tool for addressing challenges and concentrate on organizing the group to achieve the task at hand. At the state level, task focus may be directed towards collective ideologies, national policies, or religious groups. Conversely, leaders with low task focus prioritize building relationships within the group and promoting moral values. They may

not exhibit high sensitivity to the demands and needs of the people, and fulfilling these needs may not be a top priority for them.

Leaders who exhibit low indicators of task concentration are focused on building relationships within the group. For these leaders, the process of building relationships and the moral components of the group take precedence over achieving specific goals. They prioritize the group's aims and the efforts its members are willing to invest. Values like relationship, loyalty, and harmony within the group are highly regarded by leaders with low task focus. They tend to be more attentive to the demands, needs, and feelings of their group members. Leaders with low task focus work to enhance a sense of community and involvement within their group. They concentrate on group development rather than emphasizing achievement in problem-solving. These leaders perceive a strong, well-organized group as key to success. They prefer to build relationships within their group and engage in shared decision-making. When addressing international issues, they often seek options that align with common perspectives during their term in power.

2.2.7. Self-Confidence

The trait of self-confidence has long been recognized as an important characteristic of individuals in politics, indicating their perceptions of self-importance. In the political environment, individuals assess their self-confidence to position themselves in comparison to others or their own experiences. This trait is often viewed as an indicator of leaders' self-esteem, used as a reference point to establish themselves in a particular context. Personal pronouns such as "my," "I," and "mine" are used as indicators to construct a content profile for self-confidence. The frequency of these pronouns is calculated during speeches or question-answer interviews based on predetermined criteria. The overall score is developed by averaging the percentage of usage in interviews for a particular individual in politics under examination. Individuals in politics with a high sense of self-worth are less sensitive to environmental information than those with a low sense of self. They are content with their position and do not actively seek information to criticize their behavior in politics. Stability in behavior is crucial for them, and their high self-confidence leads them to filter and limit information from the political environment. Such leaders are not swayed by political circumstances and do not feel the need to adapt to situations.

On the other hand, political leaders with low self-confidence react to environmental cues and strive to adapt to their circumstances. A low indicator of self-confidence prompts leaders to consistently seek information from external sources, as they lack confidence in their own opinions when making decisions. They are highly attentive to external circumstances and the opinions of third parties. Such leaders may exhibit instability in decision-making, and their leadership style can be inconsistent, varying based on the nature of the environment. They often seek to become agents, representatives, or delegates of political groups to enhance their sense of personal significance through group membership. Self-confidence is a crucial trait for individuals in politics and is closely linked to their perceptions of self-importance. High self-confidence contributes to stability in behavior, while low self-confidence can result in instability and a reliance on external opinions. Constructing content profiles based on personal pronoun usage provides valuable insights into the self-confidence of political leaders.

2.2.8. In-Group Bias

In-group bias is a phenomenon commonly observed among leaders across various domains, such as social, political, and ethnic groups. It is a tendency of leaders to focus on their own group, prioritizing the interests of their group over others. In-group bias has significant emotional and social implications for the leader, who gains status within their group through this orientation. The unit of analysis used to classify in-group bias is the words and phrases used by the leader to refer to their group. The type of language used can reveal a lot about the leader's attitude towards their group. Positive adjectives such as "great," "peaceful," "progressive," "successful," or "prosperous" imply a positive image of the group, while words like "powerful," "capable," or "great success" convey a sense of strength and superiority. Leaders may also use language that emphasizes the need to uphold the group's honor and identity, such as "the need to firmly defend our boundaries," "must maintain our interpretation," or "determine our own."

The percentage of certain words and phrases used by the leader to reference the group's viewpoint determines their in-group bias score. The average of these percentages across all studied interview responses is the leader's total score in this trait. Leaders with strong in-group bias are committed to protecting the unique identity of their communities at all costs. They take any attempt by other groups, organizations, governments, or nations to

meddle in what they perceive as the private affairs of their group seriously. As the indicator of in-group bias rises, the leader identifies more strongly with their group. Successful leaders often view the world in terms of "them" and "the group followers."

Leaders with strong in-group bias often have difficulty accepting criticism, ignoring the problems and weaknesses of their group, which ultimately affects their image as a leader. They frequently use an external image of the enemy, referring to the external factors that cause problems for their group. Mobilization rhetoric regarding the problems of the group (country and government) is often built around a specific enemy. Leaders with strong in-group bias identify foreign enemies, usually other countries, as well as internal opposition. For such leaders, the existence of a foreign enemy and ongoing struggle against them are essential parts of their political rhetoric. They see politics as a zero-sum game in which one group's victory is another group's loss. Sensitivity to criticism often leads such leaders to surround themselves with “truly loyal” people. Leaders with low levels of in-group bias remain loyal to the division into "us" and "them" but are more prone to a critical perception of the world. They are guided by specific situations and assessments of world events. These leaders are less likely to use external forces as enemies to combat internal threats. Instead, they may choose to interact, negotiate, participate in summits, forums, and conferences, and develop diplomatic relations as strategies to calm internal tension.

In-group bias is an important factor in a leader's decision-making and orientation, having significant emotional and social implications for both the leader and their group. The language used by the leader to refer to their group is indicative of their attitude towards their group and can be used to determine their in-group bias score. Leaders with strong in-group bias are more likely to prioritize the interests of their group over others and view the world in terms of "us" and "them." They may have difficulty accepting criticism and are more likely to identify foreign enemies. On the other hand, leaders with low levels of in-group bias are more likely to use diplomatic relations to solve internal problems, showing a willingness to engage with the global community in a cooperative manner. This approach reflects a more nuanced understanding of international relations and a greater openness to dialogue.

2.2.9. Distrust of Others

Distrust of others is a personality trait that can significantly impact a leader's perspective and decision-making. This trait is characterized by feelings of doubt, worry, apprehension, and suspicion towards others. The language employed by leaders can serve as a revealing indicator of their level of distrust, with certain nouns and phrases expressing doubt, fear, and concern. A coding system can be implemented to identify these signs of distrust in a leader's speech. Leaders exhibiting a high level of distrust often perceive the world through a lens of suspicion, particularly towards direct competitors and opposing ideologies. They frequently make decisions independently, convinced that maintaining personal control is essential to mitigate risks. Such leaders may display paranoid behavior, formulating judgments based on suspicions regarding others' motives. They might undergo frequent changes in advisors or alliances to prevent any individual from amassing too much authority and challenging their leadership.

A zero-sum worldview, wherein one's gain is perceived as another's loss, can contribute significantly to a leader's heightened level of distrust toward others. Such leaders often question the motives of their counterparts and harbor the belief that others are driven to impede their success. They exhibit hypersensitivity to criticism, remaining vigilant for potential threats to their power or integrity. Conversely, leaders characterized by lower levels of distrust tend to assess situations more pragmatically, drawing from past experiences and evaluating current circumstances. They are less inclined to view the world as inherently hostile, fostering a greater sense of trust in others. This trait plays a pivotal role in shaping a leader's decision-making prowess and their ability to cultivate robust alliances. Recognizing indicators of distrust in a leader's speech can be instrumental in understanding their leadership style and anticipating potential risks associated with their decision-making. Leaders with diminished levels of distrust are often more adept at forging alliances and making grounded assessments, while heightened distrust can manifest in paranoid behavior and decision-making.

2.3. Leadership Trait Analysis and Construction of the Profile

The study of leadership has always been of great importance in the field of international relations. In recent times, there has been an increased focus on the behavioral aspects of leadership, leading to the development of new methodologies and tools for understanding

and assessing leadership traits. One such tool is the Profiler Plus program, as mentioned before, which is designed to process data and provide variables in the leadership construct. The Profiler Plus program is a software program that analyzes and assesses leadership traits using cognitive tools. It is based on a comprehensive understanding of leadership traits and behaviors, utilizing this knowledge to offer a detailed analysis of an individual's leadership style. The program is designed to process data and provide variables for assessing leadership traits. One of the main advantages of the Profiler Plus program is that it provides a standardized and objective way of analyzing leadership traits. The program is grounded in extensive research and analysis of leadership styles, allowing for the identification of specific variables and indicators to assess leadership traits. Using a standardized approach enables the program to offer a reliable and consistent assessment of an individual's leadership style, which can inform decision-making in various contexts. The cognitive tools used in the Profile Plus program are based on the latest research in cognitive psychology and neuroscience. These tools are designed to analyze patterns of behavior and cognition, which can provide insights into an individual's leadership style. The program uses a range of cognitive tools, including algorithms, decision trees, and machine learning, to identify and analyze leadership traits. Thus, The Profile Plus program is designed to be user-adopted and accessible, even for individuals who do not have a background in psychology or cognitive science. The program uses a simple and intuitive interface that guides users through the assessment process step-by-step. The program also provides clear and concise reports that can be easily interpreted by non-experts.

The conceptualization of leadership style in the Profiler Plus program is focused on studying an individual's behavior in comparison to other leaders. leadership trait analysis research employs a comparative methodology using a norming group score to achieve more accurate results. The norming group score determines which group of leaders to use as a comparison or norming group. If the leader under examination has a score surpassing one standard deviation above the mean within the sample of leaders, they are considered high on the trait. Conversely, if the leader's score falls more than one standard deviation below the mean within the sample of leaders, they are deemed low on the trait.

Leadership assessment is a critical aspect of leadership studies, and the norming group score serves as the average indicator to determine an individual's leadership traits. This

score provides a foundation for predicting a leader's behavioral results. Comparing the results of a leader with those of previous world leaders can help understand how the leader will act under specific indicators. Previous studies have analyzed data through a prism of philosophical assumptions supported by instrumental data. The determination of the average indicator of the norming group allows for fixing changes in leadership traits over time. While traits are traditionally assumed to be stable patterns of behavior that cannot change, recent research suggests that traits can change over time, and this should be taken into account in any analysis of leadership traits.

Assessment techniques are crucial in understanding and analyzing data in leadership studies. The Profiler Plus program is one such tool that uses structuralizing and coding to process data and provide variables in the leadership construct. The program's specificity lies in providing a single-point score taken as an average, which forms the basis for general data analysis and comparison with research that used this methodology. The program's unique methodology was developed through extensive research and analysis of leadership styles, specifically identifying specific variables and indicators used to assess an individual's leadership style. The program's standardized approach to analyzing leadership traits has been shown to be effective in providing clear and concise reports that can be easily interpreted by non-experts.

After receiving the indicators and identifying changes, it is essential to find confirmation in a theoretical framework. The results as scores from the Profiler Plus program should be tested with a theoretical framework to determine the significance of the research. Statistical indicators depend on periods of observation, and the theoretical framework confirms or disproves the scientific hypothesis. The effective preparation and classification of data are key components of successful research when analyzing leadership traits. In this methodology, the text is the main source of data for obtaining results. Data classification allows for the identification of factors that affect the personality being studied, while leadership trait analysis methodology refers to specific conditions that can impact the stability and instability of a leader's style.

In the next chapter of this thesis, the practical application of this methodology will be examined. The leadership score of a specific individual, in this case, Vladimir Putin, will be analyzed using the Profiler Plus program and the neoclassical theoretical framework. This practical example will illustrate how the combination of the Profiler Plus program

and theoretical frameworks can be used to analyze and understand leadership traits. Assessment techniques are crucial for comprehending and analyzing data, and the Profiler Plus program is an effective tool for analyzing leadership traits. However, to determine the significance of the results, it is necessary to use a theoretical framework and confirm the statistical indicators. Effective data preparation, classification, and analysis are essential components of successful research. Furthermore, recognizing that leadership traits can change over time is critical for accurate analysis. By employing these techniques, researchers can better understand the stability and instability of a leader's style and identify the contextual factors that affect their behavior. Constructing a comprehensive profile involves a methodical sequence of steps: Firstly, gather data on a leader's behaviors and decisions from diverse sources like interviews, speeches, and news articles. Next, organize this data into specific categories, delineating timelines, audience segmentation, and situational contexts. Then, input this organized data into Profiler Plus software, which generates scores for each category. Interpret these scores by comparing them to established benchmarks and norms, highlighting significant deviations. Use a theoretical framework to analyze the obtained scores, considering the leader's context, audience, and national interests to identify discernible patterns in decision-making. Finally, compile the findings into a comprehensive report, including the leader's profile, Profiler Plus scores, analysis of leadership traits, and comparative insights with existing literature in the examined sphere. This systematic approach offers a holistic understanding of a leader's behavioral tendencies and influential factors in their political decision-making processes.

2.3.1. Constructing Vladimir Putin's Leadership Profile: Method and Data

The thesis focuses on the significant role Vladimir Putin plays in contemporary Russian politics, highlighting his unwavering perception of the global landscape. Over the past two decades, Putin has held influential positions as both prime minister and president. The thesis aims to underscore the potential impact of personality as a crucial element in understanding foreign policy dynamics, especially in specific contexts such as the invasions in Georgia, Syria, and Ukraine. It advocates for the use of multi-method approaches that blend the objectivity inherent in quantitative content analysis with the contextual depth provided by qualitative methods from existing literature and the

neoclassical realism framework. This approach is particularly apt when addressing the challenging topic of individual explanation in politics and delving into the significance of human factors in analyzing critical episodes (Dyson, 2006). Understanding the significance of individual-level factors and leadership's impact on Russian foreign policy amid relatively stable structural influences, the analysis of leadership trait emerges as a promising avenue. The ongoing crisis in Ukraine underscores the necessity of scrutinizing leadership dynamics within Russian foreign policy. Consequently, this thesis argues that comprehending the roots and repercussions of the ongoing Ukrainian crisis, which has entangled the West in conflict, mandates a preliminary exploration of Vladimir Putin's personality and leadership style. This examination extends beyond the Ukrainian crisis, encompassing instances like the Georgian and Syrian crises.

The analysis of Russian foreign policy-making has traditionally focused on structural drivers, but a more comprehensive approach may incorporate the leader's personal attributes and environmental factors to provide a more coherent explanation for the variability in foreign policy outcomes. This approach has the potential to offer insight into the unit-level analysis of foreign policy decision-making, as structural constraints remain relatively stable, while the leadership of Russian political processes plays a significant role. Russia's domestic system fundamentally molds its foreign policy choices, particularly under the substantial influence of Putin's personality. Constructing Vladimir Putin's leadership profile involves a structured methodology encompassing key steps: Firstly, data on Putin's behaviors and decisions were gathered from diverse sources like interviews, speeches, and news articles. This information was then meticulously organized into categories, including timelines and situational contexts. Subsequently, utilizing Profiler Plus software, the organized data was inputted, generating scores for each category. These scores were interpreted by comparing them against established benchmarks and norms, analyzing significant deviations to unveil behavior patterns. Employing a robust theoretical framework, the Profiler Plus scores were scrutinized to discern leadership traits, considering Putin's context, audience, and national interests. Finally, the findings were compiled into a comprehensive report encompassing Putin's leadership profile, Profiler Plus scores, and an in-depth analysis of leadership traits, subsequently compared against existing theoretical frameworks and relevant literature within the specific sphere of examination. This methodological approach offers a nuanced

understanding of Putin's behavioral inclinations and influences in his decision-making processes within the political sphere.

Data Collection

The importance of researching leadership within the context of Russian politics has grown significantly since the Ukrainian crisis, which has had a significant impact on political processes and outcomes in Russia due to substantial Western sanctions. To evaluate Putin's personality, direct responses from press conferences and interviews with journalists in English were collected using the Nexis program, as well as official translated material from Kremlin.ru. The multiple interviews with Putin were then analyzed, and the responses to questions were separated into timelines based on critical episodes. This study's analysis relies on a range of interviews featuring Putin, encompassing impromptu question-and-answer sessions sourced from platforms like CNN, TASS, BBC, among other international media outlets, and structured question-and-answer sessions from forums like Valdai (comprehensive lists, presented in Appendix). Predominantly, the data is drawn from the English version of the official Russian website Kremlin.ru and English-language publications of international media entities that have interviewed Putin.

The materials uploaded into the Profiler Plus system were in English. Although Young's Profiler Plus program doesn't support Russian language analysis, Herman (2002) established that translated materials are suitable for analysis. The potential bias arising from using translated content to scrutinize non-English-speaking leaders' leadership is deemed insignificant, as observed by Hermann. M. Hermann's observations indicate that while there is potential for the use of translated material from non-English resources to distort analysis, the differences are not significant enough to render the analysis inaccurate. To mitigate the potential influence of speechwriters on Putin's written material, Hermann recommends the use of more spontaneous sources of material such as interviews with the media. During such interactions, leaders must respond quickly, which reduces the opportunity for staff preparation that could potentially influence the nature and wording of the response (Hermann, 2002, p. 2).

Recent studies, as exemplified by Hallin (2023), have emphasized the distinctiveness of the Russian language's grammar. They underscore potential discrepancies between translated texts and the nuanced intricacies discerned in analyses conducted directly in

Russian. Specifically, these studies delve into the challenge faced by English-oriented leadership trait analysis in striving for semantic equivalence with Russian. They conclude that a precise understanding of Russian leaders' personalities mandates tailoring LTA profiling to accommodate the peculiarities of the Russian language. While acknowledging the qualitative nature of the paper, it concedes the inevitability of analytical subjectivity. This acknowledgment serves as a cautionary note, urging against perceiving the research as an exhaustive account of equivalence in Russian-English LTA scoring. The paper systematically outlines various linguistic criteria and their potential implications on translation equivalence, providing a succinct summary table for easy reference. Furthermore, the paper's objective is to enrich future discussions concerning LTA's application to Russian-speaking leaders, specifically emphasizing the grammatical hurdles in achieving semantic equivalence between English and Russian. It suggests that further exploration in this domain could unveil complexities in establishing semantic parity between original Russian speeches and their translated versions, thereby offering crucial insights into contemporary Russian leadership.

In the course of this study, a critical observation surfaced pertaining to potential distortions inherent in translated texts. While acknowledging this inherent limitation, the study meticulously examined and cataloged distinct variations in Vladimir Putin's responses to pivotal incidents within Russian foreign policy. These variations, although identified amidst the challenge of potential translation distortions, were firmly substantiated by empirical reasoning that intricately aligned with concurrent events. The study adopted a rigorous empirical approach, meticulously correlating Putin's reactions with concurrent occurrences in Russian foreign policy. This methodological alignment ensured that the obtained results in this study aligned with the events as they occurred and corresponded to Putin's evident reactions, all substantiated by a theoretical foundation within the framework of neoclassical realism. Despite the acknowledged limitation concerning potential distortions in translations, the study's findings stand as robust empirical evidence of discernible differences in Putin's reactions. These variations were logically linked to specific incidents within Russian foreign policy, thereby enhancing the credibility and scientific rigor of the study's outcomes.

Data Preparation

The data was categorized into distinct groups, including temporal delineations and delineations before and after specific political events. The assessment of Putin is divided from his question-answer results both from domestic and foreign journalists from the period 2008-2023. It includes 71 interviews with domestic and international journalists, totaling 404,073 words spoken by Putin, presented in Appendix 1. These specific periods for each leader have been deliberately selected based on the study's aim to comprehensively examine critical cases, ensure source validity, and allow sufficient time for assessing their subsequent impacts after critical episodes. This classification approach stemmed from the premise that foreign policy decisions lack spontaneity; rather, they are influenced by underlying structural conditions that not only accompany but also shape the leadership style and political persona. This organized categorization aimed to capture the nuanced relationship between decision-making moments, structural influences, and their consequential impact on leadership style.

Georgian crisis before the crisis 19.12.2007 to 06.08.2008 and after 10.05.2009 to 22.05.2010 (date of invasion 08.08.2008).

Crimean crisis 2014 before the crisis 06.09.2012 to 19.01.2014 and after 07.05.2015 to 27.10.2016 (date of invasion 20.02.2014).

Syrian crisis before the crisis 17.01.2014 to 29.05.2015 and after 23.06.2016 to 13.11.2016(date of invasion30.09.2015).

Ukrainian crisis 2022 before crisis 20.02.2020 to 23.11.2022 after 16.08.2023 to 05.10.2023(date of invasion 24.02. 2022).

In examining Vladimir Putin's leadership profiles within this study, the initial phase involved constructing a neoclassical realism framework for each case, enabling a theoretical comparison with the LTA results. Subsequently, the second stage emphasized distance analysis, initially creating an overarching profile of Putin and then delving into how these traits impacted critical episodes. Consequently, this dissertation amalgamates quantitative and qualitative data, facilitating a comprehensive exploration of how leaders' leadership qualities manifest in the foreign policy decision-making process.

Data Entry and Score Interpretations

Understanding the personal aspects of Putin's political style can be achieved through analyzing his speech patterns, meticulously evaluated using the automatic Profiler Plus system. The premise lies in a political leader's unconscious expression of their inherent

comprehension of a specific situation, aiding in ascertaining their response to systemic challenges. This was elaborated upon more thoroughly in the preceding chapter of this thesis. The Nexis program serves as an analytical hub providing access to a repository of existing interviews. It functions as an invaluable resource, centralizing and organizing materials for analysis. Once a material meeting predefined criteria—such as the specified time frame and a spontaneous question-and-answer format—is identified through the program, it can be located using the Google search engine.

Traits	Description	Coding
Belief in Ability to Control Events	The perception of the world by a leader can impact how the leader views their state as a significant actor within the international system.	The percentage of verbs employed indicating the action or planning for action by the leader or the relevant group.
Conceptual Complexity	The ability to distinguish various facets of the environment while describing actors, places, ideas, and situations.	The proportion of words associated with a high level of complexity (e.g., ‘‘approximately,’’ ‘‘possibility,’’ ‘‘trend’’) versus low complexity (e.g., ‘‘absolutely,’’ ‘‘certainly,’’ ‘‘irreversible’’).
Distrust of Others	Doubt about and wariness of others.	The proportion of nouns indicating apprehension or suspicion regarding the intentions of others towards the speaker or the speaker's group.
In–Group Bias	The perception of one's group as occupying a central role, coupled with intense feelings of national identity and honor.	The percentage of mentions or references to the group that convey a favorable or strength-oriented view, or a need to maintain group identity.
Need for Power	An emphasis on acquiring, maintaining, and regaining control or power over others.	The percentage of verbs that convey actions related to attack, advice, influencing the behavior of others, and concern with reputation.
Self-Confidence	Individual perception of self-importance based on the ability to	The percentage of personal pronouns utilized (e.g., ‘‘I,’’ ‘‘myself,’’ ‘‘me,”

	navigate and interact effectively with the environment.	“my,’’ and ‘‘mine’’) indicating self-perceived instigation, authority, or positive reward.
Task Focus	The degree of emphasis on problem-solving compared to the maintenance of relationships with others.	The percentage of words associated with instrumental activities (e.g., ‘‘accomplishment,’’ ‘‘plan,’’ ‘‘proposal’’) versus concern for others' feelings and desires (e.g., ‘‘collaboration,’’ ‘‘amnesty,’’ ‘‘appreciation’’).

Table 1: Leadership Trait Analysis, Explanations of Traits

Source: Leadership Trait Analysis, explanation on traits (Dyson, 2006; Hermann, 2003).

For each case, these tables chronicle the trait results before and after specific events, such as a particular invasion or critical incident. The data is entered into the Profiler Plus system twice: first, prior to the critical episode, and then following it. Consequently, this process involves inputting the data twice, signifying the creation of two distinct files containing material collected before and after cases. These separate datasets culminate in the compilation of results representing the 'before' and 'after' phases, delineating changes or patterns in Putin's results through leadership traits across these two specific timeframes. These traits form the basis of the leadership trait analysis derived from explanations proposed by Hermann and other scholars specializing in LTA. This systematic approach allows for a comprehensive understanding and comparison of Putin's leadership traits within the context of specific events, facilitating a nuanced examination of his leadership dynamics and outcomes in Russian foreign policy.

Reference Group

To establish a benchmark for comparison, the researcher adopted Hermann's approach, assembling a reference group of 214 prominent global political figures. The tables provided for each case present a comprehensive overview of seven distinctive characteristics. These characteristics are evaluated to classify the obtained results as high, low, or average based on specified criteria. Moreover, these results are measured against Hermann's reference group but and also juxtaposed with the average traits displayed by these leaders. This comparison enables a clearer understanding of Putin's anticipated behavior concerning his trait results.

This comparative methodology allows for an in-depth evaluation of Putin's leadership traits in relation to the reference group, enabling a more accurate assessment. It offers an avenue for further exploration and analysis of the acquired results, facilitating a nuanced comprehension of Putin's leadership traits. By assessing Putin's scores against the average scores of leaders in the reference group, the research determined whether he exhibited high or low personality scores for specific traits. Furthermore, the study focused on scrutinizing Putin's scores within the context of his interventions in Ukraine, Georgia, and Syria. Maintaining methodological rigor, the research examined the stability of Putin's personality traits before and after making intervention decisions in the General results sections. This meticulous approach allowed for a comprehensive assessment of Putin's personality, contextualizing the findings effectively. Evaluating Putin's personality against a reference group and contextualizing his scores within his decision-making processes yields valuable insights into his behavior and decision-making. Such research significantly contributes to a deeper understanding of Russian foreign policy dynamics and political mechanisms.

2.3.2. Leadership Trait Analysis and Case Studies

Through the application of the leadership trait analysis method, a total of 71 interviews and statements made by Putin were subject to coding, allowing for the computation of overall scores across seven distinct traits. Each trait's analysis revolves around the frequency of specific verbs and phrases employed by Putin during his speeches. This approach hinges on the premise that the more recurrently certain verbs and phrases are used, the greater leaders significance to the speaker (Hermann, 2003). To elaborate, the scores attributed to each trait denote the percentage of instances wherein Putin utilized particular verbs or phrases indicative of specific leadership traits while engaging with interviewers. The fundamental principle behind this methodology lies in the notion that the choice of words reflects the leader's inherent personality traits.

The encoding and analysis of Putin's verbal expressions serve as a basis for understanding his subsequent leadership style and the framework that shapes his decision-making. This leadership profile delineates the anticipated behavior of a leader, juxtaposed against a reference group, to construct a contextual scenario. Crucially, it requires deciphering indications and aligning them with empirical data concerning a specific Russian invasion

of a region. This process elucidates why, in this instance, Putin, as the Leader, makes particular decisions. These decisions are a product of his systematic approach to interpreting and reacting to system pressures within his established framework. Putin's decisions are a manifestation of how he perceives and responds to systemic pressures during the Russian invasion of Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria. His leadership style, formed through his understanding of these pressures, becomes pivotal in shaping his responses to these critical episodes. Therefore, Putin's decisions in such instances are not merely dictated by foreign factors but are also influenced by his individual interpretation and response mechanisms within the broader systemic context.

A nuanced examination of the internal dynamics of Putin's political persona provides a unique lens through which critical episodes in Russian foreign policy, such as interventions in Georgia, Syria, and Ukraine, can be comprehended. Delving into the intricacies of the actor's specific characteristics becomes essential for gaining insight into the intricate and multifaceted landscape of Russian actions on the global stage. The leader, in this case, Putin, is not merely a passive recipient of systemic pressures but an active agent whose internal perceptions and characteristics play a pivotal role in shaping foreign policy decisions. By scrutinizing Putin's political personality, we gain a deeper understanding of how he interprets and responds to international challenges. This approach sheds light on the intricate interplay between systemic influences and individual agency, offering a more comprehensive perspective on the motives and dynamics underlying Russian foreign policy decisions in significant geopolitical events. The research has undergone a comprehensive literature review to explore the viewpoints of scholars regarding the cases studied. Alongside academic sources like articles and books, an extensive analysis of domestic and international press materials, including news articles, and interviews, has been conducted for each case. Additionally, the research delved into newspaper archives, journalists' investigations, Putin's perspectives on case details, materials from various sources, and reports from different media to gather pertinent information necessary for analyzing the profile of Putin involved.

Conclusion

This chapter advocates for the adoption of an at-distance measure approach to elucidate the role of individuals in international relations. It posits that comprehending the political behavior of individuals requires an exploration of subjective factors, and the cognitive

methodology provides a avenue for gaining insights into individuals' features in political perception. By analyzing input data, the internal links of behavior become more apparent than perceived characteristics. While cognitive methodology may not be universally applicable to describe individuals in politics, several empirical studies have demonstrated a link between cognitive constructs and politicians' behavior.

The chapter provides a descriptive explanation of the at-distance methodology and underscores that leadership trait analysis is not about creating individuals' behavioral portraits but rather a means of addressing how certain political variables relate to political outcomes. To construct a leadership profile using the Profiler Plus program, one must first calculate leadership trait analysis scores and then compare them with a theoretical framework, such as the neo-classical realism framework. The study argues that traits should be understood as a derivative concept that reflects deeper assumptions about the nature of foreign policy outcomes and demonstrates the place of leadership within it. By utilizing the Profiler Plus program and theoretical frameworks, researchers can gain a better understanding of leadership traits and their impact on political outcomes. The at-distance measure approach, particularly through cognitive methodology, provides valuable insights into the political behavior of individuals. leadership trait analysis offers a means of understanding how political variables relate to political outcomes, and the use of the Profiler Plus program and theoretical frameworks can assist in constructing a leadership profile. Ultimately, this approach can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of leadership and its role in shaping international relations.

CHAPTER 3: THE INVASSION TO GEORGIA 2008

3.1. General Theoretical Approach in Crisis

3.1.1. Historical Backgrounds on the Crisis

This chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of the interactions that led to Russia's involvement in the Georgian conflict and aims to provide insights into Russian foreign policy in the post-Soviet space. The complexity of the analysis makes it of significant interest to both academic scholars and policymakers for several reasons. Firstly, it explains Russian intervention policy in Georgia within the framework of neoclassical realism. Secondly, it elucidates the role of Vladimir Putin's leadership style in Russian foreign policy-making and how it influenced the decision to intervene in Georgia. Thirdly, it clarifies and demonstrates Russian regional dominance, threats, positions, and processes in the post-Soviet region. Fourthly, the study's findings contribute to debates in international relations theory about Russian regional ambitions. While experts usually examine the conflict from the perspective from the system level and Russian foreign policy ambitions, this chapter fills a research gap by providing a more nuanced approach to understanding the Georgian conflict. By exploring the empirical evidence underpinning the conflict, the chapter sheds light on the conditions that led to Russian intervention in Georgia and how Putin's leadership traits impacted this significant decision in Russian foreign policy.

The Georgian Crisis of 2008, a significant post-Soviet event, led to a five-day war between Russia and Georgia, originating from a territorial dispute over South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The conflict escalated when Georgia sought to regain control of South Ossetia in August 2008, prompting Russian intervention. The crisis's historical roots lie in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, with newly independent republics, including Georgia, experiencing political upheaval and nationalist movements. During the early Soviet period, South Ossetia and Abkhazia were integral parts of Georgia, but their desire for independence, driven by significant ethnic Russian populations, posed a challenge to Georgian sovereignty. The early 1990s saw violent conflicts as separatist movements declared independence. Amid civil war and economic collapse, Georgia regained independence under President Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Simultaneously, separatist militias, backed by Russia, achieved de facto independence in Abkhazia, South Ossetia,

and Ajara (Light, 2014, pp. 318-345). The historical intricacies trace back to the annexation of South Ossetia by Tsarist Russia in 1801, with subsequent events leading to the establishment of the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast within the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia in April 1922 (Karagiannis, 2013, pp. 74-93).

Throughout the Soviet era, North Ossetia remained an autonomous republic within the Russian SSR, while South Ossetia was an autonomous province within the Georgian SSR. The conflict between Georgians and Abkhazians was fueled by Stalin's policy of encouraging Georgian settlement in Abkhazia. Despite Abkhazia being a sovereign Soviet Socialist Republic until 1931, it lost its independent status and became an autonomous republic under the Georgian SSR. Stalin allowed Georgians to relocate to Abkhazia, leading to an imbalance in relations and conflicts between Georgians and Abkhazians. By 1989, ethnic Georgians comprised 46% of the Abkhaz population, while Abkhazians accounted for only 18% (German, 2006, p. 7). Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika brought about a new inter-ethnic conflict within Georgia. Ossetian leaders proclaimed the South Ossetian Soviet Democratic Party, leading to the Republic's separation from the Georgian SSR. The historical backgrounds on the Georgian crisis in 2008 are crucial to understanding the reasons behind the Russian invasion of Georgia. The conflict in South Ossetia persisted after the signing of the Dagomys Peace Agreement, with both sides violating the ceasefire. In 2004, a conflict erupted in Ajara, resulting in the resignation of local leader Aslan Abashidze and the restoration of central government control (Mikaberidze, 2015, p. 160). The emergence of self-proclaimed republics in Georgia, with accusations of Russian support, has been a contentious issue. Moscow denies involvement, but Tbilisi increasingly views the conflicts as a broader Russian assault on its sovereignty. The urgency to reintegrate territories arose due to Russia's heavy-handed approach towards both Georgia and the regions from 2004 onwards. Abkhazia and South Ossetia were treated as Russian subjects, used as bargaining chips in negotiations for Kosovo's independence Tsygankov, 2009, p. 241).

The Rose Revolution in 2003 marked a significant shift in Georgia's relationship with Russia, as the Saakashvili administration's reforms became a focal point in the evolving crisis. Saakashvili's reform agenda aimed at addressing political, economic, and social issues, including reducing corruption, enhancing service delivery, strengthening the military, and restoring territorial integrity. These reforms played a crucial role in

reshaping Georgia's political direction and influencing Moscow's response (Mitchell, 2009, pp. 171-183). From 2003 to 2008, tensions escalated between Georgia and Russia. Saakashvili's rise to power on an anti-Russian platform heightened concerns in Moscow, perceived as a threat to Georgia's sovereignty. Saakashvili's demand for the withdrawal of all Russian troops from Georgia in 2006, including peacekeepers in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, added to the friction. Although Russian military bases were closed by the end of 2007, peacekeepers remained in the breakaway regions. Putin's dismissive response to the troop withdrawal reflected Moscow's readiness to take action in these regions. Tensions peaked in the summer of 2006 when Georgia conducted an operation in the Kodori Gorge of Abkhazia.

During this operation, Georgian authorities arrested Russian special service officers, accusing them of involvement in shelling Gori. Moscow responded with a series of measures, including closing the only road to Georgia, halting services, and imposing an embargo on Georgian products. Georgia sought international support, filing a lawsuit against Russia at the European Court of Human Rights in 2007. Despite the crisis, Georgia's NATO membership process continued without interruption as President Saakashvili aimed to reduce reliance on Russia and foster partnerships with other nations. The period between 2003 and 2008 saw a significant shift in the relationship between Russia and Georgia. This was largely due to Georgia's political and economic reforms and its efforts to reduce its dependence on Russia. However, tensions escalated when Georgia launched an operation in the upper Kodori Gorge of Abkhazia to eliminate criminal groups in the summer of 2006. In response, Moscow closed the only road to Georgia, suspended air and postal services, and imposed an embargo on Georgian products.

In April 2007, Georgia filed a lawsuit against Russia at the European Court of Human Rights over deportations. Saakashvili utilized the situation to strengthen economic and energy partnerships and pursue NATO membership. Tensions rose when the Georgian administration building in the Kodori Gorge was attacked in March 2007. Both South Ossetia and Abkhazia recognized official documents in Russia, challenging Georgia's sovereignty. The possibility of war hinted by the Russian response became a reality in August 2008, rooted in the longstanding territorial dispute over South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Despite Georgia's efforts to reduce dependence on Russia and strengthen international partnerships, tensions continued to rise in 2007. South Ossetia and Abkhazia were recognized as independent states by Russia, and Russian peacekeepers remained after closing military bases in Georgia. The Kodori Gorge attack heightened tensions, and accusations of de facto annexation strained relations further. Russia violated Georgian airspace in August 2007, attacking a radar installation, and a reconnaissance aircraft was shot down over Abkhazia in April 2008, setting the stage for the 2008 war.

On April 29, 2008, the Russian Foreign Ministry proclaimed measures to strengthen CIS collective forces in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict zone. By May 5, reports indicated the presence of Russian forces, and Lieutenant General Vladimir Shamanov confirmed that necessary measures were being taken, with the Russian Ministry of Defense aware of the situation in the conflict zone (Lavrov, 2008). On the same day, while Temur Yakobashvili, the Georgian State Minister for Reintegration, expressed hopes to avert violence in Brussels, stating progress was being made, concerns persisted about Russian troops occupying areas based on incorrect information. He mentioned that the Georgian reconnaissance aircraft was destroyed in the Abkhaz sky, bringing the situation to the brink of war, according to some experts. In contrast, President Mikheil Saakashvili claimed that Russia was bombing Georgian territory, further escalating tensions.

On May 30, 2008, Russian railway troops entered Abkhazia, officially to restore destroyed railway sections. The Russian Ministry of Defense emphasized the economic intent, providing humanitarian assistance without additional weapons. The Georgian Foreign Ministry issued another note of protest to Russian Ambassador V. Kovalenko, marking the 38th official note from Georgia to Russia. Amid the tense situation, Abkhazia announced the closure of the border with Georgia effective July 1. On July 1, 2008, Sergei Makarov, the commander of the North Caucasus Military District, admitted that if Georgia initiated military operations against Abkhazia or South Ossetia, Russian troops would enter its territory. In late July, during joint Immediate Response exercises of Georgia and the United States, Russia conducted the large-scale Caucasus-2008 exercise involving various power structures. Simultaneously, Russian railway troops repaired tracks in Abkhazia. On August 8, during the Beijing Olympics, a military operation began in the conflict zone between Georgia and Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, with support from Russian military forces. Estimates indicated that 35,000–40,000 Russian and allied forces

confronted 12,000–15,000 Georgian forces, with significant air and naval assets on the Russian side (Pisciotta, 2019, pp. 1-20).

3.2. The crisis in Georgia through the Lens of Neoclassical Realism: A Framework for Understanding Political Dynamics

3.2.1. System Level on Crisis

3.2.2. Systemic Stimuli

The Russian-Georgia conflict of 2008 was marked by escalating tensions influenced by systemic stimuli and state actions. Neoclassical realists examine this conflict through the lens of how systemic factors and state decisions shaped the outcomes. Neoclassical realism posits that systemic stimuli constrain states but don't solely determine their behaviors. The conflict arose amidst concerns over NATO's proximity to Russian borders, exemplified by Western powers' strategic moves such as the planned missile defense installations in Poland and NATO enlargement. There was a widespread sense in Russia that NATO was advancing dangerously close to its borders, particularly with NATO enlargement and the planned missile defense installations in Poland and the Czech Republic (Gvalia et al., 2019, pp. 21–51).

On November 5, 2008, Medvedev's warning regarding the potential deployment of Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad to counter the US missile defense system underscored Russia's strategic response. The stance of newly elected US President Obama supporting a missile defense system, contingent upon its proven effectiveness and necessity against Iran, sustained tensions ('Obama denies', 2008). The missile shield persisted as a significant obstacle in US-Russia relations (Haas, 2010, pp. 157-185). Amidst increased Western alliance military presence in the region, Russia sought to balance its influence, leading to a standoff with Georgia. However, this maneuvering inadvertently escalated tensions, culminating in hostilities. Russia's strategic move of granting independence to South Ossetia and Abkhazia provoked Georgia into seeking a Western alliance, unintentionally reinforcing Russian support for these breakaway regions. Russia's recognition of its independence in 2008 was wielded as political leverage to dissuade Georgia from pursuing closer ties with NATO. While systemic variables like threats and provocative actions played a role in the Georgian crisis, neoclassical realists contend that

these factors alone do not fully elucidate the rationale behind Russian military interventions. Prime Minister's Putin swift involvement in the crisis a day after its onset underscores the complexity of conditions that precipitated Russian interventions, remaining unclear within the systemic context.

3.2.3. Systemic Modifiers

Russia has been recuperating its military capabilities, evidenced by significant increases in its military budget and strategic reforms since Vladimir Putin's presidency. There have been observable improvements in Russia's economic conditions, potentially linked to its strategic military actions and geopolitical positioning. The geographic proximity of Georgia to Russia has geopolitical implications, influencing Russia's strategic interests in the region. NATO's approach toward Russian borders has been perceived as a strategic concern by Russia, prompting responses aimed at safeguarding its national security interests. The expansion of the US-EUCOM's jurisdiction to encompass a vast region, including Russia, reflects systemic changes in global military configurations. This shift impacts the balance of power and strategic dynamics in the region. From October 1, 2002, the area of responsibility for the US-EUCOM European Command included most of the North Atlantic, the Caspian Sea, and Russia. As part of American diplomacy, a peacekeeping battalion was formed in Central Asia under the auspices of the UN, which was seen as a breakthrough. The next step was to create a similar structure for the Caucasian battalion under the auspices of the UN, involving Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

As a result, the military balance between Russia and the West began to shift, which can be analysed from a neoclassical realist perspective by examining the short-term and long-term responses of states to changes in military power. For neoclassical realists, changes in military power are a significant stimulus in explaining foreign and defence policy choices. Military power played a crucial role in the Russian-Georgia war in 2008. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990 and the emergence of conflicts in disputed territories, Russia consolidated its military presence in Georgia. Russia's military budget more than doubled from 2001 to 2007, growing from R 218.9 billion to R573 billion (Herspring, 2010, p. 266). When Vladimir Putin came to power, he signed a military doctrine with political, economic, and strategic bases for the military security of

Russia. In 2005, Putin ordered a revision of this doctrine, and in January 2007, General Baluyevsky, the chief of the general staff of the Russian armed forces, presented the elements of the future doctrine. The new doctrine identified the US's "desire to get a foothold in regions where Russia traditionally is present," NATO's enlargement and involvement in local conflicts near the Russian border, and "hostile information on Russia's policies" as the main threats (Haas, 2010). Like Putin, Medvedev also published three strategic documents during his presidency: the Foreign Policy Concept of the RF, the National Security Strategy of the RF until 2020, and the Military Doctrine of the RF. From a security culture perspective, these documents are characterized by three main features: (1) the promotion of multilateralism, (2) the exaggeration of threats to Russia's national security, and (3) the emphasis on the possibility of using nuclear weapons and deterrence. In addition, a specific feature of Russian security culture is (4) the use of energy issues as a political tool (Tichý, 2017, pp. 189–206).

The analysis of the Russo-Georgian conflict through the lens of neoclassical realism underscores the significance of geographical proximity and systemic shifts in shaping state strategies. The presence of U.S. military bases in Central Asia and the initiation of military reforms in Georgia under Saakashvili's leadership were perceived by Russia as strategic moves by the West to diminish its influence in the post-Soviet region. Dugin's interpretation aligns with the notion that Western military activities in Russia's sphere of influence aimed to curb its sway. The alignment of countries like Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Moldova can be seen as a potential pathway for NATO from Europe to Afghanistan, raising concerns for Russia's strategic interests. The Russo-Georgian conflict highlights the perceived threat posed by Georgia, particularly as the conflict unfolded in a disputed territory beyond Georgia's internationally recognized borders. The decision-making process leading to the conflict, influenced by Russian leadership under Putin, becomes crucial to understand the dynamics and outcomes. Putin's choices have had enduring consequences, shaping both the regional landscape and the broader international community. The examination of leadership traits and decision-making within the neoclassical realist framework provides valuable insights into the complexities of foreign policy dynamics.

3.2.4. Relative Distribution of Power and Polarity

Neoclassical realism perceives international politics as an enduring struggle for power among various actors, where states vie for influence and power in a world characterized by limited resources and uncertainties regarding each other's intentions and capabilities. The international system's uncertain nature, coupled with structural modifiers, defines the parameters of state strategies. The outcomes of interactions between countries are influenced by structural factors like technology and geography. States acknowledge anarchy as an inherent condition within this framework. Relative power distribution and trends serve as explanatory variables, shaped by structural elements such as technology and geography (Ripsman et al., 2016, pp. 43-44).

According to neoclassical realism, the international power distribution evolves through the behavior of countries and the perceptions of statesmen regarding their country's position in the system. Only political leaders and decision-makers sense the pressures and threats originating from the international system. Therefore, it is crucial to thoroughly investigate the perspectives of politicians from all countries (Rose, 1998, pp. 157-58). In the latter part of the 2000s, the unipolar system faced another setback. The 2008 global economic crisis underscored a systemic change (Monteiro, 2011; Yeşiltaş and Pirinççi, 2020). Moreover, the reintegration of Russia into the international system, the ascent of China, and the emergence of mid-level powers like Brazil, Argentina, and Turkey led to the regionalization of the international system, empowering local actors. In 2008, Russia's incursion into Georgia and its backing of South Ossetian separatists, resulting in the region's separation from Georgia, highlighted the collapse phase of the unipolar system. The inability of the West to intervene demonstrated this shift. The world order is presently in a transitional phase due to systemic uncertainty. Nevertheless, the collapse of the old system remains incomplete, and a new system has yet to emerge (Sadri Alibabalu, 2021, p. 96).

In the analysis of Russian actions during the 2008 conflict, an argument emerges concerning their seemingly erratic nature. The assault on Tbilisi and the subsequent withdrawal to the borders of Abkhazia and Ossetia appears less as an expansion of offensive force and more as a display of decisive action. Notably, the attack on Tbilisi didn't result in the occupation of the city or any further territorial gains beyond Abkhazia and South Ossetia, suggesting it was more of a demonstration of resolve rather than an

extensive military advancement. This perspective raises the possibility that the decision to attack Tbilisi might have been driven more by personal impulses than by a meticulously planned strategy devised by the Russian leadership to achieve specific objectives. While Russia's overarching goal of maintaining regional influence could have been a contributing factor, the disorderly nature of the attack implies potential personal influences at play. Debates persist regarding the motivations underpinning Russia's actions in the 2008 conflict with Georgia. Nonetheless, the lack of a clearly defined strategic objective in these actions has led scholars to critically examine the decision-making process within the Russian leadership at that time, casting doubt on the coherence and clarity of their approach.

3.2.5. Clarity

According to neoclassical realism, the West represented clear threats to Russia, and all actions taken by Western states conveyed signals of threat to Russia. Consequently, at the systemic level, the perceived threats emanating from the West's activities influenced Russia's overall security perceptions and reactions, shaping responses at both the state and individual levels. At the state level, Russia's strategic responses to perceived Western threats were centered on safeguarding its post-Soviet interests, without an aspiration for hegemony in the Caucasus. Moreover, the reinforcement of Russia's self-perception as a peace guarantor within its sphere of influence resonates at this level. While Russia responded to the active Western policy in the region, it did not seek to re-establish hegemony and imperial control in the Caucasus. NATO's presence in the region was interpreted by Russia as the United States' ambition to become a "global leader," a sentiment particularly irksome to Russian leadership.

Russian policy focused on the post-Soviet sphere of interests, and the Georgian conflict unfolded based on the actors' perceptions of each other and their interpretations of behavior. At the individual level, the Kremlin's responses, including reactions to NATO's expansion and other geopolitical developments, guided Russia's foreign policy strategies, reflecting both state-level policies and individual leadership interpretations. The Kremlin sought to assert that it was Russia, not America, that had to accept various events, such as the war in the Balkans, two rounds of NATO expansion, the US withdrawal from the ABM treaty, military presence in Central Asia, the invasion of Iraq, and plans to deploy

elements of nuclear missile defense in Eastern Europe (Cheterian, 2009, pp. 155-170). "Russia views itself as a historically established honest broker and a guarantor of peace in the region, and this perception is widely supported by the public at home" (Tsygankov, 2009, pp. 307-326). Dugin and Dobaev contend that specific events played a crucial role in shaping Russia's political reactions. The NATO summit in 2004 and the subsequent entry of new members into the Alliance marked a significant expansion of NATO's borders, bringing it closer to Russia's borders. This coincided with an increase in NATO's activities in the Caspian and Black Sea regions.

During the official NATO summit in Istanbul in 2004, NATO declared "special attention" to the regions of Central Asia and the Caucasus (Istanbul summit Communique, Istanbul, 28 June 2004). Since October 1, 1998, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova have fallen under the area of responsibility of the United States Armed Forces' European Command (EUCOM). A year later, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan were included in the zone of responsibility of the United States Central Military Command (CENTCOM). The interactions between these levels depict a complex interplay: systemic threat perceptions influencing state-level policies and individual leadership reactions, creating a dynamic framework guiding Russia's responses to perceived challenges from the West and its strategic positioning in the international landscape. However, it's important to note that NATO's expansion was more conjectural than final. Despite fourteen years passing since the Georgian crisis, Georgia has not joined either NATO or the European Union. Reflecting on the events of those days, a more comprehensive analysis of Russia's intervention in Georgia necessitates an understanding of the leaders who made the fateful decisions.

3.2.6. Permissive Strategic Environment

The international system provided a strategic environment enabling Russia to pursue its goals effectively, according to neoclassical theory. Putin's leadership has particularly drawn the attention of foreign policy scholars, who note Russia's capacity to engage effectively against weaker opponents and hesitant supporters within this system. In Bobo Lo's book "Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing, and the New Geopolitics," the argument is made that Russia's increased geopolitical ambitions can be attributed to a broader systemic crisis in the international arena. Lo emphasizes the repercussions of the

United States' failed foreign policy interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, which strained resources, impacted NATO operations in various regions, and contributed to America's economic challenges. The overextension of resources in these interventions has exacerbated the United States' economic difficulties, particularly by accumulating massive public debt (Lo, 2015, pp. 134-185).

The international system's crisis, coupled with perceived weaknesses in US foreign policy interventions, has played a significant role in shaping Russia's strategic maneuvers and its positioning within the global landscape. This interaction highlights the intricate relationship between systemic pressures, state-level responses, and resultant geopolitical shifts that impact global power structures. The reliance of NATO on territories like Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Central Asia for operational bases further reflects the geopolitical dynamics and systemic challenges faced by dominant global powers. This restructured presentation emphasizes the influence of systemic pressures and state-level responses on Russia's geopolitical ambitions, providing a clearer delineation between the levels of analysis and their interdependencies.

The mistakes made by the Bush administration during the Iraq war played a significant role in weakening the United States' image in the international system. George W. Bush's presidency witnessed a notable decline in the authority of the United States, with global leadership coming under attack from various quarters (Lo, 2008, p.5). This shift in global dynamics had transformative effects on international relations, particularly influencing Russia's strategic aspirations and responses. At the systemic level, the repercussions of critical US foreign policy decisions, notably the missteps during the Iraq war, led to a remarkable erosion of the United States' global standing. The aftermath tarnished the US image and fostered anti-American sentiments across Europe, causing a consequential division within the North Atlantic alliance. This division weakened the unity of the Western bloc and exacerbated imbalances within the Middle East. For Moscow, the rise of other global players represented more than an objective trend; it was an ideational project driven by the assertion of national sovereignty against the hegemony of the West (Lo, 2008, p. 164).

Simultaneously, these systemic shifts provided fertile ground for Russia's recalibration and assertiveness in international affairs. Moscow capitalized on the growing turbulence within the Western bloc, using the resultant geopolitical imbalance to strengthen its

political activity globally. The close ties with Beijing allowed Moscow to demonstrate independence and sustain an alternative foreign policy. Russia benefited from the ambiguity in U.S.-Chinese relations, even if its influence in this area was minimal (Lo, 2008, p. 164). The ascent of China as a global player, challenging the unipolar world order, aligned seamlessly with Russia's strategic ambitions. Putin's articulation of Russia as a potential "third pole" in a nascent multipolar world reflected Moscow's quest for a distinct strategic identity. This envisioned role aimed at delicately balancing between the United States and China, aspiring to be an "equal partner" to both superpowers. The symbiotic relationship between Russia and China in this geopolitical panorama served manifold purposes for Moscow, showcasing its capacity for an autonomous foreign policy while signaling alternative global alliance options to the West. As the United States grappled with a decline in global authority and China accelerated its ascent, Russia deftly maneuvered, leveraging the ambiguity in US-China relations to its advantage.

The primary objective behind Russia's actions in the Georgian crisis remains elusive. While the completion of the operation and the return to pre-conflict borders might suggest a desire for power expansion, explanations solely centered on territorial expansionism seem inadequate to justify the military intervention. The motives guiding Russia's actions during the Georgian crisis are complex and resist a straightforward interpretation. Putin's aspiration to consolidate regional power plays a significant role, coupled with the imperative to safeguard Russian-speaking communities within Georgia. These factors are intertwined with a broader geopolitical messaging to the West, forming a multi-layered rationale behind the intervention. This multifaceted dynamic signals an amalgamation of strategic calculations, regional considerations, and the pursuit of Russia's broader geopolitical ambitions. It showcases a nuanced interplay of motives that transcend simplistic narratives of mere territorial assertion. The motivations behind Russia's actions in the Georgian crisis are deeply rooted in a complex web of geopolitical, regional, and strategic considerations, highlighting the need for a comprehensive understanding of the factors at play.

3.3. Unit Level

Neoclassical theorists emphasize the pivotal role of domestic politics in shaping foreign policy decision-making. As articulated by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, "domestic

institutions shape foreign policy outcomes by influencing the preferences, information, bargaining power, and strategies of the actors who make policy" (Keohane and Nye, 1989, p. 34). In essence, factors such as political institutions, interest groups, and public opinion can significantly impact foreign policy decisions. According to political scientist Jack Snyder, "the leadership of a state is embedded in domestic political institutions, which, in turn, generate their own imperatives and constraints" (Snyder, 1984, p. 427). This perspective underscores the intricate relationship between Putin's domestic policies and his foreign policy decisions. His cultivated image as a strong leader committed to safeguarding Russia's interests resonates internally, shaping public opinion and subsequently influencing his foreign policy actions, including interventions in neighboring regions. Putin's emphasis on maintaining internal stability and upholding Russia's global stature aligns with his foreign policy goals, particularly in asserting influence within the post-Soviet realm. This interconnectedness between internal factors and Putin's foreign policy choices underscores the substantial impact of domestic dynamics, including political personality, on Russia's approach to global relations throughout his leadership tenure.

3.3.1. Strategic Culture of Russia

Putin's leadership has coincided with a strategic culture in Russia's foreign policy that revolves around safeguarding its historical and geographic zones of influence. The rhetoric emphasizes an authoritarian form of democracy while maintaining Russia's status as a great power, a legacy inherited from the Soviet era. Russia's arsenal, including nuclear and conventional arms, its permanent UN Security Council seat, vast natural resources with global economic impact, and its Eurasian geopolitical positioning, have contributed to its role as a mediator in global conflicts and solidified its status as a major player on the world stage. During Putin's tenure, there has been a reformation of Russia's economic policies, resulting in success reflected in his ranking. This transformation, focused on bolstering economic stability, aligns with Putin's implicit agreement with the population: delivering economic growth in exchange for increased authoritarianism, a deal that has found tolerance among the populace. To regain economic power, the Russian government implemented measures to expand and export energy, culminating in Putin's

assertion in 2005 that Russia "must become an 'energy superpower' to regain political leadership in the world" (Yasmann, 2006).

Norbert Eitelhuber's analysis in "The Russian Bear: Russian Strategic Culture and What it Implies for the West" sheds light on the persistent misunderstanding of Russia's international behavior by Western policymakers, emphasizing the importance of Russia's enduring strategic culture deeply rooted in the Russian empire's legacy. Eitelhuber contends that understanding Russia's strategic culture requires delving into the pre-Soviet era, where historical and geographical factors have shaped Russia's pursuit of great power status. Post-USSR, Russia refrained from a large-scale arms race due to various influences, and the author posits that the Georgian crisis stemmed from Russia's strategic culture, marked by reciprocal actions with the West and deteriorating trust. This conflict directly challenged Russia's dominance in Eurasia, motivating its response to safeguard its territorial dominance. The post-Cold War period has witnessed Russia's pursuit of regaining global power status, improving citizens' living standards, and fostering a unique national identity. A prominent shift in Russian strategic culture has been the growing emphasis on economic prowess, likely to endure. However, achieving significant economic modernization might pose challenges without substantial Western cooperation, especially considering the backdrop of the global financial crisis. The collapse of the Soviet Union marked a pivotal turn in Russia's economic ideology, transitioning to an open market system, elevating the economy within Russian strategic thought, and influencing the country's strategic culture. Consequently, Russia has sought to harness its economic capabilities and respond adeptly to economic pressures to maintain its dominant regional position.

3.3.2. Leader’s Perception

Neoclassical realists underscore the crucial role of decision-makers' perceptions of systemic pressures in shaping their actions in international affairs. Leaders, like individuals in general, hold personal values, beliefs, and unique perspectives on the world and global issues. These individual perceptions significantly influence how leaders engage with the international environment and shape their understanding of it. These perceptions, rooted in personal experiences and values, often become deeply ingrained as fundamental beliefs. As noted by scholars like Robert Jervis, leaders, being human, are

susceptible to errors in processing information, assessing relative power, identifying available options, and predicting the potential consequences of their actions. These fallibilities can impact their decision-making process (Ripsman, 2011, pp. 35-56).

Neoclassical realism indeed highlights how decision-makers' perceptions, shaped by personal experiences, greatly impact their actions in global affairs. However, it's crucial to recognize that leaders, despite their experiences, may be prone to cognitive biases or limited information. These factors could lead to errors in evaluating threats or risks in international scenarios. Therefore, while perceptions heavily influence decisions, leaders' biases or incomplete information might result in flawed assessments, influencing their actions in the global arena. Putin's address at the 2007 Munich Security Conference focused on critiquing US unilateralism. He accused the US and the West of engaging in unilateral and often illegal actions that failed to effectively resolve global issues. Putin highlighted ongoing conflicts and regional disputes, arguing that these actions had not curbed the proliferation of such conflicts. His concerns extended to the crisis in international law, stressing a growing disregard for its core principles. Putin specifically targeted the US for extending its influence beyond national borders, deeming such actions highly perilous. He cited various facets of US policies, spanning economic, political, cultural, and educational domains imposed on other nations, as reflective of this expansionism. Putin asserted that these actions eroded global security, undermining trust in international law as a reliable and protective framework. He underscored that such policies fueled an arms race, exacerbating tensions on the global stage. Putin's apprehensions heightened following the 2008 Bucharest summit, particularly regarding the potential inclusion of another NATO member sharing a border with Russia within the post-Soviet sphere. He frequently drew parallels between NATO's intervention in Georgia and the humanitarian grounds cited for NATO's actions in Kosovo. Putin's rhetoric during and after the conflict notably implied US responsibility for the war. As prime minister at the time, he even alleged, by the end of August 2008, that the US deliberately orchestrated the conflict to favor a specific presidential candidate in the upcoming US elections (Sherman & Sussex, 2010, pp. 113-175).

At the Bucharest summit, Putin vehemently cautioned against extending NATO membership to Georgia and Ukraine, viewing such a move as a direct threat to Russia's security. Consequently, Putin saw interactions with the outside world through the lens of

preserving Russia's dominant positions within the region. As prime minister at the time, he stated at the end of August 2008 that the US deliberately engineered a conflict in the interests of one of the presidential candidates in the upcoming US elections (Sherman and Sussex, 2010, pp. 113-175). Following the 2008 Bucharest summit, Putin grew increasingly concerned about the potential addition of another NATO member in the post-Soviet region that shares a border with Russia. He repeatedly likened the intervention in Georgia to humanitarian grounds, drawing parallels to NATO's actions in Kosovo. Putin's rhetoric during the NATO summit in Bucharest and throughout the Georgian conflict indicated his belief that the US bore responsibility for the war. While serving as prime minister at that time, Putin strongly warned against granting NATO membership to Georgia and Ukraine, citing it as a direct threat to Russia's security. This perspective shaped Putin's approach to international interactions, emphasizing the preservation of dominant positions within the region.

3.3.3. Domestic Institutions

Neoclassical realism presents a theoretical perspective aimed at elucidating state behavior in the realm of international relations, incorporating both systemic influences and domestic factors. When scrutinizing the dependent variables within this framework, five pivotal questions emerge without altering the provided quotations: Which actors are most important in foreign policy-making? Neoclassical realism acknowledges the diverse range of actors capable of influencing a state's foreign policy decisions. Political leaders, interest groups, bureaucratic agencies, and institutions all play roles whose significance may vary based on specific contextual factors and issues. Under what international conditions will these actors have a lot of influence? The international landscape holds sway over the impact exerted by domestic actors in foreign policy decisions. Neoclassical realism posits that periods of relative stability or external threats may afford domestic actors greater latitude in shaping foreign policy. Conversely, in times of heightened international competition or crisis, the influence of these actors might be constrained. Under what circumstances will local actors be most influential?

The sway of local actors in foreign policy hinges on various factors. Neoclassical realism asserts that when interests align between domestic actors and the broader national interest, local actors are more likely to wield influence. Moreover, their influence may escalate

when they possess expertise or control over critical resources related to the foreign policy issue. In what state will local actors be most important? The prominence of local actors in foreign policy-making diverges across states. Neoclassical realism contends that states with relatively open political systems, allowing diverse actors to participate in policy debates and decision-making, are prone to witnessing significant contributions from local actors. Conversely, more closed political systems may curtail the influence of domestic actors. How will the influence of the actors show itself?

Discerning the impact of domestic actors on foreign policy outcomes can be intricate. Neoclassical realism recognizes the challenge of directly observing such influence but posits that it may manifest in various ways. This includes the framing of policy debates, prioritization of certain issues, formation of alliances, allocation of resources, and negotiation of international agreements. The dynamics within the Russian elite following the dissolution of the USSR were notably influenced by former Soviet bureaucrats, leading to the emergence of factions commonly referred to as liberals and siloviki. The liberal faction, represented by figures such as D. Medvedev, A. Miller, G. Gref, and A. Kudrin, epitomized a new generation of business and political leaders aspiring to integrate Russia into international markets. They advocated for closer ties and pragmatic relations with the United States and Europe, envisioning a reshaped Russia. Conversely, the siloviki, comprised of individuals like Sechin, Ivanov, and Patrushev with backgrounds in security and the military, prioritized bolstering Russia's internal security apparatus and military capabilities. They advocated for a more assertive and independent foreign policy stance, reflecting a divergent vision for Russia's future, particularly regarding its economic and foreign policy trajectories.

The internal power struggle within the elite, with the latter represented in the power ministries, was indicative of varying visions for Russia's future. Putin's background as a member of the KGB's Foreign Service and as the director of the Federal Security Service positioned him within this milieu. The siloviki wielded influence over multiple government agencies, including critical institutions such as the Energy Agency and the Customs Service, underscoring their significant role in Russian politics. Putin's policies have consolidated power within the executive arm of the Russian government, eclipsing the influence of legislative, judicial, and regional authorities that previously held considerable sway. His leadership has involved exerting control over state-owned

enterprises and intervening in sectors once dominated by private interests, leading to a centralization of authority and a transformation of the political landscape. Despite the concentration of power under Putin's leadership, divisions within the executive branch persist, occasionally constraining the president's direct control and authority. Nonetheless, Putin's policies and actions have been pivotal in solidifying executive power and shaping Russia's political trajectory.

3.3.4. State-Society Relationship

The degree of coordination between government and society, as well as the level of society's influence on government leaders during critical situations, competition between social coalitions, political and social cohesion in domestic and foreign policy, national security, and public support for national goals, all play significant roles in government-society relations (Ripsman et al., 2016, pp. 70-71). These factors directly impact the government leaders' ability to harness, mobilize, and control the power of the nation. Leaders and elites rely on society for financial resources and the pursuit of foreign and security policy objectives (Dyson, 2010, p. 120). However, the extent of this dependence varies among different states. In the case of Russia, especially under Putin's leadership, there has been an institutional transformation. Owing to historical and geographical factors unique to Russia, the development of domestic policy differs from that of Western countries. The political perception of the people and the elites in Russia have often diverged, particularly during the Soviet era when the government functioned as a powerful employer.

Given the historical context of Russia's political culture, which has not fully embraced democracy, social processes have occasionally disrupted domestic politics. The interdependence between the state and its citizens, coupled with an absolutist culture, has institutionalized these dynamics. In moments of conflict between the government and society, the policymaking process becomes intricate, with the government grappling with opposition groups and internal dissent, often necessitating negotiations (Ripsman et al., 2016, pp. 71-72). The Putin era witnessed a discernible trend of suppressing opposition groups, fostering public discontent with foreign policy decisions. Despite this dissatisfaction, Putin adeptly employed strategic maneuvers to divert attention from grievances or dissent related to foreign policy. This diversionary tactic effectively shifted

public focus towards other matters or narratives beneficial to the ruling regime. According to neoclassical theory, leaders not only strive to safeguard the country from external threats but also aim to maintain their political power and authority domestically (Ripsman, 2011, pp. 71-72). In Russia, foreign policy becomes a tool for Putin to establish his supremacy over potential domestic rivals, directly influenced by his political maneuvers. Consequently, Putin seeks to mobilize public resources in alignment with his policy objectives through various means.

General Results

This chapter conducts an examination of the rationale behind Russia's 2008 intervention in Georgia through the neoclassical realist framework. This approach is crucial for elucidating the impact of both systemic pressures and subunit-level factors on foreign policy decisions. Nevertheless, the argument posits that relying solely on these explanations falls short of providing a comprehensive understanding of the intricate decision-making process during the five-day war in Georgia. While systemic factors, encompassing regional power dynamics and geopolitical interests, alongside unit-level factors such as internal politics and leadership ambitions, undoubtedly played pivotal roles, their exclusive consideration is insufficient. To attain a more nuanced comprehension, an exploration of individual-level dynamics, particularly leadership style and Putin's personal role in the intervention, becomes necessary. From a state-level perspective, the intervention can be construed as a response to perceived threats to Russia's security and regional influence. Georgia's aspirations to join NATO and its closer ties with the West were viewed by Russia as encroaching upon its traditional sphere of influence. This posed a threat to Russia's strategic position in the South Caucasus region, given Georgia's proximity to Russia's southern borders and the presence of an ethnic Russian population in the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Neoclassical realism suggests that these systemic pressures created incentives for Russia to intervene to protect its security interests and maintain regional influence.

Putin's individual motivations are intricately linked to his public image and approval ratings, exerting a significant influence on his leadership strategies. The assertive nature of Russian foreign policy is not solely grounded in material or ideological factors but also significantly reflects Vladimir Putin's personal perceptions and interpretations of global events, mirroring his internal dialogue. A comprehensive understanding of Russia's risk

appetite in foreign policy necessitates research on multiple fronts, delving into the fundamentals of Russian foreign policy, standardized assessments covering systemic and subunit-level factors, and Putin's unique leadership style as a key decision-maker. The offensive trajectory of Russian foreign policy has its origins in internal discussions between Putin and his allies, often revolving around his understanding of post-Soviet Russians and their political representation abroad. This transcends traditional analyses of Russian-Western relations, revealing Putin's inclination to bolster his popularity through military action, notably evident post the Georgian invasion and further exploited during the Crimean crisis, elevating his status to almost that of a hero. Acknowledging that Putin's desire for high approval ratings and his unshakable self-confidence are critical to his leadership, a detailed examination of the complex interaction of his personality and, in particular, his influence on foreign policy decisions requires a deeper study of the dynamics of his personal perception of events on foreign policy decisions and a unique leadership style. Such a detailed study becomes especially important when considering events that significantly influenced foreign policy, shedding light on the complexities of similar regimes and serving as a key tool in understanding foreign policy within these systems.

3.4. Individual-level on Crisis: Vladimir Putin's Leadership Style in Georgian crisis 2008

In this chapter, the focus is on analyzing Putin's leadership style during the 2008 intervention in Georgia, with an investigation into his role through unit-level analysis. Despite holding the position of prime minister under the presidency of Medvedev during the invasion of Georgia in 2008, empirical analysis reveals that Putin indeed wielded influence on Russian foreign policy decision-making processes and outcomes. This evidence enables a comprehensive analysis of Russia's decisions regarding Georgia in 2008, bringing together empirical data to examine assumptions about Putin's decision-making behavior in the Georgian case, previously based on his personality profile. Table 1 succinctly summarizes Putin's traits and analyzes Russian foreign policy at the state-unit level, with a particular emphasis on the significance of Putin's role in the Georgian invasion.

The results of the analysis highlight several key aspects of Putin's leadership style. Putin exhibits low conceptual complexity, indicating a preference for straightforward decision-making. He displays high levels of distrust toward others, suggesting a cautious approach in international relations. Additionally, there are low levels of in-group bias, indicating a tendency to make decisions based on broader considerations rather than favoring specific groups. Putin demonstrates low task focus, suggesting a broader strategic approach rather than a narrow focus on specific tasks. His need for power is average, as is his belief in his ability to influence and control events. Notably, he exhibits high levels of self-confidence. This study underscores the importance of individual-level analysis in foreign policy decision-making, using political figures like Putin as prominent examples. Furthermore, it provides a comprehensive explanation of this crucial episode by integrating leadership trait analysis with existing literature on the case. The examination of Putin's personality traits and their influence on the Georgian intervention offers an overview of the impact of his characteristics in shaping the foreign policy decisions of the time.

Low Conceptual Complexity

The concept of conceptual complexity score relates to how individuals interpret the political environment. Leaders with low conceptual complexity tend to adopt a simplistic perspective of the international landscape, perceiving it in binary terms. Consequently, their decisions in foreign policy are influenced by their own limited perceptions, viewing the world through a dualistic framework and categorizing it into oversimplified distinctions. In the context of the Georgian crisis, it is anticipated that Putin, known for his black-and-white thinking, will approach the situation with a fundamental dichotomous worldview, dividing actors into friends and enemies or "goodies" and "baddies." Additionally, Putin is expected to prioritize interactions with powerful colleagues who demonstrate loyalty in both domestic and foreign settings. During the Georgian crisis, Putin is likely to assess the loyalty of the Georgian government based on their stance regarding Russian dominance in the region. If the Georgian government is perceived as disloyal, Putin may interpret their actions as adversarial, attributing them to Western influence. Putin's black-and-white world perceptions were prominently exhibited during his memorable speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007. Many experts regarded Putin's Munich speech as an announcement of Russia's intention to revise its position in the global system and pursue an active foreign policy. During the conference, Putin

revealed Russian ambitions to shape the international environment within a dichotomous framework, characterized by "them and us" categories that carried strong moralistic undertones. This inclination towards binary categorizations and moralistic interpretations could influence Putin's decision-making during the Georgian crisis, shaping how he views and responds to the actions of different actors involved.

In his Munich speech, Putin portrayed the Russian position as a significant victim of a unipolar world and divided the international arena into opposing factions of "them and us." He held the West responsible for moralistic shortcomings concerning poverty issues, active foreign policy, and the dominance of a single actor (Putin, 2007). This mindset exhibited by Putin reflects a simplistic dual perception of global processes, where one actor assumes the subject/object reminiscent of Cold War-era thinking. This perspective elucidates Putin's tendency towards low conceptual complexity and his inclination towards black-and-white psychological attitudes. Leaders with low conceptual complexity tend to assemble their cabinets with loyal members who align with their singular foreign policy direction. Once decisions are made, these loyal cabinet members are expected to support the leader's chosen course without room for criticism. Indeed, most members of Putin's cabinet have followed his directives since his early years in power. The loyal cabinet is one of the major features of Putin’s leadership style.

Upon assuming office, Putin appointed his advisors and cabinet members primarily from his associates in the Saint Petersburg municipality, including individuals such as Medvedev, Sechin, Patrushev, Ivanov, Bogdanchikov, and Stepashin. The established elites in Russian politics largely consist of current and former intelligence officers from St. Petersburg, Putin's hometown. Notably, Igor Sechin, deputy head of the presidential administration; Viktor Ivanov, presidential advisor; Nikolai Patrushev, director of the Federal Security Service (FSB); Sergei Bogdanchikov, president of a state-owned oil company; Sergei Stepashin, head of the Audit Chamber and former FSB chief, are key members of this security forces clan (Bremmer and Charap, 2007, pp. 83-92). The inner circle of Putin's cabinet offers insights into the expectations tied to leaders characterized by low conceptual complexity. Such leaders often gravitate toward assembling a cabinet composed of individuals they share enduring personal connections with, rather than prioritizing diverse expertise or perspectives. This tendency aligns with the preference for familiarity and loyalty over varied viewpoints within the inner circle of power. Putin's

choice of appointees reflects this inclination, as many members of his cabinet are known to have longstanding ties or past associations with him, emphasizing personal rapport and allegiance. This inclination to surround oneself with familiar faces might signify a preference for trust and loyalty over a diverse range of opinions, potentially influencing decision-making dynamics within the highest echelons of Russian governance. Overall, Putin's cabinet composition offers an illustrative example of how leaders with low conceptual complexity often assemble close-knit teams based on personal connections rather than diverse expertise or viewpoints.

Low TASK Focus

Task focus refers to the extent to which a leader prioritizes addressing government problems rather than focusing on the feelings and needs of relevant constituents (Hermann, 2003, p. 25). Leaders with high task focus make decisions based on specific issues or causes in foreign policy, domestic politics, or economic matters. Conversely, leaders with low task focus, like Putin, prioritize the expectations and opinions of their established relationships over actively addressing various issues or problems. During the Georgian crisis, Putin demonstrated a low task focus by involving his loyalists in the decision-making process and refraining from taking any initiatives that he believed would not receive support from the appropriate constituencies. This approach fostered a sense of collegiality and engagement within his inner circle, reflecting his prioritization of maintaining loyalty and consensus. However, this low task focus also resulted in a lack of proactive problem-solving. Instead of directly addressing the specific problems facing the government and the region, Putin relied heavily on the preferences and perspectives of his loyal colleagues. This limited his ability to effectively tackle the complexities of the Georgian crisis and find comprehensive solutions.

In his early years in power, Putin sought to transform the political legacy left by Yeltsin. He surrounded himself with a loyal cabinet and engaged in conflicts with Yeltsin's oligarchs. Together with the dominant group in Russian policy known as Siloviki, Putin spearheaded the Yukos affair, which involved the sanctioned dismantling of the once powerful Russian oil company and the imprisonment of its president, Mikhail Khodorkovsky. This episode is likely to be remembered as the most significant event in Russia's political economy during the Putin era (Bremmer & Charap, 2007, p. 3). Additionally, Putin was fortunate to preside over this restoration period while oil prices

surged from $27 a barrel in 2000 to $130 a barrel by mid-2008. In addition to gaining absolute control over energy assets, Putin aimed to secure personal control over energy resources by appointing state officials to key positions in crucial businesses. Putin's low task orientation in policy demonstrated his strong preference for distributing state power among like-minded individuals, prioritizing relations over problem-solving. This approach reflected his desire to consolidate power and maintain a network of loyal allies within the state apparatus.

High Self-confidence

Putin has a high score in the self-confidence trait. Self-confidence refers to one's sense of self-importance and their perception of their ability to effectively handle situations and interact with others. Leaders with high self-confidence are less susceptible to external influences compared to those with lower self-confidence scores. They generally have a contented view of themselves and do not seek constant validation or evaluation of their behavior (Hermann, 2002, p. 25). Individuals with high self-confidence do not feel the need to compensate for any perceived inadequacies. Such leaders do not rely on political groups or delegates to enhance their self-image; instead, they exhibit individualism in decision-making. Leaders with high self-confidence are satisfied with themselves and have a strong belief in their problem-solving abilities. As a result, they may overlook evidence that challenges their own beliefs and refrain from examining or questioning their own positions or actions.

Putin's high self-confidence allowed him to challenge and manipulate internal constraints, including constitutional limits on individual power. He did not hesitate to exert his influence directly or indirectly. Starting from his Munich speech in 2007, he continued with assertive actions in foreign policy, such as the military operation in Georgia. Initially, he allowed Abkhazia and South Ossetia to declare their independence without considering the reactions of the international community. He pursued his interests and implemented his preferred political strategies, utilizing tactics like gas blackmail. Consequently, some Western political leaders chose to turn a blind eye to the issue of separatist regions and re-establish relations with Russia as an important ally in the Eurasian region. Putin's belief that Europe heavily depends on Russian energy sources fueled his self-confidence. He correctly calculated that European bureaucrats would fear

losing their electorate due to a crisis, thereby providing him with more leeway to sway Europeans to his side.

Traits	World leaders (214)	Putin's traits before the deal (2007-2008)
DIS	0.01 Low< 0.01 High> 0.01	0.1249 High
TASK	0.73 Low< 0.67 High>0.79	0.6414 Low
BACE	0.34 Low<0.30 High>0.38	0.2886 Low
IGB	0.51 Low<0.44 High>0.58	0.1684 Low
SC	0.36 Low<0.27 High>0.45	0.4518 High
CC	0.65 Low<0.61 High>0.69	0.5783 Low
PWR	0.26 Low<0.22 High>0.30	0.2604 (high leaning average)

Table 2: Putin's LTA Results in Georgian Crisis, before Invasion

Source: Created by author. Reference group based on 214-world leader's by Hermann 2003

Traits	World leaders (214)	Putin's traits before the deal (2007-2008)	Putin's traits after the deal (2009-2010)
DIS	0.01 Low< 0.01 High> 0.01	0.1249 High	0.0926 High
TASK	0.73 Low< 0.67 High>0.79	0.6414 Low	0.6623 Low
BACE	0.34 Low<0.30 High>0.38	0.2886 Low	0.3136 (low leaning average)
IGB	0.51 Low<0.44 High>0.58	0.1684 Low	0.1445 Low
SC	0.36 Low<0.27 High>0.45	0.4518 High	0.4431 (High leaning average).
CC	0.65 Low<0.61 High>0.69	0.5783 Low	0.5654 Low
PWR	0.26 Low<0.22 High>0.30	0.2604 (high leaning average)	0.2367 (low leaning average)

Table 3: Putin's LTA Results in Georgian crisis, after Invasion

Source: Created by author. Reference group based on 214-world leaders by Hermann 2003

Low in-Group Bias

In-group bias refers to a perspective in which one's own group (social, political, ethnic, etc.) takes center stage in the world. Leaders with high in-group bias have emotional attachments to their group and prioritize the preservation of their group's culture and status (Hermann, 2003, p. 29). On the other hand, leaders with low in-group bias, such as Putin, are less inclined to use scapegoats when dealing with internal opposition. Instead, they may opt for summit conferences and diplomatic actions to manage the situation. Putin is less likely to emphasize the uniqueness of his own group. This pattern reflects

the dynamics of Russian domestic politics, the power balance between liberals and Siloviki in the Kremlin, and Putin's position as a middle ground within this context. Traits associated with low in-group bias also suggest a less pronounced pro-nationalistic orientation of leaders.

Putin, with low in-group bias, is not overtly nationalistic. His discourse generally focuses on geopolitical challenges and confronting the West or Western liberal ideology, rather than displaying strong nationalistic tendencies. Putin perceives NATO's expansion towards Russia's western border, NATO's discussions with Ukraine and Georgia regarding membership, the deployment of the US missile defence system, and the occurrence of colour revolutions in regions within Russia's sphere of influence as more threatening than concerns about the well-being of Russians as a nation. However, it is worth noting that Putin has used nationalistic slogans to justify interventions in Georgia and Ukraine. Critics argue that these interventions were driven more by geopolitical considerations and the desire to maintain influence in neighbouring countries, rather than genuine concerns for the well-being of Russians as a minority group. Concrete evidence of systematic violations of the rights of Russians as a national minority in these regions has yet to be substantiated. While these interventions were presented as measures to safeguard the rights of Russians, there is ongoing debate and differing perspectives regarding the underlying motivations and the extent of rights violations.

High Distrust of Others

Distrust of others refers to a general sense of uncertainty, unease, misgivings, and wariness towards others, indicating a tendency to doubt their intentions and behavior. Leaders who exhibit high levels of distrust towards others tend to be suspicious of the motives and actions of those they perceive as competitors for their positions or opposed to their cause/ideology. In extreme cases, distrust of others can manifest as paranoia, where there is a well-developed rationale for being suspicious of specific individuals, groups, or countries (Hermann, 2003, p. 29). The leader's perception of the world is influenced by their level of distrust towards others. Leaders with high levels of distrust, such as Putin, tend to view their environment as dangerous and threatening, considering other people as actual or potential opponents of their position or competitors for their interests.

Highly distrustful leaders, like Putin, are always vigilant for any challenges to their power. They typically demand unconditional loyalty from those around them and surround themselves with a select few individuals whom they believe they can trust. According to Bremmer and Charap, (2007), at the beginning of Putin's term in office, he implemented significant changes within the executive branch, appointing loyalists to key positions. Putin's perception of domestic politics became evident during the early years of his tenure in 2000. He initiated extensive economic and political reforms that focused on reshaping the politico-economic power structure to ensure loyalty to his own group. In the Georgian crisis, Putin behaved according to his high distrust of others. He prepared for military operations and demonstrations of Russian military capacity long before the Georgian crisis. The public disputes between Putin and Saakashvili started much earlier than the intervention in 2008. Both Putin and Saakashvili showed personal dislike for each other. The Economist noted that Vladimir Putin's dislike for Saakashvili could provoke a direct reason for the Russian Prime Minister to start military operations in the Georgian issue, and the Russian government would be able to justify the military involvement in the breakaway regions. Putin could not stand how Saakashvili criticized and did not respect him. Saakashvili personally insulted him by calling him "Liliputin" (midget Putin), and Putin told Sakashvili before the invasion that from Sochi to Abkhazia is short pedestrian access, suggesting that it would be easy to annex the region very easily. Putin's pronounced distrust of other leaders profoundly shapes his approach to conflict resolution, leading him to favor military actions as a method of addressing perceived threats. This inclination toward military interventions is evident in Putin's past decisions and actions, notably demonstrated in the case of Georgia in 2008. His response during that crisis underscored a reliance on military force to assert control and protect what he perceived as Russia's interests, showcasing a recurring pattern in his leadership style. The Economist noted that despite Medvedev's presidency and his penchant for solving problems peacefully, Putin and his hardliners in the Kremlin's foreign policy apparatus could influence Medvedev's decision in favor of a military solution to Georgia's problems (The Economist, 2008).

Putin resorted to a seemingly irrational measure if Russia did not intend to annex Georgia, so the question appeared: why did Russia bomb Tbilisi on September 10? The answer to this question lies in the premise of a clear division into "us" and "them" for leaders with

high distrust in others and low conceptual complexity. In the case of Putin and Saakashvili, Putin's pronounced vindictiveness towards Saakashvili was a clear manifestation of his high level of distrust towards others. Putin repeatedly made ironic remarks directed at Saakashvili, even after Saakashvili had already left Georgia and was no longer serving as the president. This vindictive behavior demonstrated Putin's unwillingness to let go of past conflicts and his strong determination to hold Saakashvili accountable for perceived offenses. Furthermore, Putin's influence extended beyond Russia's borders, as he was able to orchestrate Saakashvili's return to Georgia through loyalists within the country. This maneuver ultimately led to Saakashvili's arrest in 2021, highlighting Putin's ability to exert control and pursue his objectives even after a significant amount of time had passed since their initial conflicts in the neighboring country. This episode serves as a testament to Putin's inclination to maintain a long-lasting memory of perceived slights or challenges to his authority. It reinforces the notion that leaders with a high level of distrust towards others can harbor deep grudges and be driven by a strong desire for retribution. Putin's actions in relentlessly pursuing Saakashvili, even many years later, underscore his determination to assert dominance and ensure that his adversaries are held accountable.

3.4.1. Putin's Leadership Style in the Invasion in Georgia in 2008

This chapter provides detailed explanations of how Putin's traits influenced his conduct during the war in Georgia. It is important to further analyze Russian foreign policy decisions and Putin's role in the Georgian crisis by addressing the following questions: What was Putin's leadership style in the Georgian intervention in 2008? What differentiated Putin's decision-making in the Georgian war? How did Putin's personality influence the course of the war, and would the invasion have unfolded differently if President Medvedev had been the sole decision-maker? Under former President Yeltsin, Russian foreign policy towards Georgia was generally more cooperative, with fewer active clashes over disputed territories. The stability during this period can be attributed to the presence of ex-Soviet leadership governments in newly emerged republics. These governments, due to their Soviet-era ties and loyalty to Russia as a regional superpower, maintained relatively amicable relations. Eduard Shevardnadze, an ex-Politburo member who later became a diplomat and the leader of Georgia, sought to develop a liberal

democratic state and even praised Yeltsin for his role in the collapse of the USSR. The previous war between Georgia and Ossetia (1990-1992) was resolved through the "Agreement on Principles for the Settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict" signed by Boris Yeltsin and Eduard Shevardnadze in Sochi on June 24, 1992. The period of crisis in Georgia is characterized by the emergence of Russian regional power, wherein conflicts that arose in the post-Soviet territory were resolved through the signing of peace treaties. Russia played a crucial role as a moderator and actively participated in the successful implementation of these treaties. The Kremlin's approach to warfare during this time symbolized the ambition of Putin's Russia, which marked a significant departure from the Yeltsin era and ushered in a new age with a vastly transformed international landscape. It is important to note that interpersonal tensions between Putin and Saakashvili had been evident long before the five-day conflict in 2008.

From Putin's perspective, Mikhail Saakashvili's presidency posed challenges right from the start. Following the Rose Revolution, which led to the overthrow of President Eduard Shevardnadze in Georgia, there was a positive post-Soviet sentiment aimed at strengthening Russian-Georgian ties. However, Saakashvili, upon assuming office, swiftly reversed Georgian foreign policy towards the West. He announced Georgia's intention to integrate with Europe and the Western world. Saakashvili made multiple visits to NATO headquarters, accompanied by his Minister of Defense and Minister of Foreign Affairs, seeking NATO's support in realizing defense goals and integrating Georgia into NATO's security architecture. Given his moderate belief in his ability to shape events, Putin was expected to adopt a balanced foreign policy orientation between being active and passive. He positioned himself as a moderate leader, perceiving himself as having influence over international actors and events. Putin's political orientation was characterized by a perceived internal locus of control and a sense of effectiveness in shaping the course of events.

In the neoclassical realism framework, Putin perceived NATO's expansion toward Russia's western frontier, the negotiations between NATO and Ukraine/Georgia regarding NATO Membership Action Plans, the deployment of the US missile defense system, and the so-called colour revolutions in the post-Soviet territory as direct threats to Russia's dominant position in the region. However, neoclassical theory struggles to explain why leaders choose aggressive political reactions to stimuli from the international

system, necessitating a unit-level analysis. Former President Saakashvili recalled that the tension between his modernist policies and pro-Western orientations had already irked Putin long before the events of August 2008. Putin adamantly opposed any compromise on Georgia's Western orientation and warned Saakashvili of military intervention if Georgia pursued a pro-Western policy. Putin, with his low conceptual complexity, exhibited a deep aversion to Western orientation, modernization, and any comparisons with the West. Loyalty and adherence to a particular course of action are key principles for leaders with low conceptual complexity, shaping Putin's leadership style. This was evident during the Georgian crisis, as Putin's cabinet remained largely unchanged throughout his entire term in office. The composition of the state apparatus consisted of officials with a general mind-set rooted in the KGB or individuals loyal to Putin's policies. Even during Medvedev's presidency, there was little reform within the cabinet, as he inherited the apparatus established by Putin.

Furthermore, Putin's low score on conceptual complexity in the neoclassical realism framework suggests that he tended to frame issues in a simplistic manner, viewing the political landscape in black-and-white terms. He relied on limited data when making decisions and displayed a reluctance to reassess policy choices. For example, Putin portrayed the Saakashvili regime in stark black-and-white terms, labelling Saakashvili as a Western/NATO agent and accusing them of killing civilians. He justified military action with a simple narrative, stating that it was not a war but a military operation for peace. Putin's lower score in conceptual complexity also helps explain his moralistic style and his nostalgia for the Soviet Union. It has been suggested that his shared historical feelings contribute to his general perspective on the Georgian intervention. Putin's Soviet nostalgia influences his foreign policy decisions, reflecting a longing for the lost unity and power of the Soviet era. However, it is important to note that relying solely on "Soviet Nostalgia" as a determining factor in foreign policy initiatives would face objections, particularly from Georgians and individuals with a Soviet past who opposed the war.Nevertheless, a unique interpretation of Putin's moralistic approach, characterized by a black-and-white framing of good and evil, the West and Russia, and a superficial judgment without considering alternative perspectives, aligns with his lower scores in conceptual complexity. This interpretation is consistent with Putin's character and ideas. His speeches about the Soviet Union highlight the losses experienced by the Russian people,

without offering room for other perspectives or alternative narratives that challenge the nostalgia for the Soviet Union. “The collapse of the Soviet empire was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20 century” “As for the Russian people, it became a genuine tragedy. Tens of millions of our fellow citizens and countrymen found themselves beyond the fringes of Russian territory” (Putin, 2005).

Putin's assessment of the relative power dynamics between Russia and Georgia reflects his average score for the need for power. On one hand, Georgia, as a state with underdevelopment and weaker military assets compared to Russia, would not have been able to challenge Russia on its own. On the other hand, the appeal of the United States as the global hegemon was evident. However, the US was already engaged in two expensive and protracted conflicts in 2008, which had depleted its military budget. Furthermore, the financial crisis experienced by the United West hindered its ability to contribute to international issues. NATO's involvement in Georgian affairs presented a problematic situation. The West, both financially and militarily, was incapable of waging another war in Russia's sphere of influence. This gave Putin the freedom to make two crucial foreign policy decisions regarding Georgia, which ultimately proved successful in his calculations. In March 2009, Obama's administration sought to reset US-Russia ties, symbolized by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton pressing a "reset" button during a meeting with Russian officials. However, a humorous incident occurred when Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov noticed that the button had the word "overload" instead of "reset" written on it. Despite the light-hearted moment, Clinton assured Lavrov that they would not let such mishaps negatively impact the relationship between the two countries.

Putin's demonstration of Russian military capacity against the actions of Saakashvili's military in the separatist regions of Georgia, without capturing the capital, showcased his power and ended hostilities after five days. It was evident that Putin had no intention of capturing Georgia. As a leader with a high level of self-confidence, such displays of power served to reinforce his self-assuredness. Putin's high self-confidence played a significant role in shaping his foreign policy decisions. He believed it was crucial for his actions to be perceived as approved by society. Putin justified his active foreign policy and the use of military force by emphasizing his belief in helping the ordinary people of Georgia. His high self-confidence also contributed to a strong sense of self, which

manifested in his perception of his own historical importance. This perception and value system are commonly observed in leaders with high self-confidence.

Putin's lower capacity to control events suggests a propensity toward a moderate political approach rooted in an internal locus of control and a strategic awareness of his influence in shaping events. This perspective implies that Putin's actions were more attuned to responding to circumstances rather than instigating them. The discourse surrounding the initiator of the conflict underscores the intricate interplay of actors' perceptions and actions within the international system. The Russian portrayal of Georgia as the aggressor and Georgia's counter-allegation of Russian provocation highlight the subjective nature of these perceptions, which significantly influenced subsequent actions. Putin's delayed response and initial non-involvement during the conflict align with the notion of a leader reacting rather than actively initiating military actions. This narrative bolsters the idea that Putin's restrained personal involvement in foreign policy decisions might have contributed to his delayed response.

During that period, Putin consistently displayed a restrained level of personal involvement in foreign policy, and his responses were not immediate. He was not inclined toward initiating a military attack. At the onset of the military confrontation, President Putin's presence at the Olympic Games in Beijing meant that President Medvedev was responsible for decision-making. This revelation was depicted in the online documentary "The Lost Day of August 8, 2008," where retired Russian generals, including former Chief of the General Staff Yuri Baluevsky and former Commander-in-Chief of the Ground Forces Vladimir Boldyrev, detailed the development and approval of a contingency plan during Putin's presidency in 2007, in anticipation of potential aggression from Georgia.

The insights provided by the documentary regarding Putin's absence during the initial conflict stages and subsequent decision-making by Medvedev shed light on the power dynamics and decision-making processes within the Russian leadership. Putin's eventual intervention in settling the conflict and the subsequent elevation of his status underscore the influential role of leadership perceptions and actions in shaping public opinion and national narratives. Initially, Putin's non-intervention was attributed to Medvedev's policy of inaction and patience, which unfortunately resulted in substantial losses on the Ossetian side. However, Putin eventually chose to depart from the Beijing Olympics to

personally engage in resolving the conflict. This decision significantly boosted his popularity and positioned him as a revered figure, almost akin to a war hero.

Medvedev's recollection of the 2011 war events reveals a significant pattern in Putin's involvement, highlighting a reactive rather than proactive approach. Admitting to contacting Putin a day after issuing orders, Medvedev portrays a sense of autonomous decision-making, showcasing the delayed interaction between leaders in critical situations. This delay signifies a tendency for Putin to intervene once circumstances have escalated, emphasizing a leadership style focused on swift action upon engagement rather than direct participation in initial decision-making. Putin's subsequent response, as recounted by Medvedev, underscores a decisive rejection of the ongoing situation, reinforcing a narrative where Putin's influence shapes actions post-facto, contributing to a hierarchical structure where his input is pivotal but often reactive to evolving events. "We contacted him a day later. I had already given all the orders. The situation was already in flames. Putin simply said that we do not accept this, and of course, he did the right thing," Medvedev said. Putin's intervention appears rooted in a reactive reassessment rather than a premeditated aggressive strategy. His actions during the 2008 Georgian invasion seemed influenced by reactive decision-making, evaluations of capabilities, and a cautious reading of the circumstances, rather than a predetermined agenda of assertive invasion. Putin's surprise, as expressed in a CNN interview while he was in Beijing during the Georgia conflict, aligns with Hermann's notion of leaders losing a sense of control when unexpected activities unfold. This unforeseen event challenged Putin's perceived control, contrary to his inclination to avoid initiating offensives.

Nevertheless, as a leader, Putin held a pivotal role in deciding Russia's response, presenting him with the critical choice between a military reaction and exploring diplomatic resolutions. This episode sheds light on the intricate nature of leadership, where unforeseen events can challenge a leader's perceived control, demanding decisive choices that significantly influence outcomes. Regarding the empirical evidence, there's growing clarity on the initiator of the war. Putin's statement suggesting anticipation of a potential military confrontation well before August 2008, stemming from President Saakashvili's refusal to compromise on Russian involvement as a regional mediator, adds depth to the understanding of the conflict's origins. For Putin, this meant the potential expansion of NATO and a challenge to Russian dominance. The prospect of NATO

expansion at the expense of Georgia and Ukraine became the main driving force for Russia. This structural factor created tension among the Russian elites and triggered the actions of the Georgian president (Simao, 2012, pp. 482-487). Russia's military intervention, which took place from August 9th to 15th, was justified by the leadership as a defensive response to Georgia's surprise attack on South Ossetia. The intervention aimed to protect Russian citizens residing in the area and was perceived as a necessary action to ensure their safety (Pisciotta, 2019, pp. 1-20).

The Georgian invasion marked a significant turning point that underscored several key aspects of Putin's leadership style. Initially, decision-making regarding the invasion rested with then-President Medvedev. However, as the crisis escalated, Putin assumed direct control over the decision-making process, opting for a more resolute approach. This shift culminated in a rapid and forceful attack on Tbilisi, showcasing Putin's assertive leadership through a swift display of military prowess. This bold action, executed under Putin's guidance, yielded success and fortified his authority, bolstering both his confidence in foreign policy judgments and the perceived effectiveness of his leadership globally. Hence, the Georgian invasion exemplified Putin's inclination for assertive decision-making, his readiness to take charge in critical circumstances, and ultimately, the reinforcement of his leadership position through astute foreign policy maneuvers.

Conclusion

Russia's war with Georgia in 2008 marked Putin's first significant foreign policy decision, even though it occurred during Medvedev's presidency. The Russian Federation aimed to assert itself as a regional superpower in the Soviet area. This conflict was notable as the first unilateral military engagement between Russia and another state since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The Georgian episode in 2008 played a crucial role in Putin's development as a decision-maker in foreign policy. His wait-and-see approach, inclination towards moderation in offensive/defensive strategies, and tendency to view problems in dual framing terms contributed to his success during the invasion of Georgia, despite Medvedev holding the presidency. Putin had prepared a plan of action for a potential conflict with Georgia during his presidency, and even while attending the Olympics in China, the regulation of the conflict required his involvement. He swiftly responded to emerging threats, deployed Russian troops to Tbilisi, relying on his own judgment rather than trusting others, and achieved success. The First Deputy Minister of

Defense and Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation alluded to Putin's assertive role in stating, "The High Command did not act until Vladimir Vladimirovich kicked him in one place," implying Medvedev's limited action.

Consequently, the successful resolution of the conflict bolstered Putin's image as a hero in the Georgian conflict and elevated his popularity to unprecedented levels. Drawing lessons from the Georgian crisis, Putin's leadership style was further shaped and would prove crucial in future crises. He calculated that the invasion of Georgia would not incur significant costs from the West. Moreover, in 2009, Hillary Clinton proposed a "reset" of US-Russia relations, and in 2012, Russia joined the WTO. The success of the military operation and the demonstration of force through the attack on Tbilisi reinforced Putin's confidence in his decision-making abilities and his ability to maintain regional dominance without interference from the West. Maintaining influence over Georgia was of utmost importance, as without their participation, Putin's active regional politics would be mere empty rhetoric exercises.

CHAPTER 4: INVASSION IN UKRAINE 2014

4.1. General Theoretical Approach to Crisis

Understanding the development of the conflict and the social and political implications that led to the Russian military actions in the Crimean crisis is crucial for analyzing the role of Vladimir Putin. This chapter examines the significant foreign policy decision to intervene in Crimea through the prism of the neoclassical realist framework. It is important to assess whether Putin's character and leadership style influenced the course and outcome of Russian foreign policy in Ukraine in 2014. The chapter begins by explaining the historical sequence of events that led to the conflict, including the Orange Revolution, the annexation of Crimea, the rise of pro-Russian military presence in Ukraine in 2014, and NATO's advancements into the Caucasus and Ukraine. Within the neoclassical realist framework, the chapter analyzes how the invasion of Ukraine in 2014 was the outcome of dynamic interactions between structural and unit-level variables, with a specific emphasis on Putin's leadership style in foreign policy decision-making. The second part of the analysis examines the results of Putin's leadership traits as unit-level explanations. This section discusses the findings derived from analyzing Putin's personality based on his direct responses to media inquiries. The chapter concludes by highlighting the significance of unit-level variables in foreign policy theories and provides a comprehensive analysis of this significant episode. This particular topic is addressed in the third part of the chapter.

4.1.1. Historical Backgrounds on the Crisis

The rapid collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 raised unforeseen questions about the fate of newly independent republics and dissolved Soviet armed forces' assets, triggering developments with far-reaching implications for regional security dynamics and foreign policies (Odom, 1998, pp. 376-387). Initial attempts to preserve the Soviet armed forces through the Commonwealth of Independent States were overridden by the insistence of former Soviet republics on developing independent military forces. This led to the distribution of nuclear forces, assets, and naval resources among post-Soviet states, with Ukraine emerging as the second-largest inheritor after Russia, becoming the world's third-largest nuclear power and gaining control over the Black Sea Fleet. The disintegration of

the Soviet Union resulted in hasty decision-making and border delineation, leading to the transfer of strategically important facilities and assets among newly independent states. This process, coupled with internal challenges and the emergence of color revolutions marked by popular protests and mass movements, influenced early changes in governments and instability in domestic politics.

In Georgia, internal divisions between pro-Russian and pro-Western factions contributed to volatility in foreign policy dynamics between Russian and Western coalitions within the country. The collapse of the Soviet Union had multifaceted consequences, impacting newly independent republics through the redistribution of resources and assets, alongside internal challenges, shaping regional security dynamics and foreign policy choices. A comprehensive understanding of these interconnected factors is crucial for grasping the broader geopolitical landscape that emerged after the Soviet Union's disintegration. In Ukraine, the 2004 presidential elections highlighted a stark divide between Viktor Yushchenko, advocating for a Western-oriented approach, and Viktor Yanukovych, favoring closer ties with Russia. This political polarization led to the Orange Revolution, marked by massive peaceful demonstrations in Kyiv. Despite Russian President Vladimir Putin's opposition to a repeat vote, Yushchenko emerged victorious in subsequent elections, exacerbating social divisions. However, the support for Yanukovych in regions like Crimea, Donetsk, and Lugansk became focal points of disputes and armed conflicts in 2014.

Yushchenko's presidency witnessed declining popularity due to economic crises and gas disputes with Russia. Moscow strategically used tactics such as increasing gas prices to pressure the pro-Western government. Tensions within Yushchenko's political elite, particularly with Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, weakened his position. Tymoshenko later adopted a more conciliatory approach towards Russia, solidifying her leadership through engagements with President Putin on gas-related issues. In the 2010 elections, her decision to run separately divided pro-Western votes, leading to Yushchenko's defeat and Yanukovych's election. Yanukovych's victory halted Yushchenko's efforts to secure Ukraine's NATO membership. In contrast to the 2004 elections, where Putin congratulated the pro-Russian-oriented candidate early, in 2010, Putin adopted a diplomatic approach, waiting for the official announcement of Viktor Yanukovych's victory. After Yanukovych's inauguration, he signed the "Kharkiv agreements," fostering

closer ties with Russia. These agreements granted Russia a 25-year lease extension for the Sevastopol naval station in Crimea in exchange for a 30% reduction in energy imports, totaling up to $40 billion.

The extension allowed the Russian Black Sea Fleet to remain in Crimea until 2042. However, issues arose over the discounted gas price for Ukraine, part of the agreement. Russia had inflated gas prices for Ukraine in 2008, leading to a contentious situation. The gas price per 1,000 cubic meters for Ukraine initially set at $179.5 had risen to $352.33 by the end of 2010. The gas price reduction was tied to Ukraine's state debt repayment to Russia. The Sevastopol naval base agreement played a crucial role in Russia-Ukraine relations, outlining terms for Russia's use of the strategic base. Russia paid rent for Sevastopol, and Ukraine could choose to receive payment in currency or apply the rental fee as a discount for Russian gas supplies.

This unique arrangement provided substantial financial benefits for Ukraine, saving over $39 billion in rent payments alone, emphasizing the complexity and impact of the leasing arrangement on both countries' economies and bilateral relations.Between 2010 and 2014, Ukrainian politics underwent significant turmoil centered around President Viktor Yanukovych. His pro-Russian stance and the abrupt withdrawal from the EU Association Agreement strained relations with the European Union, leading to widespread protests known as the Euromaidan movement. Starting in late 2013 due to Yanukovych's refusal to endorse the EU pact, the protests evolved into a broader call for democratic reforms and the removal of the Yanukovych administration. The demonstrations escalated into violent clashes with law enforcement, causing casualties and political upheaval across Ukraine.

Amidst mounting protests and instability, Yanukovych fled Ukraine in February 2014, leaving a transitional government in charge. Russia perceived this leadership change as a threat to its interests in Ukraine. Citing the protection of ethnic Russians and strategic concerns, Russia intervened militarily in Crimea, resulting in the annexation of Crimea in March 2014. This move escalated tensions between Ukraine and Russia, triggering a broader conflict in eastern Ukraine. Yanukovych's presidency marked a shift in Ukrainian politics towards closer ties with Russia, deepening societal divisions and straining relations with Western nations. Ultimately, these developments culminated in the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the subsequent conflict in eastern Ukraine.

4.2. The crisis in Cremea through the Lens of Neoclassical Realism: A Framework for Understanding Political Dynamics

4.2.1. System Level

In neoclassical realism, the structure of the international system significantly shapes foreign policy choices. Factors such as power distribution among states, existing rivalries, and overall systemic dynamics exert influence over individual actors' behaviors. The interplay between systemic influences and unit-level variables, such as leadership styles and domestic politics, contributes to decision-making processes. To understand Putin's choices during the Crimean crisis, it is crucial to delve into the systemic factors that prominently affected his decision-making.

4.2.2. Systemic Stimuli

The color revolutions, the global financial crisis of 2007-2008, and subsequent waves of change like the Arab Spring had a profound impact on the international system. These events led to systemic shifts akin to the fall of the Soviet Union. Western powers, leveraging institutions like the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), assumed roles resembling an international police force. This was notably evident in instances such as Libya, where their actions seemed to prioritize their interests, challenging the legitimacy of governments in Libya and later in Syria. This geopolitical landscape posed significant threats to the stability of these nations, as their governments were labeled as illegitimate by external forces. From the neoclassical realist viewpoint, Russia's stance shifted against the indiscriminate use of force and a reliance on UN endorsements.

This change stemmed from the perceived risk of US and NATO policies extending into territories aligned with Russia, including Iran, North Korea, and Venezuela. Such a scenario posed a significant threat to Russia's global objectives and left it isolated amid mounting systemic pressures. Putin highlighted this concern, emphasizing the need for international relations to account for global changes and power dynamics. He cited instances like the military intervention in Belgrade, conducted without the UN Security Council's sanction, as examples that called for a reassessment of global norms. Then came the turn of Iraq, Libya, and Syria. The illegal use of military power against Libya and the distortion of all the UN Security Council decisions on Libya ruined the state, created a

huge seat of international terrorism, and pushed the country towards a humanitarian catastrophe, into the vortex of a civil war, which has continued there for years." (Putin, 2022). The neoclassical realist perspective highlights systemic pressures, yet reducing Russia's actions in Ukraine solely to power restoration and China's support may oversimplify the situation. Understanding Putin's political personality is crucial to comprehending Russian foreign policy in Ukraine, as his concerns about NATO expansion, historical ties with Crimea, and Ukraine's internal turmoil after the Euromaidan movement significantly influenced Russia's decisions. While China's support strengthened Russia, grasping the intricacies of Putin's motivations is pivotal, emphasizing the need to delve into his personality for a more comprehensive understanding of Russian actions in the Ukrainian crisis.

4.2.3. Permissive Strategic Environment

In the neoclassical realist framework, the strategic environment significantly shapes governments' decisions and risk-taking tendencies. This concept applies to Putin's decision-making in Russia's foreign policy. With Putin's consolidated domestic power and a highly compliant military, he perceived significant authority and influence domestically. Analyzing the international landscape around 2014, a period marked by transition, highlighted significant shifts. The US withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 and a subsequent reduction of focus on Afghanistan by 2014, pivoting towards East Asia, created a more permissive strategic setting for the Ukraine conflict. These changes decreased direct engagement and attention from major global players, allowing regional dynamics and power struggles to evolve relatively unchecked.

In the tumultuous power dynamics of the Middle East, a power struggle among regional states provided an opening for Putin to pursue assertive measures. With powerful actors preoccupied with numerous conflicts, their ability to fully focus on any single issue diminished, granting Putin room for strategic moves with reduced risk of direct confrontation. The NATO-US intervention in Libya negatively impacted Russia, motivating Putin to seek retaliation and assert influence in Eastern Europe. In this environment, cautious maneuvering became critical in power politics. International signals appeared favorable to Putin, leading him to perceive circumstances as aligning with Russia's interests.

However, it's important to acknowledge that the international system as a whole underwent turmoil during the 2010s. Beyond Putin's personal evaluations, Russia sought to adapt to competitive dynamics and address perceived setbacks, such as the loss of influence in Libya, by pursuing alternative gains. This included the annexation of Crimea, strategically aimed at compensating for losses and asserting Russia's position on the global stage. Neoclassical realism provides insights into Putin's decision-making within the international strategic environment. The conditions in 2014, including the permissive environment in the Ukraine conflict, power struggles in the Middle East, and the perceived opportunity for retaliation in Eastern Europe, influenced Putin's actions. However, it is important to acknowledge that the international system as a whole was undergoing significant changes, and Putin interpreted these shifts as he sought to navigate and respond in order to his foreign policy vision about to protect Russia's interests and maintain its position in the face of emerging challenges.

4.2.4. Systemic Modifiers

In neoclassical realism, it is argued that a country's foreign policy breadth is influenced by its position within the international system, particularly in terms of its relative material power capacities (Rose, 1998, p. 146). In the 2000s, Russia made significant efforts to regain its power and enhance its maneuvering capabilities, particularly through the modernization program of its military. Under Putin's leadership, Russia took measures such as revitalizing grounded Soviet strategic aircraft and restarting factory activities to strengthen its armed forces. These intercontinental strategic aircraft possess the capability to carry nuclear bombs and can cover distances of up to 18,000 kilometers (Airforce Technology, 2022).

Since the 2000s, Russian aircraft have frequently encountered NATO aircraft in various incidents. These developments, combined with the substantial rise in oil prices and improving economic conditions, have enabled Russia to better withstand international pressures. These factors have contributed to Russia's capacity to assert itself on the international stage and pursue its foreign policy objectives with greater confidence. The combination of efforts to enhance military capabilities, particularly in the realm of strategic aviation, and favorable economic conditions, has allowed Russia to strengthen its position and exert influence in the international system. From a neoclassical realist

perspective, these material power factors have played a significant role in shaping Russia's foreign policy and its ability to withstand system stimuli.In the context of neoclassical realism, Putin perceives NATO's approach as a significant threat to Russia due to geographical proximity and threat perception. According to Putin, if Russia fails to respond, NATO forces could potentially launch artillery strikes on Russian cities, bypassing the need for strategic arms. Thus, the NATO threat is viewed as a matter of survival for Putin and his administration, prompting them to address it by engaging with major powers involved in the Ukraine conflict. Prior to the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Putin presented a set of conditions that were deemed unacceptable to Western actors. These conditions included preventing further NATO expansion, refraining from deploying offensive weapon systems near Russian borders, and rolling back the military capability and infrastructure of the alliance in Europe to the levels agreed upon in the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act (Putin, 2022). Geographical proximity, a key criterion analyzed by neoclassical realists in the assessment of system variables, is central to understanding the dynamics of this crisis.

Neoclassical realists also discuss the importance of controlling disputed areas, as the potential to militarily control such territories influences states' decisions to take action. However, Russia did not possess the confidence to engage in direct military confrontation. As a precautionary measure prior to the occupation of Crimea, Russia organized propaganda rallies in the region and then deployed troops disguised as unknown militias, citing the protection of the Russian minority as a pretext. This strategy allowed Russia to swiftly withdraw these forces if necessary (Mathers, 2018). By employing these covert tactics, Russia sought to maintain plausible deniability and ensure that any potential military confrontation could be managed in a manner that minimizes escalation. This approach aligns with the neoclassical realist notion of calculated action based on power considerations and risk assessments.

4.2.5. Relative Distribution of Power and Polarity

In In the neoclassical realist framework, the Arab Spring and NATO's actions in Libya disrupted the established order in the Middle East, creating an opportunity for Western powers to expand their influence. For Russia, this represented a direct threat to its influence in the region, particularly concerning its allies like Syria and Iran. The

encroachment of Western actors into the Middle East was viewed as a significant challenge to Russia's strategic interests, leading to the formation of an anti-American bloc that further eroded Russia's standing. In response, Russia aimed to counter pro-Western movements and states, seeking to assert its determination and resistance to Western influence in the region. Understanding Russia's reaction necessitates a closer examination of its strategic interests and perceptions shaped by these events.

Putin's emphasis on the correlation between economic growth and political influence underscores the evolving dynamics in global centers of power. As nations experience economic expansion, their political sway naturally strengthens, contributing to a more multipolar world. Within this context, multilateral diplomacy emerges as a pivotal tool for fostering dialogue and negotiation among nations. There is a widely held consensus that principles like openness, transparency, and predictability are crucial in international relations. The use of force is generally viewed as exceptional and should be a measure of last resort, akin to the application of the death penalty in certain state judicial systems. From this perspective, the disruptions caused by the Arab Spring and Western interventions in the Middle East disturbed the existing power balance, posing threats to Russia's allies and challenging its core interests.

Consequently, Russia sought avenues to counter pro-Western movements and states while stressing the significance of multilateral diplomacy and upholding principles of transparency and openness in global affairs. “However, today we are witnessing the opposite tendency, namely a situation in which countries that forbid the death penalty even for murderers and other dangerous criminals are airily participating in military operations that are difficult to consider legitimate. And as a matter of fact, these conflicts are killing people – hundreds and thousands of civilians!” (Putin, 2007). From a neoclassical realist perspective, Putin's actions underscore Russia's deep-seated reservations regarding the use of force and the erosion of fundamental international principles. Russia sees itself as advocating for a multipolar world order and opposes what it perceives as selective norms applied by certain Western powers. This stance emphasizes Russia's commitment to safeguarding its interests, countering Western influence, and advocating for a more principled approach to global affairs, aiming for a balanced distribution of power among nations.

While Putin consistently condemns the use of Western force, paradoxically, he employs military invasion as a tool to exert control over the region. Consequently, it becomes imperative to delve into the psychological determinants that shape Putin's preference for an offensive foreign policy. This analytical endeavor aims to uncover the intricate motivations and psychological factors driving Putin's strategic decisions on the international stage. His leadership, marked by assertiveness, a strong internal beliefs about dichotomous international stage with a focus on safeguarding perceived Russian interests, significantly shapes Russia's foreign policy stance concerning Ukraine. Additionally, the decision-making process within Putin's inner circle, characterized by centralized power and the influence of select individuals, further shapes Russia's actions in solidifying its regional dominance and responding to perceived incursions into its sphere of influence. Exploring these elements provides vital insights into Russia's strategic objectives and actions within the intricate global geopolitical landscape.

4.2.6. Clarity

Putin sees Ukraine's potential membership in NATO as a significant security threat to Russia. He argues that the choice of pathways towards ensuring security should not pose a threat to other states. In his view, Ukraine joining NATO directly threatens Russia's security (Putin, 2022). This perception is rooted in the aftermath of the color revolutions in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and other regions, where anti-Russian politicians came to power. Given this context, the fall of Ukraine would be seen as a serious threat by Russia and Putin. Putin's statements highlight his concerns regarding Ukraine's potential accession to NATO and the establishment of NATO facilities in the region. He suggests that these developments have been predetermined and are imminent. Putin expresses apprehension that such actions would drastically elevate the military threats posed to Russia, significantly multiplying the risks. Specifically, he underscores the potential for a sudden strike on Russian territory, emphasizing the proximity of many Ukrainian airfields to Russia's borders as a key factor amplifying these concerns. With NATO's tactical aviation, including precision weapon carriers, stationed in Ukraine, the potential exists for strikes deep into Russian territory along “the Volgograd-Kazan-Samara-Astrakhan line. Moreover, the deployment of reconnaissance radars on Ukrainian soil would allow NATO to closely monitor Russia's airspace up to the Urals” (Putin, 2022).

In a neoclassical realist framework, Putin's concerns about Ukraine potentially joining NATO reflect Russia's ongoing efforts to safeguard its security interests and prevent the perceived encroachment of Western military presence in what Russia considers its sphere of influence. The prospect of NATO expansion into Ukraine is seen as a direct threat to Russia's strategic depth and overall security landscape. Putin's statements underscore the risks and vulnerabilities Russia could face if Ukraine were to align itself with NATO, highlighting Ukraine's significance as a buffer zone for Russian security. This perspective showcases how geopolitical dynamics and power balances significantly shape a nation's security considerations and foreign policy choices, revealing the intricate interplay between neighboring states' actions and a country's strategic decisions. Putin's emphasis on the proximity of NATO and the potential threat to Russian cities aims to underline the gravity of the situation, painting a picture of urgency for Russia to respond to these perceived threats.

Given the perceived progress of the West and NATO, coupled with Russia's perceived inability to resist in all geographical areas, some argue that Putin's statements indicate skepticism towards the international system based on collective security and UN peacekeeping. According to this perspective, Putin believes that the end of the Cold War resulted in a world dominated by a single center of power, implying Western dominance. In this view, the dominant powers assume that they know what needs to be done and often disregard the role of the UN, which is seen as an institution that hinders their decision-making process rather than facilitating it (Macalay, 2018, p. 205). This perspective underscores criticism of the selective application of international norms and the perceived disregard for the UN's role in decision-making. Putin's stance implies that powerful states prioritize their interests and may sidestep or manipulate multilateral institutions to serve their agendas, aligning with neoclassical realist principles that emphasize national interests and power dynamics in foreign policy. However, these viewpoints present an incomplete picture without considering Putin's specific outlook on Russian foreign policy. They warrant consideration within the broader context of the Ukraine crisis and Russia's foreign policy priorities. To fully understand Russian foreign policy, it's crucial to comprehensively examine Putin's perception of the global order and how it shapes Russia's actions and goals, shedding light on the intricate dynamics guiding the country's geopolitical decisions.

4.3. Unit Level on the Crisis

In neoclassical realism, Rose argues that systemic pressures are transmitted to the unit level through intervening variables (Rose, 1998, p. 13). Over a period of five to six years, Russia's policymaking circumstances experienced significant changes due to its evolving position within the international structure. Additionally, Russia witnessed a more contentious internal environment characterized by rivalries and debates between pro-democracy groups and the government. Consequently, government institutions, particularly the president and his associates, faced a loss of legitimacy as civil society grew. This made it more challenging to mobilize societal support for Putin's foreign policy and acquire the necessary resources to project Russia's hard power across borders. Furthermore, during Putin's administration, governments gained increased potential to mobilize the nation in response to foreign threats, leading to an intensification of exaggerated propaganda regarding Western hegemony and NATO's proximity to Russia's borders (Becker et al., 2016, p. 118). Security emerges as a primary national interest for Russia, drawing significant relevance from its geography, history, culture, and the dynamics of domestic and foreign policy (Thomas, 2018, p. 34). As the successor to the Soviet Union, Putin consistently perceives security vulnerabilities as potential triggers for a new wave of collapse in Russia. Consequently, he approaches foreign policy matters through a security-oriented framework. In the context of the Crimean crisis, we can analyze four factors that have served as catalysts for Russia's foreign policy from a neoclassical realist perspective.

4.3.1. Strategic Culture of Russia

In 2008, Russia's invasion of Georgia served as a significant signal to the international community, demonstrating Russia's self-perception as a global power willing to assert its strength when necessary. After the collapse of the USSR, Russia was widely perceived as a weak nation with a disintegrated military and economy. However, Russia implemented military reforms and pursued economic development and domestic policies to regain lost power and rebuild confidence. The foundations of Russia's current foreign policy can be traced back to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of the Russian Empire. These historical roots, along with Russia's geographical location, specific

political culture, and historical institutions, suggest imperialist tendencies (Thomas, 2018, p. 60).

Sharing this perspective, Putin believes that “Russia is a country with a history spanning more than a thousand years and has consistently exercised the privilege to carry out an independent foreign policy” (Putin, 2007). Consequently, in the case of Ukraine, Russia aimed to send a clear message not only through economic and diplomatic pressures but also by annexing Crimea, emphasizing its commitment to pursuing its strategic interests. The historical integration of Ukraine into the Soviet Union underscores its importance in Russian strategic culture. Geopolitical experts from Russia assert the complexity of Ukraine's geopolitical significance, viewing Western powers' proximity to Ukraine as a substantial threat. Since the Soviet Union's dissolution, Russia has actively worked to retain influence over Kiev, aiming to prevent Ukraine from aligning with Western policies. To achieve this goal, Russia has employed various strategies, including offering attractive economic incentives such as providing Ukraine with highly discounted energy exports.

Estimates indicate that between 1992 and 2008, Russia allocated approximately $47 billion in gas export subsidies to Ukraine alone, accounting for 62 percent of the total subsidies ($75 billion) within the Commonwealth of Independent States (Huseynov, 2018, pp.192-193). However, Putin claims that, according to expert assessments and calculations of “energy prices, the subsidized loans Russia provided to Ukraine, along with economic and trade preferences, resulted in an overall benefit for the Ukrainian budget amounting to $250 billion between 1991 and 2013” (Putin, 2022). The main framework of Putin's grand strategy in the field of strategic culture involves ensuring undisputed military, political, and economic security within the sphere of Russian influence. Russian leaders have referred to this element as the "Russian Monroe Doctrine" (Skak, 2011).

Ukraine holds a significant position within Russia's strategic culture, owing to its profound impact on military, political, and economic realms. Putin's perspective underscores Ukraine's pivotal role, viewing the country's separation, along with other former Soviet nations, from the USSR as a betrayal of Russia's historical legacy. According to Putin's 2022 statement, he attributes the dissolution of the unified Soviet country to strategic errors made by Bolshevik leaders and the Communist Party's

leadership in various aspects of state-building, the economy, and ethnic policies. These missteps, as per Putin's assessment, led to the collapse of the Soviet Union, a loss deeply felt in Russia's historical narrative.

4.3.2. Leader's Perception

In neoclassical realism, the focus is on how leaders' personal perceptions influence their policies. Putin's opposition to a unipolar world reflects his belief that the international system's diversity contradicts a single dominant force. This perception guides his global actions, highlighting his preference for a multipolar setup with power shared among multiple nations. He perceives a unipolar world as one where there is a single master or sovereign, which he believes is detrimental not only to those within the system but also to the sovereign itself, leading to its self-destruction (Jankowski, 2022, p. 79). Putin's viewpoint underscores that a unipolar system reduces the importance of sovereign states, favoring a hierarchical structure where some nations serve as vassals. He contends that this perspective aligns with Russia's historical destiny and its role in global politics. Russia's historical development has been based on principles of diversity, harmony, and balance, and Putin believes that Russia brings this equilibrium to the international stage (Jankowski, 2022, p. 79).

At the Munich Security Conference in 2007, Putin said: "Unilateral and frequently illegitimate actions have not resolved any problems. Moreover, they have caused new human tragedies and created new centers of tension…I would not want anyone to suspect any aggressive intentions on our part. However, the system of international relations is just like mathematics. There are no personal dimensions. In addition, of course, we should react to this… We are seeing a greater and greater disdain for the basic principles of international law. Moreover, independent legal norms are coming increasingly closer to one state's legal system. One state and, of course, primarily the United States, has overstepped its national borders in every way. This is visible in the economic, political, cultural, and educational policies it imposes on other nations. Well, who likes this? Who is happy about this?... It results in the fact that no one feels safe. I want to emphasize this – no one feels safe! Because no one can feel that international law is like a stonewall that will protect them… I am convinced that we have reached that decisive moment when we must seriously think about the architecture of global security… I am convinced that the

only mechanism that can make decisions about using military force as a last resort is the Charter of the United Nations... And we do not need to substitute NATO or the EU for the UN. When the UN will truly unites the forces of the international community and can react to events in various countries, when we will leave behind this disdain for international law, then the situation will be able to change. Otherwise, the situation will simply result in a dead-end, and the number of serious mistakes will be multiplied" (Putin, 2007). Putin attaches immense importance to Ukraine due to his perception of it being an integral part of Russia's historical and cultural sphere of influence. From his perspective, Ukraine is not merely a neighboring country but a close ally and a younger sibling to Russia (Putin, 2021). In Putin's view, the officials who rose to power after the Maidan protests in Ukraine and the subsequent change in government in 2014 betrayed the historical ties between Russia and Ukraine by aligning themselves with the West. He accuses these Ukrainian authorities of disregarding Russia's interests, leveraging the relationship for personal gain.

Putin contends that the pro-Western stance adopted by Ukrainian oligarchs wasn't rooted in a genuine desire for the people's welfare but rather aimed to safeguard their illicitly amassed wealth stashed in Western banks. He argues that these oligarchs, in collaboration with the Ukrainian government, have favored Russia's geopolitical rivals and neglected their obligations to Russia. Putin's narrative contends that the Maidan protests, initially rooted in public discontent, were co-opted by radical nationalists seeking to overthrow the government through a coup d'état. He alleges direct foreign assistance to these nationalists, citing reports of substantial financial support from the US Embassy to sustain the Kyiv protest camp.

Putin constructs a narrative portraying mismanagement and embezzlement of the shared legacy from the Soviet era and the Russian Empire as the driving force behind these actions. He argues that Ukrainian officials squandered resources, including Russian and Soviet assets, exacerbating the division between the two nations. Putin's perspective underscores the immense importance of Ukraine to Russia and portrays Ukrainian officials as a criminal group betraying the historical alliance. He accuses them of receiving foreign support, primarily from the US, claiming their actions prioritize personal interests over Russia.

Understanding Putin's political personality is pivotal in deciphering Russia's stance toward Ukraine. Putin's narrative depicts Ukraine as crucial to Russia, alleging mismanagement of shared legacies as the reason behind strained relations. His portrayal of Ukrainian officials as betraying historical ties and prioritizing personal gains over Russia's interests reveals the depth of his perception. Yet, delving into Putin's cognitive processes is crucial, shedding light on his beliefs and emotional connections to Ukraine. This deeper insight goes beyond geopolitical factors, unveiling the intricate facets influencing Putin's views and strategies, providing a more nuanced understanding of his decisions concerning Ukraine within the international arena.

4.3.3. Domestic Institutions

Putin's reform strategy in the early 2000s initially yielded significant success. However, the manner in which these reforms were implemented turned out to be a strategic mistake that led Russia astray. This mistake arose from the fact that privileged groups, composed of former high-ranking members of the KGB, maintained their administrative positions while engaging in business activities that exploited government resources. Consequently, this fostered a system of widespread administrative and economic corruption, with these groups even engaging in internal conflicts as they sought control over Russia's most lucrative resources. Faced with such circumstances, Putin recognized that drastic changes were necessary to maintain his grip on power within this milieu. To this end, he advocated for members of the former security apparatus to adopt a more aggressive and nationalist Russian ideology propagated by Putin himself. This sentiment served to incite public support against perceived international pressure on Russia. As a result, during the 2000s, Putin was able to consolidate his dominance over domestic politics by pursuing such a policy (Reddaway, 2018, p. 105).

According to the neoclassical realism perspective, which contends that domestic actors, particularly non-governmental organizations (NGOs), should have limited influence over sensitive policies, especially those related to national security, the same can be observed in Russia. Putin has exerted control over NGOs, minimizing their impact on critical matters such as Russia's policy toward Ukraine. Two primary reasons support this approach: first, the specialized nature of security policy, which warrants limited interference, and second, the notion that intervention by one institution legitimizes

intervention by others, ultimately leading to divisions and weakness in foreign policy (Ripsman, 2009, pp. 179-181). Consequently, Putin has taken measures to control the decision-making process and suppress opposition voices. In addition to oligarchs from the private sector, several influential institutions can potentially impact Putin's foreign policy decisions. These include political party-supporting companies like United Russia, government agencies such as the Investigative Committee and the Federal Security Service, the military, and major state-owned companies like Gazprom and Rosatom, as well as large private companies such as RusAl and Lukoilthat these institutions can exert some influence on the presidency and its decisions (Kaczmarski, 2014, p. 389). However, as previously mentioned, Putin's vertical relationship with these entities has weakened their influence.

In 2003, the United Russia party's sweeping victory, securing 67 percent of the vote, reinforced Putin's belief in the necessity of a dominant party for a controlled governance system. In subsequent elections, these Kremlin objectives were achieved. It is evident that electoral laws were altered to align with Putin's preferences, and amendments were made to enhance executive control over the parliament (Stanovaya, 2013). Against this backdrop, during the occupation of Crimea in 2014, Putin requested approval from the parliament, which he effectively controlled, for military operations in Ukraine. The parliament representatives swiftly granted the requested permit (DW, 2014). With the appointment of the obedient Secretary of Defense Sergei Shoigu in 2012, who remains in office as of 2022, Putin gained complete control over the armed forces. Thus, two formidable institutions, the military and the parliament, collaborated with the government in executing Putin's foreign policy concerning Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea.

4.3.4. State-Society Relationship

Russian officials in the late 2000s were optimistic about relative economic stability because they believed they had prevented an economic collapse, and domestic reforms had stabilized the political system. However, when Prime Minister Vladimir Putin announced his intention to run for the presidency in 2011, the popularity of Putin, President Dmitry Medvedev, and their party, United Russia, plummeted, and the opposition staged large-scale demonstrations in Moscow over Putin's strategy. Since then, Putin has consistently focused on gaining high levels of popularity among the people. As

a result, ordinary citizens are largely excluded from participating in political life, and their role is primarily limited to supporting Putin.

In explaining this situation, neoclassical realists argue that when there is a conflict between the government and society, the foreign policy process becomes more complex and challenging. In such cases, government officials are compelled to pursue one of two strategies. They either expend energy fighting opposition groups and attempting to overcome domestic opposition, or they seek to establish a negotiation mechanism with the opposition to reach a compromise (Ripsman et al., 2016, pp. 71-72). During Putin's presidency after 2012, the first strategy of fighting opposition groups was adopted, and government institutions targeted the opposition, with Alexei Navalny gradually emerging as a prominent figure.

To evoke a sense of nationalism, Putin employs the term "Narod," which refers to all Russians, in his speeches and repeatedly extols the virtues of the Russian Narod (Hill, 2012, p. 69). For Putin, supporting Russian speakers, even if they are citizens of other countries, serves as a mechanism to justify his foreign policy. In this context, he justifies the Russian occupation of Crimea by portraying Russians in the region as being exposed to massacres and ethnic cleansing: "And the residents of Donetsk and Lugansk took up arms to defend their home, their language, and their lives. Have they left any other choice after the riots that swept through the cities of Ukraine, after the horror and tragedy of 2 May 2014 in Odesa where Ukrainian neo-Nazis burned people alive making a new Khatyn out of it?" (Putin, 2021). Prior to the occupation of Crimea, Putin, rejecting Western policies toward Russia and embracing a distinct Russian path, adopted a particular discourse to instill in the people, attempting to mobilize public resources and opinion in his policy toward Ukraine. Putin referred to Ukraine as "the Russians of Kyiv" and declared Ukraine and Russia to be not just brother nations but a single, united nation (Hill, 2015, p. 50).

Putin has wielded substantial influence and control over several key institutions during his extended tenure. Over his 20 years in power, he has accrued significant experience in shaping public opinion and rallying support, notably evident during the Crimean crisis. Thus, his complex role in annexing Crimea without warfare increased his popularity following the occupation. Accordingly, after the annexation of Crimea, his popularity reached 89% (Gregory, 2015). Putin viewed the annexation of Crimea as a necessity for

public mobilization and repeatedly emphasized security threats against Russia in public opinion to sustain the aggressive policy. Until the Crimean crisis, he aimed to demonstrate that the annexation of Crimea was inevitable. Therefore, the neoclassical realist argument regarding the relationship between the state and society in the Crimean crisis provides a relevant conceptual framework for examining the events.

The transition of power from Medvedev to Putin marked a pivotal moment in Putin's political trajectory, catalyzing a notable shift towards a more assertive governance style. This transformation was motivated by a desire for stability amidst perceived international threats and historical influences, shaping Putin's approach towards a more authoritative rule. The emergence and rise of opposition movements during Putin's presidency, however, acted as a significant political shock. In response, tighter controls were imposed on civil society to maintain authority and suppress dissent. Additionally, Putin's foreign policy decisions, notably the annexation of Crimea, were strategic maneuvers aimed at consolidating domestic support and projecting strength. A comprehensive understanding of Putin's political behavior necessitates a detailed examination of his traits and a thorough analysis of critical events. This approach helps elucidate the motivations and actions that have molded Putin's leadership style and political decisions. Overall, your text effectively captures the key points, and these suggestions aim to enhance clarity and flow.

General Results

Neoclassical realism offers a comprehensive framework to comprehend the nuances and complexities of Putin's policies, transcending mere realist threat assessments. Within this framework, Russia's interventionist behavior towards Ukraine can be interpreted as reflective of an irredentist and revisionist strategy. According to neoclassical realism, Russia as "As a former hegemon and now a rising power, seeks to challenge the political institutions and power structures established by Western powers when it was weak and is eager to overthrow the status quo in favour of a new global order more supportive of Russia's growing international status" (Braumoeller, 2015). Within this framework, Putin's decision to take control of Crimea in 2014 can be seen as a strategic move driven by his interpretation of relative power. As Alexander Wendt, a prominent neoclassical realist, argues, "States behave based on how they perceive their relative power position

in the international system" (Wendt, 1999). This suggests that Putin's actions were influenced by how he perceived Russia's power in relation to other actors.

The decision to annex Crimea was also influenced by a critical period between 2012 and 2013, during which Putin faced challenges to his authority and legitimacy. Factors such as dissatisfaction with a UN resolution in Libya and the growth of opposition, independent media, and protests within Russia heightened Putin's concerns about maintaining power. As Wendt emphasizes, leaders, being human, can make mistakes in their estimations of relative power and the potential outcomes of their decisions (Wendt, 1999). This suggests that Putin's assessment of power dynamics and available options might have been prone to misjudgements or miscalculations. Following the resounding victory in the 2008 war with Georgia, Putin began to acknowledge the substantial surge in his popularity triggered by military actions. This realization was further solidified by the Crimea invasion and subsequent annexation. Despite encountering international sanctions and an overall economic crisis, the Russian populace fervently embraced these military endeavours, recognizing Putin's central role in them.

The successful military campaigns not only demonstrated Russia's capabilities but also bolstered Putin's personal image as a strong leader who could safeguard national interests and restore Russian power on the global stage. The perceived successes in Georgia and Crimea played a crucial role in enhancing Putin's popularity among the Russian populace. It is worth noting that this phenomenon is not unique to Putin. As Lebow (1981) points out, leaders often derive political benefits from military victories. Such achievements can have a profound impact on a leader's reputation and public support. In the case of Putin, the triumphs in Georgia and Crimea served as milestones in his political career, solidifying his position as a strong and decisive leader in the eyes of the Russian people.

The convergence of these factors drove Putin to take actions aimed at consolidating power and asserting Russia's global position. His understanding of shifting power dynamics and the imperative to maintain domestic stability significantly influenced his decision-making process, aligning with the neoclassical realist perspective on state behavior. This framework offers valuable insights into Putin's pursuit of power and his inclination to challenge the established international order. Citations from scholars in this field further bolster the argument that Putin's actions align with neoclassical realist concepts. However, while neoclassical realism sheds light on Putin's behavior and motivations, it

might not fully elucidate why he favors interventionist approaches over diplomatic or soft power strategies. To tackle this query, a more in-depth exploration of Putin's personal traits and significant events becomes necessary. By examining his individual perceptions and characteristics, we can uncover fresh perspectives and alternative reasons behind his foreign policy choices. While neoclassical realism primarily centres on security considerations and power dynamics, it is apparent that Putin's objectives encompass dimensions beyond these facets.

To comprehensively comprehend the intricacies of his decision-making process, it is imperative to incorporate factors that transcend conventional realist interpretations. By examining pivotal junctures in Putin's personal history and dissecting his individual perspectives, we can procure insights into his overarching foreign policy goals. By incorporating individual-level analysis, we can explore how Putin's worldview was shaped and how it influenced his policy preferences. This approach goes beyond the systemic-level explanations provided by neoclassical realism, allowing us to understand the broader context that influenced Putin's decision-making. Although the distribution of power in the international system played a role in shaping Putin's perspectives, it's crucial to acknowledge the multifaceted nature of his goals and motivations. Realist concepts alone, like security or power dynamics, don't fully encapsulate Putin's actions. A comprehensive understanding demands consideration of his individual perceptions, experiences, and broader aspirations. In essence, while neoclassical realism offers valuable insights, delving deeper into Putin's individual characteristics and the impact of critical events allows a broader context for understanding his decision-making in foreign policy.

Graphic 1: Electoral Ratings of Putin before and after the Invasion in Ukraine

Source: https://www.4freerussia.org/putin.war/Putin.War-Eng.pdf**.** Poll "FOMnibus" March 14–15, 2015. Access date 22/02/2022

4.4. Individual-Level on Crisis: Vladimir Putin's Leadership Style in Crimea crisis

Table 3 compares Putin's personality scores to a reference group of 214 international politicians. This chapter aims to analyze the influence of Vladimir Putin's traits on the Crimea crisis by assessing his leadership style based on M. Hermann's framework. According to Hermann's (2003) methodology, individuals are classified as having either a high or low level for each of the seven features, based on whether their scores fall outside one standard deviation of the mean for the corresponding reference group. The reference group consists of 214 leaders from previous studies. To evaluate Vladimir Putin's leadership style during the intervention in Ukraine, his interviews from January 2012 to December 2016 were collected. Despite some scholars' concerns about the accuracy of translated material, M. Hermann deemed this approach acceptable. The data were gathered from sources such as the Nexis news database and the official website of the Russian president, Kremlin.ru. Specific search terms, including "Putin," "war in Ukraine," and "interview," were used with targeted dates and keywords. The analysis

reveals that during the Crimea crisis, Putin exhibited low conceptual complexity, high distrust of others, average belief in the ability to control events, average need for power, average task focus, low in-group bias, and average self-confidence.

Through rigorous analysis and assessment of individual traits, researchers can identify patterns, tendencies, and correlations between specific characteristics and leadership outcomes. This knowledge enables a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to effective leadership or, in this case, the role of Vladimir Putin's traits in the Crimea crisis. The logic behind analyzing individual differences at the individual level is that these differences play a crucial role in determining the outcomes. Therefore, understanding the nature of these differences is an essential explanatory factor (Dyson, 2006, pp. 289-306). By delving into these individual differences and traits, this study can develop a nuanced understanding of how they interact and contribute to leadership outcomes in the Crimea crisis. This approach allows for a comprehensive analysis that goes beyond simplistic generalizations, enabling a more accurate and insightful examination of the role played by Vladimir Putin's traits in shaping the course and outcomes of the crisis.

Distrust of Others

Putin's high level of distrust towards others has significant implications for his leadership style and decision-making processes. His distrust leads him to be suspicious of domestic policies and to anticipate potential sabotage of his plans. He maintains a wary outlook towards other actors, including individuals, groups, or countries that may compete for his position or express views contrary to his cause or ideology (Hermann, 2002). When Putin doubts the loyalty of the population, he tends to exclude them from working with him and restrict their involvement in the policy-making process. This approach often results in the dismissal and replacement of leaders, ensuring that no one can challenge his authority. Putin's high level of distrust also makes him highly sensitive to criticism and more prone to taking action when he perceives a challenge to his power (Hermann, 2002).

Compared with the context of the Georgian crisis in the Crimea crisis, Putin's score in the trait of distrust of others changed. The heightened level of distrust indicates that he became less reliant on others and grew wary of his own office, suspecting potential sabotage of his plans. This score also suggests that Putin's personality influences his implementation of foreign policy decisions, as he exhibits a lack of readiness for

cooperation and a lack of trust in the decision-making process. Putin is afraid to build long-term relationships with partners, fearing that someone may emerge to challenge his power. Furthermore, his distrust of others makes him resistant to criticism and likely dismissive of others' perspectives, out of concern that they may pose a threat to his authority. The study's analysis of leadership qualities confirms that Putin no longer maintains absolute trust in his colleagues within the political environment. Putin's high level of distrust toward others significantly impacts his leadership style, decision-making approach, and relationships with both domestic and international actors. His suspicion and wariness of others shape his actions, including his handling of criticism and his tendency to maintain a tight grip on power.

Low Conceptual Complexity

A relatively black-and-white perspective characterizes Putin’s low complexity score, indicating that his leadership style of information processing during the invasion of Ukraine tends to categorize the policy environment in absolute terms. He heavily relies on stereotypes and analogies, adopts an overtly ideological approach to policy, and frames problems without critically evaluating existing perceptions of other countries. These black-and-white tendencies were particularly evident during the Ukrainian crisis in 2014. In a study by Herman (1980) on the relationship between complexity and foreign policy outcomes, it was found that lower complexity could be associated with a more decisive and active foreign policy approach. Preston (2001), who examined how complexity influenced decision-making, discovered that individuals with lower complexity tended to exhibit a more decisive style and engaged in reduced information-seeking compared to those with higher complexity (Kowert 2002, Dyson, 2006). Drawing parallels to the case of the Georgian crisis in 2008, Putin's low complexity score is stable and suggests that in the Ukrainian crisis of 2014, he likely employed a simplistic style of information processing characterized by limited information search and a focus on binary categorizations. This approach would involve reaching conclusions with minimal consideration of domestic and international alternatives and minimal revisions to core principles. Putin's low complexity score indicates a tendency toward a black-and-white perspective in information processing, influencing his decision-making style and approach to foreign policy. This trait, demonstrated in both the Georgian crisis and the

Ukrainian crisis, suggests a preference for simplified categorizations and a reduced inclination to seek alternative viewpoints or revise core foreign policy principles.

Traits	World leaders (214)	Putin's traits before the deal (2012-2014)
DIS	0.01 Low<0.01 High> 0.01	0.1470 High
TASK	0.73 Low<0.67 High>0.79	0.7257 Average
BACE	0.34 Low<0.30 High>0.38	0.3299(low leaning average)
IGB	0.51 Low<0.44 High>0.58	0.1742 Low
SC	0.36 Low<0.27 High>0.45	0.4284 (high leaning average)
CC	0.65 Low<0.61 High>0.69	0.5908 Low
PWR	0.26 Low<0.22 High>0.30	0.2542(low leaning average)

Table 4: Putin's LTA Results in Crimean Crisis 2014 before Invasion

Source: Created by author. Reference group of 214 world leaders developed by Hermann, 2003

Traits	World leaders (214)	Putin's traits before the deal (2012-2014)	Putin's traits after the deal (2015-2016)
DIS	0.01 Low<0.01 High> 0.01	0.1470 High	0.1340 High
TASK	0.73 Low<0.63 High>0.79	0.7257(low leaning average)	0.6552(low leaning average)
BACE	0.34 Low<0.30 High>0.38	0.3299(low leaning average)	0.3372(average)
IGB	0.51 Low<0.44 High>0.58	0.1742 Low	0.1536 Low
SC	0.36 Low<0.27 High>0.45	0.4284(high leaning average)	0.4721 High
CC	0.65 Low<0.61 High>0.69	0.5908 Low	0.6063 Low
PWR	0.26 Low<0.22 High>0.30	0.2542 (low leaning average)	0.2400 (low leaning average)

Table 5: Putin's LTA Results in Crimean Crisis 2014 after Invasion

Source: Created by author. Reference group of 214-world leader by Hermann, 2003

The Average Belief in the Ability to Control Events

Putin's low average score in belief in the ability to control events places him in a middle ground within the offense-defense distribution of power (Hermann, 2002, p. 12). This cognitive style is evident in his approach during the Crimea crisis in 2014, characterized

by a wait-and-see attitude, calculated reactions, and a tendency to deflect responsibility onto others rather than taking accountability and moving forward. Leaders who possess a strong belief in their ability to control events tend to exhibit a proactive and assertive leadership style. Conversely, leaders with a low belief in controlling events often display reactive and hesitant behaviors, delegating authority and attributing blame to others. Putin's low average score in belief in the ability to control events places him in a position where he seeks to balance offense and defense dynamics in decision-making. This cognitive style influenced his actions during the Crimea crisis, where he adopted a cautious approach, responded in a calculated manner, and tended to shift responsibility onto others.

Analyzing Putin's case reveals that his relatively low average belief in the ability to control events, despite his official portrait and public proclamations about Russian potential and military strength, raises intriguing questions. Despite his outward self-confidence and assertiveness on the global stage, evidence from his internal circle suggests that he may not have genuinely believed in the image he projected. This contradiction can be interpreted as a manifestation of a carefully calculated approach to the security dilemma, where projecting strength externally serves as a protective shield, concealing potential vulnerabilities or uncertainties within his realm of influence. The security dilemma refers to the paradoxical situation where states' efforts to enhance their security can inadvertently lead to increased insecurity for themselves and others. In this context, leaders may feel compelled to project strength and power, even if their underlying belief in their ability to control events is lacking. This discrepancy between public rhetoric and private doubt can be seen as a manifestation of the security dilemma. Taliaferro describes the security dilemma as a complex characteristic of anarchy, where state actions are influenced by factors such as power distribution, military alliances, geographical proximity, the balance between offensive and defensive capabilities, international economic pressures, and the potential extraction of resources from conquered territories (Taliaferro, 2000, pp. 128-161). Leaders who rely on centralized and closed decision-making structures may be more susceptible to miscalculations and misperceptions, exacerbating the security dilemma. On the other hand, leaders who promote inclusive decision-making processes that incorporate diverse perspectives and

expertise may be better equipped to understand and address the security concerns of other states, potentially mitigating the security dilemma.

Average Self-confidence

Putin's self-confidence score experienced a notable decline following the invasion of Georgia in 2008, significantly impacting his subsequent behavior. Recognizing the necessity to adapt to the constraints posed by unfolding events, Putin became more inclined to seek information from his surrounding environment. Hermann posits that a leader's sense of self-confidence is influenced by stimuli from the environment, and a decrease in self-confidence can lead to the leader reacting differently to challenges, whether they are foreign or domestic (Hermann, 2002). The diminishing confidence in Putin manifested in a lack of determination and a tendency to shift responsibility onto others. He began sharing duties and risks, possibly in an attempt to compensate for his decreasing self-confidence. This decline in self-confidence became even more apparent during the Crimea crisis, resulting in inconsistent political behavior. To restore and enhance his self-confidence, Putin sought to delegate power to his group members, as Hermann (2002) suggested. Consequently, Putin adopted a policy of employing invasion curators, such as Surkov, and attempted to conceal his direct involvement in the offensive in Ukraine. To bolster his confidence, Putin needed another successful operation, prompting his decision to intervene in the Syrian conflict in 2015. This move aimed to restore his image as a powerful and decisive leader and regain lost confidence both domestically and internationally.

4.4.1. Vladimir Putin’s Crimea Decision 2014

Putin's seven-figure traits scheme offers valuable insights into his leadership style, shedding light on his behavior during the Ukraine crisis in 2014. This rating scheme encompasses multiple dimensions that influenced his actions during that period. The objective here is to assess whether expectations derived from Putin's personality profile align with his decision-making behavior in the context of the Crimea case. Table 3 provides a summary of Putin's anticipated conduct, considering his personality traits, accompanied by supporting evidence from his decisions related to Crimea. Specifically, his increased distrust of others, heightened task focus, low conceptual complexity,

diminished belief in his ability to control events, and reduced self-confidence played significant roles in shaping his decision-making.

Putin became more sensitive to criticism and attentive to challenges to his authority. His view of people shifted more towards considering them as tools rather than unique personalities, and he became more concerned about tasks shaping processes and outcomes in dichotomy frames. Growing challenges and criticism led to increased suspicion of others and their intentions, influencing his interactions with both domestic and international actors. This heightened distrust resulted in a more guarded and cautious approach in his decision-making. Putin's intensified task focus became a defining characteristic of his leadership style during the Crimea crisis. He prioritized achieving specific goals and objectives, emphasizing tangible outcomes and practical solutions over abstract or complex ideas. This task-oriented mindset shaped his policies and actions, ensuring a firm grip on processes and desired outcomes.

In terms of conceptual complexity, Putin continued to exhibit a preference for simplicity and straightforward approaches, favoring practical and pragmatic solutions that could yield quick, tangible results. This inclination towards simplicity influenced his decision-making, as he sought clear and manageable paths forward rather than navigating complex and nuanced scenarios. Additionally, Putin's diminished belief in his ability to control events and reduced self-confidence impacted his decision-making processes, making him more cautious and hesitant. Increasing awareness of the limitations of his control and potential risks involved in certain actions influenced his approach to foreign policy, aiming to mitigate risks and maintain stability. Overall, Putin's evolving traits and psychological characteristics shaped his decision-making style during the Ukraine crisis, emphasizing heightened distrust of others, increased task focus, low conceptual complexity, diminished belief in his ability to control events and reduced self-confidence. Understanding these factors provides valuable insights into the motivations and thought processes behind Putin's actions in governance and foreign policy.

4.4.2. Putin’s Leadership Style in Crimea Crisis

Low conceptual complexity continues to be a defining characteristic of Putin's approach to the international arena, as demonstrated during the Georgia crisis. This inclination is evident in his simplistic, binary handling of the Ukrainian crisis, revealing a limited

tolerance for ambiguity. This thinking pattern, observed previously during the Georgian crisis, involves categorizing the international environment into clear-cut divisions of "us" and "them," reflecting a categorical decision-making approach. The impact of color revolutions on Russia's domestic politics is noteworthy. Putin's binary perception led him to interpret these events as an "organized Western policy against Russia's national interests," heightening his perceived fear of a similar scenario unfolding within Russia. This perception also raised questions about Putin's consolidated power. Furthermore, Putin's binary outlook has influenced his division of elite groups in Ukraine into pro-Russian and Western-oriented factions, contributing to instability in foreign policy between Russian and Western coalitions.

Leaders with low conceptual complexity interpret the international environment through dual categorization, a trait consistent with Putin's approach. His personal connection to Ukrainian elections increased his interest in decision-making, where low conceptual complexity influenced both his perception of the international environment and decision-making processes, framing Russian foreign policy in dualistic terms. Neoclassical realists focus on Russia's interventionist behavior and desire to reshape the world order but miss explaining events through Putin's binary perception and the role of low conceptual complexity in forming a black-and-white foreign policy. A pivotal reference is Putin's 2007 Munich speech, depicting Russia as a victim in a unipolar world and expressing concerns about a perceived threat from a hostile alliance. Influenced by low conceptual complexity, Putin viewed the world in dual frames, evoking Cold War thinking. This speech signaled Russia's intent to reassess its global position, shifting from offensive to defensive foreign policy. While neoclassical realism provides insights into Russia's interventionist behavior, Putin's low conceptual complexity, contributing to a dichotomous worldview, is crucial in understanding geopolitical dynamics and strategic calculations guiding Russia's foreign policy decisions. This leadership style prioritizes military force over soft power, reflecting a confrontational approach, puzzling the choice of military confrontation over closer ties with pro-Western politicians in the case of Putin and Ukraine.

Putin's decision regarding Ukraine seems influenced by a combination of geopolitical considerations, strategic calculations, and domestic political dynamics. His low conceptual complexity, characterized by a dichotomous worldview, is crucial in shaping

his perspective on Ukraine. Viewing Ukraine's integration into Western institutions as a direct threat to Russia's influence and security interests, Putin prioritizes military confrontation to assert control and maintain a sphere of influence in the region. This simplified thinking leads to the use of military force to counter what he perceives as a challenge to Russia's strategic position and ensure Ukraine remains within its sphere of influence. Putin's dichotomous thinking and reluctance to cooperate with pro-Western leaders significantly shape the conflict dynamics. During the 2004 presidential election in Ukraine, the competition between Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovych intensified the country's division. Yushchenko aimed for Western integration and reforms, while Yanukovych sought closer ties with Russia, appealing to the Russian-speaking population. Putin's support for Yanukovych and unwillingness to engage with pro-Western leaders deepened polarization and tensions in Ukrainian society. The dichotomous worldview, coupled with the perceived threat to Russia's influence, likely influenced Putin's decision to prioritize military confrontation over cooperation and dialogue. This approach has played a significant role in shaping the trajectory of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

In a New York Times article, Putin expressed disapproval of a second round of voting in Ukraine during a Russian state television interview, questioning the need for repeated rounds. However, his prediction proved incorrect as Yushchenko won subsequent elections, deepening the societal divide along pro-Russian and pro-Western lines (New York Times, 2013). Following this, Yanukovych gained significant support in Crimea, Donetsk, and Lugansk, contributing to Ukraine's division into pro-Russian and pro-Western factions. These divisions set the stage for conflicts, particularly in these regions, which escalated in 2014 and eventually led to Russia's intervention in Ukraine in 2022. After Yanukovych's electoral defeat, Putin adopted a wait-and-see policy, successfully influencing Ukraine domestically (grani.ru.org). The events leading to Russia's 2022 intervention can be traced back to key factors post-Orange Revolution in 2004. Viktor Yushchenko's presidency faced challenges, including economic crises and gas disputes with Russia, using gas prices as leverage. Within Yushchenko's political circle, a rift between Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and a shift in her stance towards Russia occurred. Engaging in gas negotiations with Putin, Tymoshenko strengthened her position

but lost to Yanukovych in the 2010 elections, dividing pro-Western votes (Elder, 2009; Gow, 2009).

In 2010, in contrast to the confident approach taken in 2004, Putin adopted a wait-and-see policy, reflecting a decrease in his self-confidence and an acknowledgment of the possibility of an unfavorable outcome. Yanukovych's victory, facilitated by Putin's calculated strategy, led to a more pro-Russian orientation in Ukraine, effectively blocking Yushchenko's NATO ambitions. Putin's success was evident as he and Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev congratulated Yanukovych on his victory (Putin, Nazarbayev, 2010). Putin's wait-and-see policy proved successful, with Yanukovych implementing reforms and signing the "Kharkiv agreements" favoring Russia. These agreements granted a 25-year extension on Russia's lease of the Sevastopol naval station in Crimea, along with a 30% gas import discount worth up to $40 billion. This extended lease ensured Russia's strategic presence in Crimea until 2042. However, the formal gas discount became a point of contention, leading to the Kharkiv agreement's cancellation, revealing Russia's manipulation of gas prices for Ukraine. By the end of 2010, the gas price per 1,000 cubic meters had risen significantly, and Ukraine's state debt obligations were linked to the gas price reduction, creating financial challenges (Putin, Nazarbayev, 2010).

Putin's strategic success in Ukraine, particularly the annexation of Crimea, was achieved through calculated decision-making influenced by his average belief in controlling events. In contrast to the Georgia crisis, Putin adopted a more proactive approach in Crimea, securing parliamentary consent for military action in 2014. This political maneuver demonstrated strategic coordination, aligning military actions with foreign policy goals and ultimately leading to the annexation of Crimea. Putin's assertive actions, such as the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and military intervention in Ukraine, were driven by the belief that they were necessary to protect Russia's national security and preserve its sphere of influence (Elder, 2009; Haas, 2009).

Putin's consolidation of power in the Russian government facilitated greater control over the Ukraine situation. His assertive and determined leadership style, coupled with a preference for centralized governance, was evident in the Crimea crisis. However, Putin operates within certain boundaries, considering potential consequences and striving to align control with his goals. In the Crimea crisis, Putin's moderate belief in controlling

events was demonstrated by delegating Surkov as a curator to develop pro-Russian policy in Ukraine in 2014. This measured approach aimed to maintain stability and minimize risks, acknowledging the complexities of the situation. Putin's belief that the West influenced the election results posed a direct threat to Russia, leading him to actively influence domestic policies through Surkov. Leaders with a moderate belief in controlling events may opt for cautious measures, relying on capable individuals like Surkov to execute strategies and achieve desired outcomes. Putin's delegation to Surkov allowed him to retain control while leveraging Surkov's expertise to enhance Russia's influence in Ukraine.

Since 1999, V. Surkov has played a significant role in the Russian government, serving under Presidents Yeltsin, Putin, and Medvedev. His influence extends to shaping Russia's political system, including the establishment of the United Russia party and the NASHI youth movement. Despite a brief departure in 2013 due to a corruption scandal, Surkov returned as an assistant to President Putin and curator for the Presidential Office, focusing on Social and Economic Cooperation with CIS countries, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. Surkov's postmodern perspective is characterized by compromising the Ukrainian government and framing Russian aggression as a "civil war." Surkov's efforts were primarily focused on manipulating public opinion, utilizing methods and resources similar to domestic political techniques. These included the use of pseudo-experts, technical parties, fake civic organizations, youth movements such as Nashi, and covert media strategies (Hosaka, 2019, pp. 750-773). Surkov's key political strategies in Ukraine involved the use of pseudo-experts, individuals who appeared to be independent and knowledgeable but were actually aligned with the Kremlin's agenda. These pseudo-experts would disseminate information and provide analysis that supported the desired narrative, creating an illusion of credibility and manipulating public perception. Additionally, Surkov utilized technical parties, which were political entities created and controlled by the Kremlin. These parties would advocate for policies and positions that aligned with the government's interests, providing an additional layer of support for the desired narrative. Fake civic organizations were another tool in Surkov's arsenal. These organizations would present themselves as grassroots movements or civil society groups, but in reality, they were carefully orchestrated and funded by the Kremlin. They would

engage in activities that furthered the government's agenda while creating the appearance of popular support.

Surkov's influence extended to youth movements, notably Nashi, a pro-government organization that played a significant role in promoting the Kremlin's narrative and suppressing dissent among young people. Nashi organized rallies, demonstrations, and events to showcase loyalty to the government and counter opposition movements. Covert media strategies, including manipulating news coverage, creating fake news outlets, and disseminating propaganda through social media, were employed to shape public opinion in favor of the Kremlin's agenda. These tactics were not limited to domestic affairs, reflecting Putin's KGB background and influencing his perception of international processes. Putin drew on past practices of appointing individuals to oversee internal processes, such as his assignment in Germany, to protect and advance Russian interests. Putin believed that the West influenced election results, posing a direct threat to Russia, reminiscent of KGB actions during the Soviet era. Surkov actively worked to influence domestic policies in line with these beliefs.

Examining Surkov's role in the Crimean Crisis reveals his instrumental role in orchestrating Russia's hybrid warfare strategy, combining military force, information warfare, and covert tactics to significantly destabilize Ukraine's government and territorial integrity. His support for separatist movements in Donetsk and Lugansk exacerbated tensions, advocating for self-determination and perpetuating unrest. Surkov's adept propaganda machinery, disseminating disinformation and manipulating social platforms, shaped pro-Russian narratives in Ukraine, swaying public opinion in favor of Moscow's interests. Surkov's strategic vision aimed to proliferate numerous parties or political factions with similarities, intending to dismantle opposition by fostering competition. This approach sought to undermine both Navalny's opposition movements in Russia and the pro-Western orientation in Ukraine. His influence with Ukrainian oligarchs aligned political and economic decisions with Russia's agenda. Exploiting cultural divisions and identity, including language differences, Surkov strategically divided Ukrainian society. Moreover, his meddling in elections and political processes aimed to weaken pro-Western forces, sculpting a landscape conducive to Moscow's influence.When Surkov's plans for Ukraine, particularly the implementation of the "Minsk agreements," faced obstacles, it potentially contributed to his resignation. The

agreements aimed to diplomatically resolve the conflict in Ukraine and establish a ceasefire between conflicting parties. Surkov's inability to achieve significant progress in implementing these agreements may have led to his removal from the Kremlin. In 2022, post his departure, Surkov encountered legal troubles, including house arrest and subsequent transfer to a pre-trial detention center. Ultimately, Surkov chose to leave Russia and immigrate to France.

Medvedev, Putin, and Raise of Russian Opposition

Putin's self-confidence and distrust issues underwent a significant decline preceding the crisis in Ukraine, notably when compared to the period surrounding the Georgian crisis. This decline suggests that the power transition from Medvedev to Putin encountered difficulties, adversely affecting Putin's self-assurance and fostering an atmosphere of increased distrust within his cabinet. Notably, Putin assumed a passive stance at the onset of the crisis, allowing events to unfold without direct intervention. In contrast to his assertive foreign policy during the Georgian crisis, Putin chose a different approach for the Ukrainian crisis by appointing V. Surkov as its overseer. This strategic decision framed the unfolding events as a transformation of Ukraine's domestic politics, involving key pro-Russian Ukrainian figures such as Yanukovych, Medvechuk, Igor Strelkov (Girkin), Igor Bezler, and Pavel Gubarev. The presence of an intervening variable in the form of Putin's decision-making impact on foreign policy suggests a heightened sense of hesitancy and doubt in his decision-making process. This cautious approach prioritizes the avoidance of crisis escalation, opting instead to exert pressure on Ukraine through the exploitation of domestic issues. This marks a departure from Putin's previously active foreign policy stance.

Neoclassical realists argue "that innenpolitik influences leader decision-making in some cases. Innenpolitik approaches can shed light on the foreign policy choices and grand strategies of states, especially during periods of high-stakes international challenges. Only in extreme cases, when leaders are threatened with imminent de-selection in an election, revolution, or coup, do states make policy choices almost exclusively, or even mainly, for domestic political reasons" (Ripsman et al., 2016, pp. 112-174). This indeed happened before the invasion of Ukraine in 2014. Putin's increased distrust of others has two explanations. The period spanning 2011-2012 marked a crucial turning point for Vladimir Putin as he prepared to resume the presidency. However, the electoral process was marked

by intricacies, given Dmitry Medvedev's simultaneous intention to pursue the presidency. A noticeable divergence in their perspectives became evident during this period, particularly regarding Medvedev's "modernization" agenda, which clashed with Putin's overarching state-building philosophy.

Medvedev's presidency, characterized by a more liberal approach and a desire for closer ties with the West, inadvertently provided a platform for the Russian opposition to gain momentum. A significant development during this time was the establishment of the opposition channel Dozhd, often perceived as Medvedev's covert initiative. Dozhd TV actively covered opposition activities and protests, contributing significantly to the political visibility of the opposition movement. Concurrently, opposition figure Alexei Navalny rose to prominence, declaring his candidacy for the 2012 presidential election. In 2011, Navalny founded the Anti-Corruption Foundation, conducting thorough investigations into embezzlement and disseminating exposés on the illicit enrichment of government officials. Navalny's dynamic presence on social media, complemented by his video materials and blog on LiveJournal, exerted a substantial influence on Russia's political discourse. His investigations, targeting the existing elite, laid bare funding channels and instances of state budget embezzlement. This resonated profoundly with the progressive youth, who perceived Navalny as a stalwart advocate for truth and accountability, particularly through alternative communication channels on social media platforms that posed a challenge for Putin to fully comprehend.

Putin's nostalgic sentiment for the Soviet Union, centered around appealing to those who remembered its past greatness, failed to resonate with the progressive youth. Opposition figures like Navalny, Yashin, and Nemtsov took a direct approach, criticizing the ruling United Russia party and specifically targeting the well-educated liberal youth. The crucial divergence in discourse between Putin and the opposition revolved around the focus on the past or present versus the future. Navalny's concept of "Future Russia" epitomized the opposition's emphasis on forward-thinking and progressive ideas. The period from 2011 to 2012 witnessed a transformation in Russia's political landscape, where Medvedev's presidency provided the opposition with visibility and traction. Navalny's investigations and communication strategies captured the attention of progressive youth, shaping the opposition's discourse centered on a vision for the future, in stark contrast to Putin's emphasis on the past and present.

These dynamics played a pivotal role in the increasing influence of the opposition movement during this period. To strategically maintain control over domestic politics, Putin ensured that liberals in his inner circle did not gain a controlling stake, utilizing individuals like Medvedev to counterbalance the influential siloviki faction. A notable instance of Putin's control was evident in the succession process of 2008 when S. Ivanov, a prominent siloviki representative, appeared poised to become Putin's successor. Despite receiving congratulations from colleagues, signaling his anticipated rise to power, Putin surprised many by choosing a more convenient and less ambitious candidate, Medvedev. This decision safeguarded Putin's control and curtailed the influence of the siloviki within the Kremlin. Medvedev's presidency marked notable shifts in Russia's foreign policy. A significant change was the initiation of a rapprochement with NATO, as Medvedev authorized the establishment of an American military base in Ulyanovsk, facilitating NATO transit goods to the East. This decision departed from the traditional stance of the siloviki, indicating a more cooperative approach in Russia's relations with the West.

In 2011, a pivotal event highlighted the growing divergence between Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev. When confronted with a UN Security Council resolution authorizing a military operation against the regime of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, Russia unexpectedly abstained from using its veto power. This decision led to a public clash between Putin and Medvedev, with Putin openly criticizing Medvedev's choice. It is essential to note that, according to the Russian constitution, foreign policy falls within the purview of the president. Putin's public reprimand of Medvedev underscored his dominance and control over Russia's foreign policy decisions, sending a clear signal to the elites and the siloviki that he remained the ultimate authority in the Kremlin. These events coincided with broader shifts within Putin's elite circle. In the early 2000s, as the Russian Federation experienced relative stability and prosperity, a delicate balance existed between the "liberal" and "siloviki" factions within Russian institutions. However, a turning point occurred with the suppression of the protest movement in 2011-2012, known as the Bolotnaya protests, and Putin's subsequent return to the presidency. These occurrences tilted the balance in favor of the siloviki faction, aligning with Putin's preference for a more assertive and centralized governing style. Putin's strategic management of the liberal faction within his inner circle, exemplified by his selection of Medvedev over Ivanov, allowed him to maintain control over domestic politics.

Medvedev's presidential term witnessed substantial shifts in Russia's foreign policy, notably marked by a surprising alignment with NATO and unforeseen decisions concerning the UN Security Council resolution on Libya. The geopolitical dynamics between Russia and the West during Dmitry Medvedev's tenure further exemplified these shifts. Remarkably, Russia, traditionally adversarial to NATO and perceived as an implacable foe by President Putin, unexpectedly sanctioned a transit point for military equipment in Ulyanovsk. This decision prompted inquiries from independent journalists regarding perceived westward expansion and its potential impact on Eastern influence. Putin, however, downplayed these concerns, attributing them to remnants of a bipolar worldview and signaling a departure from historical adversarial relations (Putin, 2012).

Despite these changes, Putin's public criticism of Medvedev regarding the Russian UN position on Libya not only served to underscore his dominance but also strategically asserted his unparalleled authority within the Kremlin. Moreover, upon Putin's return to the presidency, he strategically reversed the decision about NATO's transit point in Russia by closing it and redirecting Russia's focus toward involvement in Syria. This evidence supports the interpretation that this calculated move aimed to remind both the Russian public and political elites that Putin's control over critical decisions, especially in foreign policy matters, remained absolute and unchallenged. This maneuver functioned as a deliberate signal, consolidating Putin's position as the ultimate decision-maker in the political landscape. This sequence of events underscores the intricate complexities and strategic recalibrations in Russia's global priorities during this period. In addition to these displays of power, Putin's government implemented measures to suppress protests and dissent, further consolidating his control. This included crackdowns on opposition movements, stricter regulations on civil liberties, and the use of state-controlled media to shape public opinion. These actions were designed to maintain stability and prevent potential challenges to Putin's rule, reinforcing the perception of his unwavering authority. Putin's return to the presidency after his stint as prime minister played a significant role in solidifying the influence of the siloviki within his inner circle, enhancing their already considerable power and influence in Russia. The heightened ascendancy of the siloviki became palpable through discernible trends in key appointments and policy formulations orchestrated by Vladimir Putin. Prominent roles within government institutions, security agencies, and state-owned corporations were

selectively bestowed upon numerous members of this influential group. The strategic placement of siloviki members ensured the efficacious implementation of Putin's articulated vision and policy objectives, concurrently fostering unwavering loyalty to his leadership.

This amalgamation of factors, encompassing Putin's public censure, the quelling of protests, and the fortification of the siloviki's influence, collectively engendered an environment wherein dissension was actively discouraged, and opposition forces found themselves marginalized. These dynamics, in concert, substantiated the prevailing perception that Putin's authority remained unassailable and that his inner circle, notably the siloviki, wielded substantial influence in shaping decision-making processes. Consequently, these orchestrated dynamics served to consolidate Putin's dominance and exertion of control over the political landscape of Russia. Notably, Putin's public rebuke of Dmitry Medvedev's actions, alongside the suppression of dissent through protest suppression and the amplification of the siloviki's influence, contributed to a further entrenchment of Putin's preeminent position as the ultimate authority within the Kremlin. This strategic alignment of internal dynamics underscores the systematic fortification of Putin's leadership, emblematic of an intricate interplay between political maneuvering, institutional appointments, and public discourse.

The Effect of Traumatic Events on Putin's Leadership Style and Foreign Policy Decisions

Tables 6 and 7 were meticulously fixed to discern pivotal moments in Vladimir Putin's career where transformative events significantly altered the stability of his enduring characteristics. This analysis revealed two distinct periods of trauma and change in Putin's trajectory: the transition from the role of Prime Minister to President, and the response to the wave of opposition protests spanning the years 2012 to 2013. These critical junctures in Putin's political journey triggered a cascade of consequential developments, notably his forceful reassertion of authority, which, in turn, catalyzed a notable shift in Russia's foreign policy posture. This shift manifested as an enhanced engagement in global affairs, most notably in the Middle East, and the annexation of Crimea.

Event	Period	Impact on Putin's Characteristics
The transition from Prime Minister to President	2012	Marked shift in leadership style and foreign policy approach
Opposition Protests	2012-2013	Precipitated a more assertive leadership style
The political appearance of Alexei Navalny	2013	Legal challenges, media control, and maintaining a balance of power to ensure the preservation of Putin's rule.

Table 6: Traumatic Events and its Impact on Putin's Personality

Source: Created by author

Transition from Prime Minister to President	More proactive foreign policy, Russia's re-entry into the Middle East, and the annexation of Crimea
Opposition Protests	Heightened political assertiveness and a recalibration of Putin's leadership style
The political appearance of Alexei Navalny	Response to International Condemnation of Navalny's Treatment as western interference in Russia's internal affairs.

Table 7: Consequential Outcomes of Traumatic Events

Source: Created by author

These changes in leadership style succinctly encapsulate the pivotal moments in Putin's career and their cascading effects on his leadership attributes and foreign policy decisions. The transition from Prime Minister to President marked a notable transformation, resulting in a more dynamic and assertive approach to international relations, symbolized by Russia's resurgence in the Middle East and the annexation of Crimea. The response to opposition protests catalyzed heightened political assertiveness, culminating in a recalibration of Putin's leadership style and a shift in the geopolitical landscape. Putin consistently displayed his openness to information in all four instances, setting a foreign policy course aimed at maintaining Russia's regional dominance since his historic Munich speech in 2007. He relentlessly pursued this goal, believing that the success of these

interventions would shape Russia's position in the region. Moreover, Putin's receptivity to context implies that he is sensitive to situational cues, emphasizing the need to examine how his traits have evolved in each case following crucial decisions to intervene.

Conclusion

The Ukrainian crisis played a pivotal role in shaping Vladimir Putin's evolution as a foreign policy decision-maker, providing insights into distinct patterns in his decision-making style. Evidently, Putin's inherent skepticism toward others, tendency to perceive issues in binary terms, and inclination for a cautious, wait-and-see approach were prominent features during the Ukrainian episode. Leveraging his background from the KGB, he strategically employed prolonged actions and relied on his judgments, influencing the trajectory of the conflict with lasting ramifications into 2022. Despite these characteristics, Putin's overarching goal remained the maintenance of a dominant position in the region, motivating him to intervene in the unfolding events in Ukraine. Drawing on his adeptness in shaping domestic institutions in Russia through a loyal cabinet, he aspired to replicate such influence in Ukraine. Unfortunately, this combination of strategies failed to yield the intended results.

Putin's lower self-confidence and apprehension about confronting the West led to a protracted resolution of the conflict. His ambiguous stance on the presence of Russian troops in Ukraine eroded control over events. Additionally, the difficulties in his return to the presidency and the heightened distrust from the Russian public served as a cautionary tale against pursuing an assertive foreign policy in Ukraine in 2022. The Ukrainian crisis illuminated the intricate nature of Putin's decision-making process. His suspicion, binary worldview, and strategic approach based on cognitive style influenced his actions, yet clashed with the imperative to maintain dominance in the face of challenges in Ukraine. This discord resulted in a protracted and uncertain resolution of the conflict, shaped by Putin's self-confidence and evolving dynamics with the West.

Putin's dichotomous interpretations of events in Ukraine led to a bifurcated perception, dividing the political process into pro-Russian and pro-Western factions. This division heightened criticism from the Russian opposition and contributed to internal divisions within Russia. Putin's consolidation of state institutions under his loyal inner circle fostered a distorted view of Russia's military capabilities. Rampant corruption and insufficient oversight within the army impeded total control over Ukrainian territory.

While the annexation of Crimea was successful, efforts to consolidate power, quell conflict, and assert authority in the annexed regions proved unsuccessful. Consequently, Putin shifted focus to intervention in Syria, viewing it as a strategic move to enhance Russia's global prestige. The calculated nature of this approach was evident in the Syrian invasion, where Putin anticipated positive outcomes such as the lifting of sanctions and the restoration of Russia's influential position in the region. However, both the Ukrainian and Syrian experiences underscored the intricacies and limitations of Russia's strategic pursuits under Putin's leadership.

CHAPTER 5: INVASSION IN SYRIA 2015

5.1. General Theoretical Approach to Crisis

5.1.1. Historical Backgrounds on the Crisis

The establishment of Syria as an independent state dates back to the 1940s, initially governed by France under the League of Nations mandate established during the Paris Peace Conference in 1918-1919 and the San Remo conference in April 1920. Following France's surrender in 1940, it became evident that maintaining full control over Syrian territory was no longer feasible. On September 27, 1941, the French military authorities officially granted Syria partial independence. In 1943, with British support, the idea of "Greater Syria" emerged, aiming to unite Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine. However, France opposed this concept. In March 1943, the Syrian constitution was reinstated, marking Syria's de facto recognition as an independent nation. The commencement of Soviet-Syrian relations is often traced to 1946 when the USSR recognized the right to independence for both Syria and Lebanon at the UN Security Council. In June 1941, British forces invaded Syria and Lebanon, defeating the Vichy armed forces with Free French assistance. This led to an "interregnum" period, during which the French mandate lost its power, providing Syria and Lebanon an opportunity to pursue independence. However, the actual administration of Syrian territory remained under the control of the British occupation forces' commander, leading to disputes with the French. To comprehend the stages of Soviet-Syrian relations, it is essential to revisit the mid-1940s when Syria gained independence in 1946 with support from the Soviet Union. This period witnessed the formation of the Middle East regional environment, influencing the development of Soviet-Syrian relations. Formal cooperation between the two countries began in the mid-1950s and continued to evolve across various fields until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. In the early 1950s, the USA and Western countries sought to form military alliances, leading to the establishment of the Baghdad Pact in 1955, including Pakistan, Turkey, and Iraq. During the Cold War, both the USSR and the USA vied for allies in the Middle East. Responding to increasing US actions, the Soviet Union initiated official government-level contact with Syria. Consequently, in July 1955, the first Syrian parliamentary delegation visited Moscow for a friendly visit, and in November of the same year, a Soviet-Syrian trade and payments agreement was signed.

The Syrian diplomatic mission in Moscow and the USSR mission in Damascus were elevated to the status of embassies.

From 1955 onward, the Soviet Union became a crucial military and political ally of Syria, offering weapons, military equipment, and training for the Syrian army based on the Soviet model. They also provided support for the construction of military infrastructure. Syria's foreign policy underwent significant developments in 1963 when the Baath Party came to power, marking a shift towards a "socialist orientation." With Soviet backing, the Baath Party assumed control, aligning Syria's political rhetoric more closely with the Soviet Union. This partnership prompted substantial economic reforms, including nationalization, agrarian reform, and political restructuring. Concurrently, Syria adopted an active anti-Israeli stance, although the 1967 war resulted in a significant defeat for Syria, isolating it in terms of foreign policy, including within the Arab world.The failure to send troops to support the Palestinians during King Hussein's campaign in Jordan brought further changes to Syria's political landscape. During this period, Hafez Assad, educated in the Soviet Union, rose to power. With Assad's ascent, Syria actively pursued a strategy to strengthen its ties with the USSR, leading to the Sovietization of the country's foreign and domestic political orientation. Under Hafez Assad's rule, Syria's relationship with the USSR deepened significantly, and the country became a key ally in the Middle East, closely aligned with Soviet Russia. It played a pivotal role in the region during the Cold War. The Soviet Union, rooted in Marxist ideology, aimed to promote secular ideas in the Middle East, and this ideological alignment was apparent in its engagement with Syria.

5.2. The crisis in Syria through the Lens of Neoclassical Realism: A Framework for Understanding Political Dynamics

5.2.1. System Level on the Crisis

Since the imposition of sanctions against Russia following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Moscow has faced limitations in its participation in international political affairs. However, Putin has maintained a strong presence in international processes and anticipated that the international community would overlook the annexation of Crimea, similar to the case of Georgia. During the UN's 70th-anniversary meeting, Putin

emphasized the need for cooperation with the Syrian government and its armed forces in the fight against terrorism. He made a statement highlighting that it is President Assad's armed forces and Kurdish militias who are genuinely combating the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations in Syria (Putin, 2014). On September 30, 2015, the Russian Federation Council authorized the launch of a military operation in Syria. Initially, Moscow expected the operation to be of a shorter duration, lasting months rather than years. Before Russia's intervention, the Syrian government forces had suffered significant territorial losses, with a large portion of the country under the control of the Islamic State. By March 2015, government troops had lost control over the city of Idlib, an important administrative center, and in April 2015, they also lost control over Jisr al-Shugur, which opened up a path to areas inhabited by Alevis, an ideological minority supporting the ruling regime. One of Putin's primary objectives in intervening militarily in Syria was to ensure the continued rule of Bashar al-Assad. With Russian aviation support and assistance from Iran, the Syrian government forces shifted from a defensive stance to an offensive one in domestic policy. A significant turning point for the government forces was their near-success in encircling Aleppo, a city partly under the control of opposition forces. The massacre with chemical weapon usage in Aleppo not only pushed back ISIS and the Free Syrian Army but also played a crucial role in shifting the momentum of the war in favor of the Syrian government.

5.2.2. Systemic Stimuli

5.2.3. Permissive Strategic Environment

The Arab Spring of 2011 marked a significant turning point in Russia's resurgence on the global political stage, prompting a reevaluation of its role in the Middle East. This transformative event led to a reshuffling of influence in the region, introducing new actors and dynamics. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia conducted a comprehensive reassessment of its Middle East policy, acknowledging the region's significance as both a regional and global player. The primary objectives of this reassessment were to establish new partnerships, support allies, and pursue foreign policy goals. The intervention in Syria in 2015 played a pivotal role in solidifying Russia's foreign policy objectives through large-scale military operations conducted beyond its borders. Actively engaging in the Middle East, particularly through military action in

Syria, became a strategic move for Russia to regain a prominent role in the global geopolitical arena. At the core of its strategy was the goal of balancing the influence of regional powers and fostering multilateral coalitions, reflecting principles of power politics and political pragmatism, each characterized by distinct features. From a neoclassical perspective, while the threats from the West may not have been as overt as those during the Crimea crisis, the dynamics of the Syrian war signaled potential risks to Russia. The country perceived its operations in Syria as indispensable for maintaining its geopolitical presence in the future. A central concern for Russia was the looming possibility of exclusion from Middle East equations and the potential for isolation post-conflict. Russian officials recognized that the gradual removal of anti-Western leaders in the region could pose a future threat to Russian interests. The intervention in Syria can be interpreted as a response to a perceived challenge from the West and a proactive measure to mitigate potential risks. This reflects Russia's strategic thinking that maintaining influence in the Middle East serves as a buffer against potential geopolitical marginalization. This neoclassical perspective emphasizes the complex interplay between global events, regional dynamics, and state strategic responses in the complex landscape of international relations. Moreover, the key question becomes understanding how and why Putin made this particular strategic calculation. It is important to study the psychological determinants prompting Putin to make foreign policy moves in a certain trajectory.

5.2.2. Systemic Modifiers

According to neoclassical realism, systemic factors wield significant influence on a state's behavior in the international arena. States often perceive the dynamics of international politics as significant threats, prompting them to react with considerable capacity. In the context of the Arab Spring and Western powers' military intervention in Libya, these actions created conditions that facilitated Russia's involvement in Syria. The Russian authorities viewed unilateral Western attacks on Middle Eastern countries as a strategic threat, leading them to adopt a counteractive stance. The presence of Russia's naval fleet in the Middle East, established through its historical relationship with Syria during the Soviet era, added gravity to Russia's response. Putin and his administration considered the prospect of the USA and NATO unilaterally shaping the international system as

unacceptable, as they aimed to reestablish Russia's strength and influence. Putin argued that NATO had altered international norms to align with Western interests, thereby normalizing interventions in the domestic political crises of other countries. By maintaining its longstanding alliance with the Syrian government, Russia sought to prevent such changes and safeguard its position within the international system. This demonstrated Russia's commitment to protecting its interests and preserving its influence in the region.

5.2.3. Relative Distribution of Power and Polarity

During the 2010s, the international system underwent significant transformations and transitions. The Arab Spring served as a symbol of this period of change, prompting leading states to take action to protect their positions. However, the system also witnessed an increase in the number of actors, including emerging powers such as China, India, Brazil, Turkey, Argentina, and Iran, who gained influence in their respective regions. Recognizing the shift towards a multipolar system, Russia began to actively seek power and assert its position. Russia's previous actions in Georgia and Ukraine demonstrated that Western powers did not respond strongly to its actions. NATO's intervention in Libya further raised concerns for Russia, signaling a potential return to a unipolar system. To safeguard its place in the regionalized international system and prevent the resurgence of a unipolar order, Russia made the calculated decision to intervene in Syria. This decision involved weighing the potential benefits and risks. The end of US dominance in the unipolar system and the integration of the Middle East into the new multipolar system had a significant impact on the behavior and predictions of the warring actors, influencing both the outbreak and progression of the war. Russia's intervention in Syria in 2015 can be interpreted as a response to the changing dynamics and power shifts in the region (Phillips, 2022, pp. 358-381). This evolution presented a challenge to the interests of traditional actors in the Middle East, particularly Turkey, ultimately resulting in a significant rift between Turkey and Russia (Sadri Alibabalu, 2022). However, the specific decision-making process of Putin regarding this intervention is not clearly outlined in the available explanations from neoclassical realism perspectives. Thus suggests that Putin's foreign policy direction in Russia's intervention in Syria remains incompletely revealed. This includes his undisclosed personal preferences for maintaining the Assad regime,

assigning blame to the West for destabilizing the region, reliance on a narrow circle of outsiders in decision-making, and an overrated strategic approach that influenced the course of Russia's military intervention in Syria.

5.2.4. Clarity

The Arab Spring in 2011 marked a significant turning point in Russia's resurgence on the global political stage. This transformative event triggered a reshuffling of influence in the region, introducing new actors and dynamics. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia underwent a comprehensive reassessment of its Middle East policy, recognizing the region's importance as a key player on both regional and global scales. The aim of this reassessment was to establish new partnerships, support allies, and pursue its foreign policy objectives. The intervention in Syria in 2015 played a pivotal role in solidifying Russia's foreign policy goals through extensive military operations conducted beyond its borders. By actively engaging in the Middle East, particularly through military action in Syria, Russia sought to regain a prominent role in the global geopolitical arena. Central to its strategy was the objective of balancing the influence of regional powers and fostering multilateral coalitions, aligning with the principles of power politics and political pragmatism, each characterized by distinct features. From a neoclassical perspective, understanding Putin's personality becomes crucial in deciphering the Syrian crisis. While the West's threats may not have been as overt as during the Crimea crisis, the dynamics of the Syrian war signaled potential risks to Russia. The nation perceived its operations in Syria as pivotal for securing its geopolitical foothold in the future. A primary concern for Russia revolved around the looming prospect of exclusion from Middle Eastern equations and potential isolation post-conflict. Russian officials foresaw that the gradual removal of anti-Western leaders in the region could pose a future threat to Russian interests. Consequently, the intervention can be viewed as a response to the perceived Western challenge and a proactive measure aimed at mitigating potential risks. Russian officials foresaw the gradual removal of anti-Western leaders in the region as a potential threat to Russian interests. This foresight underscores Putin's pragmatic approach and his determination to safeguard Russia's influence in the Middle East. The intervention, therefore, can be interpreted as a proactive response to the perceived Western challenge, aimed at mitigating potential risks and ensuring Russia's continued

relevance in the region. In essence, from a neoclassical perspective, Putin's personality, strategic thinking, and concerns about Russia's global standing provide valuable insights into the motivations behind the Syrian intervention. It highlights the intricate interplay between leader psychological determinants and state behavior in the realm of international relations.

5.3. Unit-Level on the Crisis

Neoclassical realism is an academic theory aimed at comprehending the foreign policy behavior of states by incorporating both systemic and domestic factors. According to neoclassical realists, while systemic elements such as the international balance of power and global threats influence a state's conduct, domestic factors, including the characteristics and interests of leaders, bureaucratic politics, and societal preferences, also play a pivotal role. When scrutinizing Russia's foreign policy behavior through a neoclassical realist lens, the approach involves examining the domestic factors that shape Russian decision-making. This encompasses the analysis of Vladimir Putin's role as a leader and his leadership style, the influence of various domestic factions and interest groups, the impact of societal preferences and nationalism, as well as bureaucratic dynamics within the Russian government. By considering these domestic factors, analysts can gain insights into how they interact with systemic pressures and shape Russia's foreign policy choices. This approach enables a more nuanced understanding of Russia's foreign policy decision-making process, acknowledging the intricate interplay between domestic and systemic dynamics. It recognizes that while systemic factors set the broader context, domestic factors and the agency of leaders are indispensable in determining specific policy choices and their implementation. Employing a neoclassical realist framework allows scholars to conduct rigorous analyses of Russia's foreign policy behavior, drawing on a spectrum of academic theories, empirical evidence, and case studies. This academic approach contributes to a deeper understanding of the motivations, constraints, and actions of Russia as a critical actor in the international system.

5.3.1. Strategic Culture of Russia

Russia's strategic culture is profoundly shaped by its strong emphasis on geopolitics and a proclivity for traditional geopolitical maneuvers, exemplified by its intervention in

Syria. The nation's geographical positioning has historically played a pivotal role in determining the challenges and opportunities it confronts, significantly impacting the lives and destiny of its people. Consequently, a robust geopolitical mindset has become ingrained in Russian political culture, with the pursuit of territorial expansion and the assertion of major power status consistently ranking among top concerns and priorities. This has resulted in substantial investments in military capabilities, solidifying military power and the Russian army as central pillars of the government due to the physical and ethnic geography of the country. Another influential element shaping Russia's strategic culture is its historical standing in the international system, particularly during and after the Cold War. As a perennial major power with relative weaknesses on the global stage, Russians hold the belief that asserting their role as a great power is imperative, especially during crises like the Syrian conflict. However, they are acutely aware of their vulnerabilities and limitations within the international system. Under Putin's leadership, Russian strategic culture underscores the preservation of influence in the Middle East, particularly in Syria, driven by historical commitments to authoritarian regimes, manifested through military assistance when deemed necessary. While neoclassical realism suggests that historical promises may influence Russia's behavior towards these regimes, asserting unwavering confidence in Putin's policy amid the broader context of Russian strategic culture remains a complex challenge.

5.3.2. Leader’s Perception

According to neoclassical realism, the beliefs of leaders play a crucial role in shaping a country's foreign policy. In this context, the worldview shared by Putin and those close to him reflects an anti-American stance. For instance, Putin defines Russia's objective as "to stabilize the legitimate authority of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad" (BBC, 2015). This assertion implies that, according to Putin, the Assad regime represents the legitimate government of Syria, while its opposition comprises groups backed by the United States and other Western nations. In a 2015 statement, Putin expressed, “We think it’s an enormous mistake to refuse to cooperate with the Syrian government and its armed forces who are valiantly fighting terrorism face to face.” He further emphasized, "...Ensuring peace and regional and global stability remains the key objective of the international community with the U.N. at its helm. We believe this means creating a space of equal and

indivisible security, which is not for the select few but for everyone. Yet, it is a challenge and complicated and time-consuming task, but there is simply no other alternative. However, the bloc thinking of the times of the Cold War and the desire to explore new geopolitical areas is still present among some of our colleagues" (Putin, 2015). These statements underscore Putin's perspective that the Assad regime is the legitimate government of Syria, and its opposition consists of groups supported by the United States and Western nations. Consequently, Putin asserts that the events in Syria result from interventions that defy international norms, and Russia should take action to prevent such interventions, even if it requires unilateral measures.

5.3.3. Domestic Institutions

The historical emphasis of the Russian government on constructing a robust centralized system to address threats has frequently given rise to autocratic leaders who govern based on their own perceptions, preferences, and desires. To navigate the myriad domestic and foreign challenges confronting Russia, there has been a prevailing belief that an authoritarian regime is the most effective means of managing internal and international threats. Consequently, Russian politics has traditionally centered around the individual leader, resulting in a concentration of decision-making power in their hands. However, this tradition of a potent state, initially established to address insecurities and threats, has evolved into a significant impediment to Russia's development. With power consolidated in the hands of a single individual, governmental institutions operate in alignment with the leader's intentions and aspirations. In the case of Vladimir Putin's Russia, for instance, the military, bureaucracy, parliament, and cabinet all align with Putin's objectives and visions. The absence of a viable opposition to challenge Putin's authority, particularly regarding the intervention in Syria, facilitates swift decision-making in Russian foreign policy. Neoclassical realists encounter challenges when attempting to offer a clear analysis of this situation. The intricate interplay between a robust government, its institutions, and the dominant leader makes it challenging to attribute decision-making processes solely to structural or systemic factors. The influence of individual agency and the dynamics of domestic power structures within Russia's political system add layers of complexity that require careful consideration in understanding Russian foreign policy decision-making.

5.3.4. State-Society Relationship

The nature and extent of cooperation between the state and society, along with the influence of the public on leaders in critical situations, are pivotal factors shaping the quality of foreign policy decision-making (Ripsman et al., 2016, pp. 70-71). The level of coordination between the Russian government and society has long been a subject of interest. Some argue that the Russian government still exhibits paternalistic characteristics reminiscent of the Soviet welfare system. Presently, numerous non-governmental organizations in Russia receive government funding and support, limiting their capacity to challenge government policies (Cheskin & March, 2015, p. 270). Hence, it can be posited that the Russian government assumes a paternalistic stance towards society, and influential figures like Putin do not necessarily need to consider public opinion. Consequently, Russian society lacks significant influence over the country's leaders, particularly Putin, who, conversely, employs various tactics to influence the people. Additionally, as the opposition has been suppressed, foreign policy is often enforced through coercion. Putin and his team have sought to evoke national sentiments by exaggerating foreign threats. The Syrian conflict provided an opportunity for Putin to demonstrate to Russian society that he could project strength beyond the former Soviet Union, allowing him to divert national resources toward enforcing foreign policy objectives. Due to his relative independence from society for financial resources and the pursuit of foreign and security policy goals, Putin could readily implement foreign policy decisions. The underdeveloped nature of Russia's political system enabled him to exert significant control, supported by independent financial resources derived from the country's energy reserves, without major concerns regarding the military's foreign operations. The institutionalization of an absolutist culture in domestic politics allowed him considerable leeway in critical cases, enabling him to make desired decisions in meetings with foreign officials while paying little attention to domestic politics and public opinion. It is evident that public opinion does not always align with his foreign policy actions; however, he faced minimal obstacles in the case of Syria when it came to revitalizing the perception of Russia as a superpower among the people. Nonetheless, neoclassical realism struggles to accurately assess the nature of the relationship between the government and the Russian people, making it challenging to provide a comprehensive analysis. LTA analysis could potentially bridge this gap.

General Results

The neoclassical realist framework stands as a valuable analytical tool for examining the interplay between the international system and the behavior of individual states. However, its application to Putin's interpretation of the Syrian crisis raises certain inquiries. As a leader, Putin faced a complex set of circumstances largely beyond his control, encompassing geopolitical dynamics, regional conflicts, and the actions of other global actors. Putin's personal understanding of ongoing international system processes played a significant role in shaping Russia's active foreign policy in Syria. One such process was the perceived dominance of a single actor, viewed by Putin as a potential threat to Russia's interests, prompting him to actively engage in Syria to safeguard Russia's strategic position in the region and counterbalance perceived dominance. Despite inheriting a longstanding competition with the US and the West from the Cold War period, Putin aligned with the US in Syria. This alignment can be attributed to strategic calculations, pragmatic considerations, and the pursuit of shared interests. Putin's decision to cooperate with the US reflected a pragmatic approach to managing regional conflicts and preserving stability. In the anarchy of the international system, characterized by competition and the significance of material capacities, Putin had to navigate through various threats and opportunities, carefully assessing risks and benefits associated with different courses of action. The competitive nature of the system required consideration of the actions and intentions of other states with similar ambitions or interests in the region. Putin's leadership style, marked by pragmatism, assertiveness, and a focus on realpolitik, played a pivotal role in shaping his interpretation of threats and opportunities. This chapter explores how Putin's leadership style interacts with the neoclassical realist framework, influencing his decision-making process in response to the Syrian crisis. It examines the factors shaping his interpretation of events and the outcomes resulting from his actions in Syria. The analysis underscores the complex interplay between systemic factors, individual agency, and leadership style within the neoclassical realist framework. Russia's historical tendency towards leadership-driven decision-making, combined with Putin's specific leadership style, is essential in understanding his interpretation of events in the Syrian crisis. Scrutinizing the nuances of his leadership style provides a more comprehensive understanding of Putin's decision-making process and sheds light on the motivations behind Russia's actions in Syria.

5.4. Individual-Level on Crisis Vladimir Putin's Perception and LTA

Putin's scores, as presented in Table 5, are compared to those of 214 world leaders from the reference groups, providing insights into his leadership style and personality. The analysis reveals that Putin has average scores in terms of his need for power, belief in his ability to control events, and self-confidence. However, he exhibits low levels of task focus, conceptual complexity, in-group bias, and high distrust of others, distinguishing him from the average world leader in these traits. These variations in scores can potentially impact Russian foreign policy, aligning with Hermann's explanation of personality assessment. The aim of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive account of Putin's leadership style and personality, particularly highlighting the traits that differentiate him from the average world leader in the context of the Syrian crisis. The research draws from various sources, including the NexusUni system, official speeches, interviews from the Kremlin's website (Kremlin.ru), and reputable literature. The collected material exceeds more than 120,000 words, meeting the minimum requirement proposed by Hermann for accurate analysis. One notable trait exhibited by Putin is his high level of distrust of others, which became more pronounced during Russia's interventions in Ukraine and Syria compared to his actions in Georgia. This suggests that Putin had concerns about domestic challenges, including opposition within Russia. While he successfully annexed Crimea, he faced difficulties in fully exerting control over the Donbas region. Putin's decision to intervene in Syria was influenced by his interpretation of the outcomes of the Crimea crisis. He aimed to safeguard Russia's interests while closely monitoring global developments and implementing cautious measures to limit adversaries' actions. The growing distrust of others indicates a declining trust in his colleagues within domestic and international power circles.

To safeguard his plans and prevent potential undermining, Putin preferred making independent decisions regarding Syria, relying less on the input of others. Loyalty became a crucial factor in his decision-making process, leading to frequent rotations of advisors to prevent the accumulation of significant power bases that could pose a threat to his authority. This approach, influenced by a zero-sum perspective on the world, may have contributed to his tendency to view others with suspicion, especially when their gains potentially meant losses for Russia. Putin believed that intervention in Syria would help mitigate the consequences of the Crimea intervention. Collaborating with Western

coalitions allowed Putin to regain influence in international processes. However, his high level of distrust influenced his perception of situations. The success of the Syrian crisis presented an opportunity for Putin to assert his style in Ukraine in 2022. This personal perception informed his subsequent decision-making and capacity to challenge the West directly. Putin's leadership style and personality traits, including his high level of distrust of others, played a significant role in shaping his interpretation of events and decision-making during the Syrian crisis. Furthermore, these traits influenced his approach to Ukraine in 2022 as he sought to assert his authority and advance Russia's interests. The analysis sheds light on the interplay between Putin's personality traits and his foreign policy actions, providing a deeper understanding of his leadership style and its impact on Russia's actions in regional and international affairs.

Low Conceptual Complexity

This trait pertains to an individual's ability to comprehend and interpret situations from diverse perspectives. According to Hermann, low conceptual complexity is a characteristic that might incline a leader towards endorsing an assertive foreign policy stance, as it tends to mold their worldview in a simplistic and dichotomous framework. In the context of Vladimir Putin, there is a consistent display of limited conceptual capacity. He tends to perceive situations in a binary manner, illustrating a reluctance to entertain alternative approaches and relying predominantly on categorical reasoning. This diminished conceptual complexity is also reflected in a disregard for international environmental feedback and an incapacity to identify crucial signals indicating ineffective political action. Putin's low conceptual complexity had a significant impact on his policy response in the aftermath of the Syrian crisis. He framed the situation in simplistic terms, using moralistic language that was met with discomfort by many people around the world. His approach was characterized by clarity and determination in terms of how to respond. Following the decision to intervene in Syria, Putin immediately employed black-and-white rhetoric, stating: Despite Russia's participation in a coalition in Syria, Putin consistently seized opportunities to blame the West. In his words, "....I deeply believe that some of the responsibility for what is happening in the region, particularly in Syria, lies primarily with our Western partners, above all the USA and its allies, including the main European countries" (Putin, 2015).

Putin's diminished conceptual complexity manifested in his inclination to perceive situations in binary terms and attribute blame to the West, exerting a significant impact on his policy response following the Syrian crisis. His rhetoric and utilization of moralistic language exhibited a constrained ability to contemplate alternative perspectives, ultimately shaping his approach to the conflict. Aligning with the characteristic of individuals with lower conceptual complexity, who tend to perceive the world in absolute categories, Putin asserted that the conflict was not merely a struggle between the Assad regime and the opposition but rather a confrontation between the legitimate government and extremist forces. Nevertheless, Putin participated in Syria alongside the Western coalition, yet this did not alter his dual rhetoric. It is essential to highlight that despite his verbal stance, Putin actively collaborated with the Western coalition in Syria. Putin's persistent use of dual rhetoric and black-and-white language remained in harmony with his low conceptual complexity. Even in cooperation with the Western coalition, Putin's worldview persisted in simplistic categorizations, reflecting a reluctance to entertain alternative perspectives. "I want you, your audience to finally realize that no one except for al-Assad's army is fighting against ISIS or other terrorist organizations in Syria, no one else is fighting them on Syrian territory" (Putin, 2014). Later, Putin absolutely described why Russia joined the war, stating, "Our service members in Syria, of course, are fighting terrorism and in this respect, protect the interests of the Syrian people" (Putin, 2015).

The second notable consequence of Putin's diminished conceptual complexity in shaping his policy response to the Syrian crisis was apparent in his unwavering certainty regarding his actions. Putin presented the Russian intervention as a direct counterterrorism effort in Syria, endorsing a military approach as the most suitable response. This steadfast conviction arose from his restricted capacity to entertain alternative perspectives and his tendency to perceive the situation in simplistic terms. Consequently, Putin exhibited a firm commitment to military action as the primary solution to address the crisis. "Fifty years ago, I learned one rule in the streets of Leningrad: if the fight is inevitable, be the first to strike. In addition, I assure you, the threat of terrorist strikes against Russia has not become greater or less due to our actions in Syria. It was already there and it still is, unfortunately. We were not taking any action in Syria. What caused the terrorists to strike the railway station in Volgograd? Nothing. Simply their people-hating mentality, their

attitude toward people’s lives, and the fight against Russia itself. Therefore, it is better for us to fight them there, as I already said, rather than await them here" (Putin, 2015).

Putin's low conceptual complexity exerted a significant influence on his policy response to the Syrian crisis, shaping both his approach and rhetoric. This cognitive trait restricted his ability to fully grasp the intricacies of the conflict and impeded his receptivity to alternative strategies and perspectives. Consequently, skepticism arose among the Russian domestic audience regarding the connection between terrorist attacks on Russia and the rationale for the Syrian invasion. This doubt stemmed from Putin's oversimplified explanations of the war against terrorism, which failed to offer a nuanced understanding of the situation. The audience recognized the necessity for a more comprehensive and informed approach that transcended framing the conflict solely in terms of military victory or defeat (Novalny, 2018). Despite Russia's collaboration with the Western coalition, Putin's persisting low conceptual complexity continued to shape his decision-making processes. This underscores the enduring impact of this cognitive trait on his policy responses. The absence of a more nuanced understanding of the Syrian crisis, influenced by his limited conceptual capacity, may have implications for the effectiveness and outcomes of Russia's actions in the region.

Average Belief in the Ability to Control Events

As we have seen, Putin's average belief in his ability to control events predisposes him toward a cautious and wait-and-see approach in foreign policy, often adopting a balanced stance with delineated but realistic aims. This factor played a significant role in shaping Putin's response to the Syrian crisis and his actions as part of Western coalitions. When considering the possibility of intervening in Syria, Putin approached the matter calmly and spoke in broad terms about the necessity of promoting peace in international affairs and the role Russia could play in achieving this objective. His measured approach reflected his belief in carefully evaluating the situation before committing to a specific course of action. This cautious attitude aligns with his average belief in his ability to control events, as he tends to exercise prudence and strategic calculation in his foreign policy decisions.

By adopting a balanced policy stance, Putin sought to navigate the complexities of the Syrian crisis without overextending Russia's commitments. He was mindful of the potential risks and consequences of military intervention and aimed to avoid hasty and

impulsive actions. This approach allowed him to work with Western coalitions while preserving Russia's interests and strategic position in the region. Putin's average belief in his ability to control events influenced his decision-making during the Syrian crisis, contributing to a measured and calculated approach that sought to strike a balance between pursuing Russia's interests and maintaining stability in the international arena. In it: "This depends above all on the Syrian army itself and the Syrian authorities. We cannot commit ourselves to more than is reasonable and never have done so. I said from the start that our active operations on Syrian soil would be limited in time to the Syrian army’s offensive. Our task is to stabilize the legitimate government and establish conditions that will make it possible to look for a political compromise" (Putin, 2015). Indeed, Putin had a plan for the Russian intervention in Syria, which included setting out a comprehensive analysis of the root causes of terrorism and the struggle for peace in the region. Putin stated, "After Syria's official authorities reached out to us for support, we decided to launch a Russian military operation in that nation. I will stress again: it is fully legitimate, and its only goal is to help restore peace. I am sure that the Russian service members' actions will have the necessary positive effect on the situation, helping Syria's official authorities create the conditions for subsequent actions in reaching a political settlement and stage pre-emptive strikes against terrorists that threaten our nation, Russia. Thus, we help all nations and peoples who are certainly in danger if these terrorists return home..." (Putin, 2015).

From the standpoint of Putin's personality, the significance of the Syrian invasion lies not in imperial ambitions but rather in his desire to act as a partner with the Western coalition. Putin sought to be seen as an equal partner in world affairs, believing that this would enhance Russia's ability to operate freely in the CIS region and reduce systemic pressure after the Crimean annexation. However, this expectation was met with resistance from the Western coalition, as evident in their reaction to the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. While Putin's efforts to redevelop partnerships with the West were beneficial for coalitions and saved the Assad administration from total collapse, they did not yield the desired profits for Russia in the Ukrainian issue. Although Assad remained in power, Putin did not receive carte blanche in Ukraine. Putin's quest to be a full partner with the West involved calculated expectations that ultimately could not be fulfilled. The successful Russian participation in Syria can be seen as a short-term Middle Eastern

regional operation, reflecting a pattern typical of individuals who believe they have a high level of control over events. This approach includes a wait-and-see mindset toward policy, an offensive and defensive agenda, and a miscalculation regarding Putin's position as a global player collaborating with the West. The events in Syria highlighted the complexities and limitations of trying to align with Western coalitions while pursuing Russia's interests on the global stage.

Putin's average score in believing in his ability to control events can be attributed to his desire to share foreign policy responsibility with semi-state actors. The engagement of a semi-state military company like Wagner in the Syrian crisis reflects Putin's intention to distribute responsibility for foreign policy decisions and mitigate personal risks. By utilizing such entities, Putin can distance himself and the Russian state from direct involvement in military operations, providing a level of deniability and reducing potential political repercussions. Wagner, as a private military company, is not officially part of the Russian Armed Forces, allowing Putin to maintain a level of ambiguity regarding its actions. This ambiguity can be strategically advantageous for Putin, as it provides flexibility and plausible deniability if the operations lead to controversial outcomes or international criticism. While Putin acknowledged that Wagner's leadership included members of his inner circle, he portrayed them as staff members of his cabinet, rather than explicitly granting them authority to act on behalf of the state in the military operation in Syria.

The use of the term ‘private individuals’ was a typical KGB tactic that allowed plausible deniability for any Kremlin involvement, and it went to the heart of how Putin's regime operated (Belton, 2020). This distinction allows Putin to retain control over the narrative and shift responsibility away from the Russian government if the actions of Wagner or any other semi-state entities come under scrutiny or face backlash. Additionally, involving private military companies like Wagner can offer certain advantages in military operations. They may be more flexible, adaptable, and capable of undertaking unconventional missions compared to regular armed forces. This can make them attractive assets for tasks in conflict zones, particularly in regions where direct involvement by official state forces might be more contentious or politically sensitive. However, relying on semi-state military companies also comes with risks. It can create complexities in command and control, and their actions might not always align perfectly

with the overall strategic goals of the Russian government. Moreover, their involvement may exacerbate tensions with other actors in the region or internationally, as it blurs the lines between official state actions and activities carried out by non-state actors. The use of semi-state military companies like Wagner in the Syrian crisis displays Putin's willingness to explore unconventional means to pursue foreign policy objectives while also seeking to share responsibility and limit direct exposure for the Russian state. This approach enables Putin to maintain a degree of flexibility and adaptability in foreign affairs, but it also carries potential challenges and risks. For instance, the failed military coup in Russia in the summer of 2023 led by Prigozhin highlighted how such private military entities could become a source of internal power struggles and crises between their members.

Traits	World leaders(214)	Putin's traits before the deal(2014-2015)
DIS	0.01 Low< 0.01 High> 0.01	0.1557 High
TASK	0.73 Low< 0.67 High>0.79	0.6592 Low
BACE	0.34 Low<0.30 High>0.38	0.3428 (average)
IGB	0.51 Low<0.44 High>0.58	0.1472(Low)
SC	0.36 Low<0.27 High>0.45	0.4274 High leaning average
CC	0.65 Low<0.61 High>0.69	0.5638(Low)
PWR	0.26 Low<0.22 High>0.30	0.2568 average

Table 8: Putin's LTA Results in Syrian Crisis before Invasion

Source: Created by author. Reference group of 214-world leaders developed by Hermann, 2003

Traits	World leaders(214)	Putin's traits before the deal(2014-2015)	Putin's traits after the deal(2015-2016)
DIS	0.01 Low< 0.01 High> 0.01	0.1557 High	0.1635 High
TASK	0.73 Low< 0.67 High>0.79	0.6592 Low	0.6426 Low
BACE	0.34 Low<0.30 High>0.38	0.3428 Average	0.3494 Average
IGB	0.51 Low<0.44 High>0.58	0.1472 Low	0.1868 Low
SC	0.36 Low<0.27 High>0.45	0.4274 High leaning average	0.4637 High
CC	0.65 Low<0.61 High>0.69	0.5638 Low	0.5958 Low
PWR	0.26 Low<0.22 High>0.30	0.2568 Average	0.2582 Average

Table 9: Putin's LTA Results in Syrian Crisis after Invasion

Source: Created by author. Reference group of 214-world leaders developed by Hermann, 2003

The Average Need for Power

In the period following the Syrian invasion, Putin demonstrated an average need for power, indicating a moderate leadership style between low and high scores. This moderate approach suggests that Putin tends to strike a balance between various leadership traits, adopting different roles in foreign policy decision-making. Putin's leadership style can be characterized by a mix of being Machiavellian, working behind

the scenes to ensure Russian interests prevail, and daring and charming as a dashing hero. In the context of Vladimir Putin's leadership style, the reference to a "dashing hero" implies that he is not afraid to make bold decisions and take risks in pursuing Russia's interests on the global stage. This characterization suggests that Putin, in certain situations, adopts a charismatic and assertive demeanor. He may project an image of strength and determination, showcasing a willingness to engage in decisive actions. The use of this term emphasizes a leader who is not hesitant to take the spotlight and assertively shape the direction of foreign policy. He is capable of taking offensive actions in decision-making, driven by a strong belief in the rightness of his policies. In the Syrian crisis, Putin adopted a realistic vision of Russian interests, promoting the official agenda of fighting terrorism in Syria to prevent its spread in Russia. Simultaneously, he delegated power to semi-governmental groups like Wagner, which operated in Syria.

In essence, during the Syrian crisis, Putin pursued a clear foreign policy objective of forming a coalition with other countries to address the conflict and enhance Russia's position on the international stage after the Crimea crisis. In doing so, he relied on a close circle of advisers and his loyal cabinet, highlighting a moderate level of control over the course of action while maintaining an absolute determination for success. This foreign policy decision-making style had become stable for Putin during the Georgian and Crimean conflicts and was quickly replicated in the Syrian invasion. Following the Syrian crisis and leading into the Crimean invasion, Putin continued to operate primarily through the same small inner circle dominated by key figures such as Defense Minister S. Shoigu, General Staff of the Armed Forces V. Gerasimov, Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov, and media adviser D. Peskov. Putin's moderate leadership style, combining various traits and utilizing a close circle of advisers, allowed him to navigate complex foreign policy challenges such as the Syrian crisis and the subsequent events in Crimea. By carefully balancing different approaches, Putin sought to promote Russian interests and maintain a sense of control over decision-making while being open to collaboration with other nations and coalitions.

However, Putin's average score for the need for power has shaped his leadership style, leading him to seek involvement in international coalitions. The success of handling the Syrian crisis boosted his confidence in the correctness of his foreign policy decisions. Putin adeptly maneuvered between conflicting parties, saved the Assad regime, presented

the situation as a defense of national interests, and demonstrated his ability to make decisive decisions on the ground. The Western support for Putin's Syrian policy allowed him to both advise and criticize his coalition partners. This success contributed to a resurgence of self-confidence, reminiscent of the period before the Georgia conflict in 2008 and set the stage for his actions during the Ukrainian invasion in 2022. Understanding how Putin's need for power influences his decision-making is essential for comprehending Russia's actions in the ever-changing global political landscape.

5.4.1. Vladimir Putin’s Syrian Decisions

Does the analysis of Putin as an individual add importance to the analysis of Russian foreign policy? The question of whether Vladimir Putin's actions in the Syrian crisis were unique to him as an individual or whether any person in power in Russia would have acted the same is a crucial consideration. Putin's response to the Syrian crisis was not immediate, and his decision to offer assistance came after Assad asked for help. The groundwork for intervening in Syria was laid after Russia annexed Crimea. Given the timeline and the scope of the response, it becomes essential to closely examine Putin as an individual to understand the dynamics at play. While there is a compelling argument that the war in Syria can be explained through basic realist terms, such as the need to address the threat posed by ISIS, Putin's wider agenda sets him apart. His desire not only to eliminate the specific danger of ISIS but also to position Russia as an equal partner in the international system, both during and after the Syrian crisis, reflects a distinct aspect of Putin's leadership. While there were substantive incentives from a realist perspective to join the coalition, these were not decisive. Assad's government, with similar incentives, opposed the US action against the Free Syrian Army, and the international incentives were balanced by domestic risks.

An actor-general account of the incentives for joining the coalition and the security rationale for dealing with Assad might render Putin's policy reasonable, but it could also explain many other policy stances. The key to the policy output of the Russian state lies in Putin's confidence in his ability to save the Assad regime, his unwavering view of the US presence, and his preference for exclusive processes. These aspects are rooted in Putin's personality and leadership style rather than solely in the material environment. Analyzing Putin as an individual leader adds considerable importance to understanding

Russian foreign policy, especially in the context of the Syrian crisis. While realist factors may explain some aspects of Russia's actions, Putin's unique leadership style, personality traits, and broader agenda play a significant role in shaping Russia's approach to international relations. By considering Putin as an individual actor, we gain deeper insights into the motivations and decision-making processes that influence Russian foreign policy in complex geopolitical situations.

Another compelling illustration of Putin's leadership style is his wait-and-see international stance, rooted in his confidence in controlling events. This approach mirrors Russia's strategy of balancing against the United States, evident in past instances such as Georgia and Ukraine, and now in Syria. Putin has consistently demonstrated a readiness to utilize any available means to advance Russia's foreign policy objectives (Pisciotta, 2019, p. 1-20). Examining how Putin's balanced internal locus of control influenced the decision-making process in the Syrian case reveals his belief in effectively managing the challenges at hand. His objectives included reinforcing Assad's grip on power, reinstating Russia's pre-Crimea annexation status in the international system, defeating rebel forces like ISIS, and showcasing Russia's military prowess globally.

This strategic calculus highlights distinctive elements of Putin's leadership style, encompassing ambition, the importance of upholding a favorable international image, and a focus on addressing underlying issues. Despite having an average score in belief in his ability to control events, Putin's leadership style underscores a calculated, balancing, and wait-and-see approach. However, in Syria, he also underscored his commitment to realizing his second foreign policy objective, initially outlined in a Munich speech in 2007: the transformation of the international system from unipolar to multipolar. Putin effectively displayed the importance of Russian military force in the international balance of power by sending several dozen aircraft to Syria, aiming to challenge the USA's monopoly on the global use of force. His actions sought to demonstrate that the international system should be perceived as a multipolar world, where Russia holds an equal position to the US (Moulioukova & Kanet, 2020, pp. 1-22). Putin framed the situation in Syria as a continuation of the deeply rooted imbalance in the international system, arguing that the United States skillfully utilizes unipolarity and its normative discourse to advance its agenda on the global stage.

Despite Russia's substantial achievements in Syria, Putin's low score in conceptual complexity has influenced the handling of the Syrian crisis. The approach to the Syrian issue has been marked by a moralistic inclination to simplify the world into black and white terms. Decision-making appears to be guided by a constrained information search and a general reluctance to reconsider foreign policy choices. Consequently, it seems that Putin may not have afforded sufficient attention to the intricacies of the Syrian problem. Moreover, Putin's low conceptual complexity is evident in his preference for maintaining a cabinet consisting solely of loyal members who share his views and discourse on the issue. This absence of diverse perspectives within the cabinet may have contributed to a limited understanding of the nuances and intricacies of the Syrian crisis.

Both Putin and Lavrov use dual linguistic tools to support an ontological criticism of the West. They utilize words such as "mislead," "lying," "dominate," "dictate," "unconstructive," "dangerous," "short-sighted," and "inertia" to describe Western actions (Moulioukova and Kanet, 2020, p. 14). This language reveals a tendency to oversimplify and cast the actions of the West in negative and adversarial terms, potentially impeding a more nuanced and constructive approach to international relations. Putin's low conceptual complexity, coupled with the absence of diverse perspectives in his cabinet, has impacted the management of the Syrian crisis. Furthermore, the adoption of critical language by both Putin and Lavrov in describing Western actions suggests a shared moralistic and confrontational approach to international affairs.

On an individual level, Putin did not miss the opportunity to criticize the West in his characteristic dualistic and moralistic manner. He framed the US policy in Syria in stark black-and-white terms, asserting that the USA's objective was to remove al-Assad, whereas Russia's goal was to combat terrorism and support President al-Assad's triumph over terrorism. Putin underscored the imperative of military action, positioning himself as a pivotal figure in the war against terrorism and underscoring the critical necessity of Russian intervention in Syria for the sake of Russian security. He stated, "....we know for certain that today there are at least 2,000 and maybe even more than 2,000 militants in Syria who are from Russia or other former Soviet republics, and of course, there is the threat of their return to Russia. And this is why it is better to help al-Assad do away with them there than to wait until they come back here." (Putin, 2014). Despite Russia coordinating military action against terrorism in Syria in partnership with the USA, Putin

perceived the US move more as a rival than a partner. Such a perspective is anticipated from leaders with a low score in conceptual complexity. As mentioned earlier, realist considerations of power created strong incentives for Putin to pursue a partnership with the USA. However, individual-level factors did not seem to reinforce these realpolitik imperatives. Instead, Putin tended to view international affairs predominantly in black-and-white terms, evident in his moralistic reproaches about US actions in Syria.

The issue of international terrorism and the involvement of non-state actors in Syria presented a cluster of shared concerns that Putin assessed through a dichotomous and straightforward lens. From his standpoint, the Syrian conflict allowed no room for alternative resolutions; his allegiance to Assad remained unwavering, positioning opposition to Assad as tantamount to terrorism, warranting annihilation. Within Putin's foreign policy framework, there exists a proclivity to support leaders irrespective of their domestic policies. According to Putin, offering support to leaders, regardless of their domestic politics, serves as a safeguard for his policy in Russia. Thus, maintaining leadership, as perceived by Putin, acts as an assurance of stability in the international environment. Putin emphasizes their role in fostering stability, prioritizing this consideration over an in-depth examination of their internal policies. Putin's analytical approach reflects a deliberate simplification of global dynamics, characterized by a black-and-white perspective. He tends to unequivocal judgments concerning the intrinsic value of robust leadership within the international arena. This inclination is palpable in his stance on the events unfolding in Syria, where he embraces a simplistic viewpoint, prioritizing a belief in the imperative nature of strong leadership, thereby sidestepping a nuanced consideration of the intricacies inherent to the situation.

A distinctive aspect of Putin's foreign policy is his support for strong leadership reflected by his low task focus. He negatively perceived the fact that Gaddafi was killed in Libya, and it is speculated that if it were not for President Medvedev's support for the UN resolution on Libya, Putin might have influenced the process differently. Putin expressed his sentiments about Gaddafi's death."…..Who permitted this, was there any trial? Who took on the right to execute this man, no matter who he is?" "….Is there a lack of crooked regimes in the world? What, are we going to intervene in internal conflicts everywhere? Look at Africa, what has been happening in Somalia for many years. ... Are we going to bomb everywhere and conduct missile strikes?" (Putin, 2011). This underscores how

Putin's low conceptual complexity and low task focus influence his foreign policy decisions, leading him to perceive situations in clear dichotomies and prefer developing relations with authoritarian leadership, aligning with his leadership style and personality traits. Additionally, leaders with low conceptual complexity often base their foreign policy actions not solely on rational choices regarding countries' security but rather on narrow perceptions of whom to support and whom not to support. This could explain Putin's support for Assad, expression of regret for Gaddafi, and indifference to the death of Saddam Hussein.

Putin falls in the middle concerning another trait: his average score on the need for power. Consequently, he is expected to allow his cabinet to participate in decision-making while retaining control over policy decisions and processes. This was evident during the Syrian crisis when Putin engaged not only with the coalition but also involved his loyal cabinet members, such as Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, Secretary of the Security Council Nikolai Patrushev, and Head of the Presidential Administration Sergei Ivanov, in the decision-making process. This aspect of Putin's leadership style indicates his preference for making military-political decisions collectively, distributing and balancing the decision-making process within his cabinet. This collective decision-making approach was also observed during the Georgian and Crimean crises. In the Syrian crisis, Putin's average level of self-confidence made him more sensitive to criticism, prompting him to gather information and calculate actions before making decisions. This trait further confirms that during the Syrian crisis, Putin shared the decision-making process with his loyal cabinet. Putin's belief in his ability to control events and achieve foreign policy objectives can indeed be seen in his delegation of power to semi-governmental groups like Wagner.

By leveraging semi-governmental groups like Wagner, Putin maintained flexibility in his foreign policy, adapting strategies without direct military intervention. This approach also granted him plausible deniability, enabling him to distance himself from controversial actions on the ground and avoid direct confrontations. Delegating power to such groups provided Putin with a strategic advantage on the international stage, allowing him to pursue Russia's interests discreetly. However, this strategy also raised concerns about accountability and unintended consequences, as illustrated in the summer of 2023 when

Wagner's leader attempted a failed military coup. This incident underscored the risks associated with relying on semi-governmental groups for foreign policy objectives.

Distrust of others often prompts leaders to be less reliant on external entities to prevent potential sabotage of their objectives. Hermann notes that the fear of losing may cause a leader to question others' motives (Hermann, 2022, p. 31). In Putin's case, his high score on distrust during the Syrian intervention likely stems from the high stakes involved and the critical importance he placed on Russia's future position in the international system. Following the Bolotnaya protest in 2011-2012, where extensive anti-government demonstrations occurred in Moscow, Putin's perception of threats and distrust in others significantly increased. The protest, considered the largest since the fall of the Soviet Union, saw demonstrators shouting slogans like 'Putin is a thief!' and 'The thief should sit in jail!' near the Kremlin's red walls (Belton, 2020, p. 342). The protests were seen as a direct challenge to his leadership and authority, compelling him to take active steps in various aspects of governance, including foreign policy. For Putin, maintaining power and control within the country became of utmost importance. The Bolotnaya protest had shaken his confidence in the loyalty of certain segments of society and his cabinet, as well as the potential for internal dissent. In response, he sought to consolidate his hold on power both domestically and internationally. In the realm of foreign policy, Putin believed that projecting strength and assertiveness would not only bolster his image as a strong leader domestically but also fortify Russia's position on the global stage. He viewed an active offensive foreign policy as a means to assert Russia's interests and influence internationally, simultaneously showcasing his leadership capabilities to the Russian population.

Putin's proactive foreign policy approach resulted in significant actions, such as the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and military intervention in Syria in 2015. These decisions were, in part, driven by Putin's aspiration to demonstrate Russia's military capabilities and assert its influence in crucial regions. Moreover, they portrayed Putin as a leader willing to take decisive actions to safeguard Russia's interests, thereby reinforcing his image as a strong and resolute leader. Following the Bolotnaya protest, Putin's response manifested as heightened distrust, prompting assertive actions in foreign policy aimed at projecting strength and consolidating domestic power. This assertiveness in foreign policy significantly influenced Russia's global relations while concurrently reinforcing Putin's

leadership image domestically. Conversely, Putin's notably low in-group bias score suggests a lack of strong emotional ties to specific groups, including nationalist sentiments. In Russian domestic politics, he avoids favoring any singular group, opting instead to navigate between various interest groups while maintaining a distinct identity for his own cohort. His preference lies in fostering robust personal connections with individuals rather than explicitly endorsing specific interest groups, a characteristic evident in both domestic and international political spheres.

The chapter employs a multi-method analysis, including neoclassical realism with a focus on leadership perception through LTA to explain Russian foreign policy. It provides detailed insights into Putin's leadership style. Putin's leadership style during the Syrian crisis is seen as a continuation of his personal interpretations of international processes, as observed in previous critical cases such as the Georgian and Crimean crises. However, his leadership style has evolved over time. Empirical evidence from case studies supports Putin's style in the Syrian crisis. It is evident that several events during the crisis were influenced by his personal interpretations of events and decisions regarding intervention in Syria. While he viewed the international environment through a realist lens, he still collaborated with the international coalition. Nevertheless, Putin had his vision of what he aimed to achieve from the intervention, and his confidence in this vision elevated his self-confidence score. This confidence allowed him to make significant decisions later during the events of Ukraine in 2022.

This chapter delves into the intricate role of Putin's leadership style in shaping Russia's foreign policy, with a particular emphasis on the Syrian crisis and its subsequent evolution. Leveraging empirical evidence and comprehensive case studies, it meticulously examines the multifaceted influence wielded by Putin's leadership approach on Russia's foreign policy during the intervention in the Syrian conflict. By scrutinizing empirical data and employing detailed case studies, the chapter elucidates the dynamic evolution of Putin's leadership style, emphasizing its adaptive nature and the consequential shifts in Russia's foreign policy trajectory. This comprehensive analysis aims to unravel the nuanced interplay between Putin's leadership attributes and their consequential impact on Russia's engagements in the Syrian crisis and broader global affairs.

Conclusion

This chapter delves into the influential role of Vladimir Putin's personality traits in shaping Russia's decision to intervene in Syria. Using LTA, the analysis revealed that Putin possesses an average belief in his ability to control events, low conceptual complexity, average need for power, low task focus, high distrust of others, low in-group bias, and an average level of self-confidence. These traits have significantly impacted Putin's decision-making process and foreign policy approach during the Syrian crisis and other critical events. Putin's wait-and-see policy orientation, influenced by his average belief in his ability to control and influence events, is evident in his approach to the Syrian crisis. He carefully calculated foreign policy decisions in collaboration with the Western coalition, driven by his average belief in his ability to control events and the desire to establish Russia as a significant player on the world stage. Additionally, his average need for power prompted him to delegate part of the responsibility in the Syrian war to semi-state organizations like the Wagner Group. Putin's low conceptual complexity led him to frame the situation in dual black-and-white terms, occasionally cooperating with the Western coalition while also criticizing them. His low task focus influenced his preference for aligning with authoritarian leaders to support and save the Assad regime. Furthermore, his low in-group bias demonstrated his non-nationalistic behavior and foreign policy agenda, while his average self-confidence helped him approach the situation more rationally, avoiding unnecessary actions that might challenge Western coalitions.

Putin's leadership style during the Syrian crisis combines strategic decision-making, delegation, and an emphasis on rationality. His approach is influenced by his beliefs in his ability to control events, the need to maintain Russia's power and influence, and a rational outlook on international affairs. The successful outcome of the Syrian intervention bolstered Putin's self-confidence and reaffirmed his perception of Russia's role in the international system. However, this confidence also contributed to miscalculations in his subsequent decision-making during the Ukrainian crisis in 2022. Unlike in Syria, Putin's actions in Ukraine were met with international opposition and increased concerns about Russia's brutality and aggression. The analysis of Putin's personality traits and their impact on foreign policy decisions in the Syrian crisis provides valuable insights into understanding Russia's actions on the global stage. His leadership

style, characterized by specific traits, has been a key determinant in shaping Russia's responses to complex international situations. However, it also demonstrates that personality traits alone may not fully explain foreign policy behavior, as outcomes are also influenced by external factors and geopolitical dynamics. Understanding Putin's personality and its influence on foreign policy decisions is crucial for comprehending Russia's actions in the international arena. By considering individual-level factors and leadership style, analysts can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in shaping a nation's foreign policy and its responses to global challenges.

CHAPTER 6: INVASION IN UKRAINE 2022

6.1. General Theoretical Approach to Crisis

6.1.1. Historical Backgrounds on the Crisis

On February 21, 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin addressed the nation from the Kremlin, announcing and explaining the military intervention in Ukraine that occurred in 2022. He commenced his speech by underscoring historical mistakes made by the Soviet leadership. Similarly, on March 18, 2014, during the official signing of documents uniting Crimea with the Russian Federation, he also addressed the nation, criticizing Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev for transferring Crimea to Ukraine in 1954. In 2022, he altered his rhetoric and accused Lenin of making historical mistakes by conferring national republic status to Soviet states in 1917. Lenin's ideas of a confederative state arrangement and the right of nations to self-determination, including secession, were foundational to Soviet statehood. These concepts were confirmed in the Declaration on the Formation of the USSR in 1922 and enshrined in the 1924 Soviet Constitution, which granted administrative units the status and form of national state entities.

Putin questioned the necessity of granting the republics the right to secede without conditions, considering it a generous gift that allowed for potential secession. According to Putin, Soviet Ukraine resulted from Bolshevik policy and can be referred to as "Vladimir Lenin's Ukraine." This claim finds support in archival documents, including Lenin's instructions regarding Donbas, which were incorporated into Ukraine (Putin, 2022). Additionally, Stalin played a role in territorial changes in the region. Before World War II, he allocated territory from Poland, Romania, and Hungary to Ukraine. Later, in 1954, Khrushchev's decision returned Crimea to Ukraine, further shaping the territory of modern Ukraine (Putin, 2015, p.12). Both before and after the Great Patriotic War, Stalin incorporated the USSR and transferred to Ukraine some lands that previously belonged to Poland, Romania, and Hungary. In the process, he gave Poland part of what was traditionally German land as compensation. In 1954, Khrushchev took Crimea away from Russia and gave it to Ukraine. Effectively, this is how the territory of modern Ukraine was formed (Putin, 2015, p.12).

Putin's decision-making in international relations is undeniably influenced by a set of personal beliefs and perceptions. He has consistently laid blame on Western countries and

NATO, accusing them of having intentions to seize Ukraine and Crimea, thereby weakening Russia. However, despite these allegations, since the conflict in 2014, there have been no tangible actions towards Ukraine joining NATO. This lack of action can be attributed to NATO's rigorous selection criteria, which prioritize the enhancement of security within the alliance. The evaluation of candidates' military, political, and economic assets is conducted with a keen eye on their potential impact on alliance capabilities and overall security in relation to Russia. NATO carefully weighs the potential risks of conflict with Russia or internal destabilization before admitting new members, as highlighted by Wolff (2015, p. 12).

Putin's inclination towards an assertive and revisionist foreign policy became evident with the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. He framed these actions as rectifying what he perceived as "outrageous historical injustice." The conviction to protect the survival of the Russian state was further solidified during the coronavirus pandemic. Putin, driven by a strong belief in safeguarding Russia's unique culture, history, and land, remained particularly sensitive to perceived threats from the West. Putin's worldview is deeply rooted in the idea of preserving Russia's status and power in the international arena, which he believes has historically been undervalued by Western powers. His perspective prioritizes strong authoritarian leadership as a means to protect Russia's interests, including those related to Ukraine, and to maintain its distinct identity on the global stage. This narrative forms a significant backdrop to his decision-making in international affairs.

Putin's motivations and decision-making regarding Ukraine encompass a multifaceted range of factors, from systemic influences to personal traits. It is evident that Putin's actions were shaped by a complex interplay of historical context, geopolitical considerations, and his individual beliefs and leadership style. The perception of historical injustices, particularly Russia's perceived undervaluation by the West and Putin's commitment to preserving Russia's identity and power, played a pivotal role in shaping his decisions. This historical lens, combined with systemic factors like NATO's enlargement and Russia's security concerns, likely fueled his decision-making process. His personality traits, such as a strong sense of national identity, a desire for assertiveness on the global stage, and a perception of Ukraine as part of Russia's sphere of influence, undoubtedly influenced his approach.

Furthermore, Putin's leadership style, characterized by authoritarian tendencies and centralized control, enabled him to act decisively without substantial internal opposition. His suspicion of the West and belief in NATO's intentions as a threat to Russia's interests fed into his decisions. Viewing the conflict as an opportunity to project strength domestically and internationally likely intertwined with his strategic considerations. While the international environment, especially perceived Western threats, amplified his concerns, his leadership style and personality traits seemingly guided the planning and execution of the intervention. It is plausible that his decision-making process involved a blend of careful consideration of risks and consequences, intertwined with deeply ingrained personal motivations and convictions. The complexity of Putin's intervention in Ukraine in 2022 lies in how these factors interacted and influenced each other, making it challenging to attribute actions solely to one aspect over another. The intervention stemmed from a nuanced interplay between historical grievances, systemic factors, individual personality traits, and geopolitical considerations, converging to shape Putin's approach and decisions in the conflict.

6.2. The crisis in Ukraine 2022 through the Lens of Neoclassical Realism: A Framework for Understanding Political Dynamics

6.2.1. System Level

According to previously discussed concerning Russia's policy towards Crimea, neoclassical realists emphasize the paramount importance of the international system as a primary determinant of countries' foreign policy decisions. While acknowledging the influence of individual leaders' attributes and beliefs, neoclassical realists prioritize systemic factors that shape a country's conduct in the global arena. In the context of Russia's actions towards Crimea, systemic factors, specifically the perceived threat to Russian interests, significantly shaped the nation's decision-making process. This influence persisted and extended into the invasion in Ukraine in 2022.

6.2.2. Systemic Stimuli

Post-2015 systemic shifts have compelled Russia to adopt a more assertive stance, positioning itself with a heightened sense of power. The persistent and provocative continuation of the civil war in Ukraine, despite multiple ceasefires, led Russia to perceive

a threat to its vital interests. This perception prompted Russia to contemplate a shift in the global order. The passivity of the West following the annexation of Crimea and its partial successes in Middle Eastern conflicts were interpreted by Russia as indications of its potential role as an architect of a new international order. These circumstances led Russia to consider a transformative role within the international system. In a joint Sino-Russian statement released before the Olympic Games in February 2022, leaders emphasized concerns about a minority of global actors advocating unilateral approaches to international issues and resorting to the use of force. They pointed out that such actors interfere in the internal affairs of other states, violating their legitimate rights and interests. According to the leaders, these actions incite contradictions, differences, and confrontation, hindering the development and progress of humanity despite opposition from the international community (Putin, 2022). The statement urged all states to uphold the sovereignty, security, and development interests of nations and to safeguard the international architecture driven by the United Nations and the world order based on international law. The leaders emphasized the importance of working towards genuine multipolarity, with the United Nations and its Security Council playing central and coordinating roles, aiming to foster more democratic international relations and ensure peace, stability, and sustainable development worldwide.

Similar to Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the global environment leading up to the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, remained on an anti-Russian trajectory. Russian leaders, particularly Putin, perceived this as an aggressive stance directed against their country, prompting the development of counteractive plans. The substantial backing provided by the U.S. and NATO to the Ukrainian military after the annexation of Crimea further solidified Russia's perception of an encroaching anti-Russian sentiment. Putin explicitly highlighted this sentiment in his address announcing Russia's large-scale attack on Ukraine: “This array includes promises not to expand NATO eastwards even by an inch. To reiterate: they have deceived us, or, to put it simply, they have played us. Sure, one often hears that politics is a dirty business. It could be, but it shouldn’t be as dirty as it is now, not to such an extent. This type of behavior is contrary not only to the principles of international relations but also and above all to the generally accepted norms of morality and ethics. Where are justice and truth here? Just lies and hypocrisy all around” (Putin, 2022).

Neoclassical realist perspectives propose that these triggers propelled Russia into a crisis with potential repercussions for the international system. The change in power dynamics in Eastern Europe, originating from the Ukrainian crisis, was perceived by Russia as an irrevocable reality that it could not endorse, thereby escalating the crisis. The systemic explanation provided by neoclassical realism demonstrates its adequacy in understanding this attack by encompassing both systemic factors and Putin's personal perspective on Ukraine. It emphasizes the importance of systemic elements while also acknowledging the role of individual leaders in shaping a country's foreign policy decisions. In his pre-war statement, Putin clearly emphasized the significance of Ukraine to Russia, stating, "I would like to emphasize again that Ukraine is not just a neighboring country for us. It is an inalienable part of our history, culture, and spiritual space" (Putin, 2022). This mindset, based on Putin's personal interpretation of the international system and his deep connection to Ukraine, motivated him to intervene in Ukraine in 2022. The detailed examination of this mindset and its impact on his decision-making is further explored in the following chapter.

6.2.3. Systemic Modifiers

Comparable to the Crimean crisis, systemic influences played a pivotal role in shaping Russia's conduct in 2022. The international community's passivity during the annexation of Crimea effectively signaled approval to Russia, encouraging the nation to adopt a more dynamic policy under this implicit endorsement. Structurally, the global landscape communicated a message to Russia amid the disruptions of the Covid-19 era: a perceived weakening of the West within the multipolar system. Consequently, Russia sought to solidify its position in this evolving framework. Russia's relatively stable economic situation, despite minor embargoes, contributed to positive indicators in Putin's strategic calculations. This led Putin to anticipate that the Russian economy could withstand a medium-scale war, influencing his decision-making. From a neoclassical perspective, factors such as economic power, military technology, geographical proximity, and control of certain areas heavily influence actors' behaviors. These factors are crucial in explaining Russia's policy. Drawing from the annexation of Crimea, Russia believed its military strength was sufficient to conquer Ukraine entirely, expecting a cost-effective resolution to the conflict. Moreover, Russia's perceived success in the Syrian war boosted its

confidence in potential military success in this context. However, while neoclassical realism offers insights based on these estimations, it's important to acknowledge their limitations — they are estimations, not precise metrics. Furthermore, Putin's personal perceptions of the crisis and his individual traits likely played a significant role in strategizing the invasion. A closer examination of his characteristics might reveal potential miscalculations and complexities that go beyond the measurable factors highlighted by neoclassical realism. Understanding the nuances of Putin's personal crisis management style could provide deeper insights into Russia's actions in this context.

6.2.4. Relative Distribution of Power and Polarity

The 2020s witnessed profound shifts in the international system, notably influenced by systemic upheavals triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic and the election of John Biden as the US president. These changes suggested a movement towards a normative order in the global system, prompting Russia to enhance its position by forging an alliance with China against the USA and the broader Western sphere. Making historical comparisons, Putin specifically likened the perceived threats arising from Ukraine and the West to the aggression that the USSR faced from Nazi Germany. Through this historical analogy, Putin emphasized the gravity of the situation, framing it as an existential threat comparable to past challenges. This personal interpretation of events likely played a significant role in shaping Russia's response, emphasizing urgency and the severity of the perceived threat as viewed from Putin's perspective “The attempt to appease the aggressor ahead of the Great Patriotic War proved to be a mistake that came at a high cost for our people. In the first months after the hostilities broke out, we lost vast territories of strategic importance, as well as millions of lives. We will not make this mistake the second time. We have no right to do so” (Putin, 2022). According to Putin, the West-centered world is coming to an end and actors like Russia need to consolidate their positions in the new world. “The historical period of the West's undivided dominance over world affairs is coming to an end” (Putin, 2022).

Putin's stance drew on historical lessons from the Great Patriotic War, where attempts at appeasement led to dire consequences for the Russian people. Pledging to avoid repeating such errors, he emphasized Russia's imperative to fortify its position in a shifting global order. Putin's perspective foresaw the decline of Western dominance in global affairs,

signaling the emergence of a multipolar world. Within this outlook, he believed the international system lacked sufficient space for assertive action by actors like Russia, and he refrained from viewing key players in the system as adversaries. Perceiving Russia as strong and unmatched in this conflict, Putin rejected Western leaders' mediation attempts and notably snubbed President Emmanuel Macron of France. While symbolically significant, these actions illustrate Putin's reluctance to consider major actors in the global system as his rivals. Nevertheless, the dynamics within a multipolar system can lead to miscalculations among major powers. While the neoclassical perspective sheds light on how the system's structure influenced Putin's decision-making, delving into leadership trait analysis and a deeper comprehension of Putin's individual traits can further elucidate his specific decision-making and behavior. The systemic changes in the international arena significantly shaped Russia's conduct in 2022. However, Putin's specific choices were shaped by a combination of systemic factors and his personal traits. This underscores the intricate interplay between international relations theory and leadership analysis, highlighting the complexity inherent in understanding Russia's actions.

6.2.5. Clarity

Neoclassical realists indeed emphasize the significance of the magnitude and visibility of threats. When threats emerge, states often feel compelled to respond swiftly. However, it's equally crucial to consider the impact of information pollution, where misinformation can lead state actors to react in ways that may result in unforeseen dangers. In this context, Putin's bias regarding the threat posed by Ukraine underscores Russia's perception of being encircled by potential threats. Putin maintains a stark view of the threat originating from Ukraine, believing that Russia could face an imminent attack from Ukrainian territory. Additionally, he expresses apprehensions regarding the potential for a nuclear attack from Ukraine, citing concerns about the perceived threat emanating from Ukraine's nuclear facilities. This perspective offers insights into Putin's perspective on the international system, where he perceives potential risks and dangers originating from neighboring countries. The neoclassical realist perspective underscores the significance of these threat perceptions in shaping a state's behavior. In Putin's case, the perceived threats stemming from Ukraine play a pivotal role in guiding Russia's policy decisions and subsequent actions. Understanding the intricacies of these threat perceptions is

essential in comprehending Russia's approach not only to its neighbors but also within the broader international system. Putin's articulated concerns about Ukraine acquiring weapons of mass destruction exemplify the gravity Russia attaches to these perceived threats. He emphasizes that such a scenario could significantly alter the global and European landscape, particularly posing a substantial risk to Russia.

Putin further suggests the possibility that Ukraine's Western supporters might facilitate the acquisition of such weapons, creating an additional threat to Russia's security. Moreover, Putin highlights the persistent influx of Western weaponry into Ukraine since 2014, along with significant financial support, training, and supervision by foreign advisors. This consistent supply of arms, openly observed by the world, raises alarms for Russia, contributing to their perception of heightened threats emanating from the Kyiv regime. These concerns illustrate how Putin's views on international support to Ukraine shape Russia's perception of threats and inform their policy decisions. Over the past few years, military contingents of NATO countries have been almost constantly present on Ukrainian territory under the pretext of exercises. The Ukrainian troop control system has already been integrated into NATO. This means that NATO headquarters can issue direct commands to the Ukrainian armed forces, even to their separate units and squads" (Putin, 2022).

Putin's perspective on the enlargement of NATO and its perceived direct threat to Russia's strategic centers was undoubtedly crystal clear. The palpable presence of these perceived threats indeed alarmed Russia, compelling the country to mobilize its resources in response. However, the pivotal question remains: why does Putin perceive these threats with such clarity? In essence, has Putin potentially exaggerated the extent of these threats? These questions, rooted in the nuances of perception, extend beyond the scope of analysis offered by neoclassical realism. Therefore, seeking answers requires delving into Putin's psychological determinants of events and his individual perspective to understand the nature and intensity of these perceived threats.

6.2.6. Permissive Strategic Environment

The behavior of international actors in February 2022 notably played an enabling role for Putin in commencing an operation in Ukraine. The Russian military's extensive exercises appeared to be an effort to precondition global public opinion for this action. Under

Biden's administration, signals conveyed a perception that the USA might not respond forcefully. Additionally, discord between the USA and some NATO members inadvertently tilted the strategic environment in favor of Russia. The post-Covid-19 landscape seemed to create circumstances where weaker actors couldn't mount strong opposition against Russia. Against this backdrop, Putin's visit to China preceding the Ukraine operation indicated a conducive strategic atmosphere. This visit seemingly aimed to secure, at the very least, China's non-opposition to the operation. However, the pivotal development was the joint declaration issued by Russia and China regarding the global order. In this statement, both countries highlighted the violation of international norms and the failure to adhere to these norms, demanding a return to these established standards: "The sides are gravely concerned about serious international security challenges and believe that the fates of all nations are interconnected. No State can or should ensure its security separately from the security of the rest of the world and at the expense of the security of other States. The international community should actively engage in global governance to ensure universal, comprehensive, indivisible, and lasting security" (Putin, 2022).

The joint declaration by Russian and Chinese authorities preceding the attack on Ukraine suggests their perception of the international system as one wherein they can exert influence. This declaration portrays Russia as envisioning itself as capable of pursuing its policies within this permissive international system while simultaneously addressing security threats by targeting Ukraine. However, Putin's assumptions proved to be flawed, revealing significant costs for Russia in its pursuit of a more assertive role in the system. In this context, neoclassical realism encounters challenges in comprehending why Putin took such a consequential step. Consequently, delving into the reasoning behind Putin's perception of the international system as permissive necessitates an analysis through leadership trait analysis. Understanding Putin's individual perspective, and traits, and how they shaped his view of the international stage as accommodating becomes crucial in unpacking the motivations behind his actions despite the unfavorable outcomes.

6.3. Unit-Level Analysis of the Crisis

Throughout the 2010s, substantial achievements in foreign policy bolstered Putin's standing within domestic politics. Neoclassical realists underscore the significance of the

internal dynamics and mechanisms of interactions within domestic politics, as they heavily influence a country's reaction to international pressures. This facet proves crucial in comprehending Russia's incursion into Ukraine.

6.3.1. Strategic Culture of Russia

Russia's military operations in Georgia, the annexation of Crimea, engagements in Syria, and interventions in Libya collectively shaped the strategic culture and mindset of the nation. The perceived lack of a robust response from the West, notably during the annexation of Crimea, fostered a perception within Russia that it could pursue bolder actions with relative impunity. Consequently, Putin held the belief that Russia remained unopposed and had the capacity to undertake even more assertive measures in strategic affairs. According to Elias Götz and Jørgen Staune, Russia's historical fear of the West and its sense of being a superpower played a role in Russia's taking this step. For the first reason, Russia does not mind creating buffer zones on its borders. According to the second factor, it is the necessity of Russia, as a great power, to have an area of influence in the Eurasian region (Götz & Staun, 2022).

Russia, previously encountering minimal international resistance in its military endeavors, operated under the belief that initiating a new military campaign would yield similar outcomes. Consequently, military intervention has evolved into a fundamental component of Russian foreign policy when deemed necessary. This notion has gained widespread acceptance among foreign policy circles. Historically, Ukraine served as a buffer zone between Russia and the West, a role it was perceived to have renounced by adopting an anti-Russian stance. Russia considers Ukraine, alongside other former USSR nations, as integral parts of its sphere of influence. The institutionalization of such military actions followed the annexation of Crimea. Thus, the 2022 operation in Ukraine mirrors this established tradition within Russian foreign policy.

6.3.2. Leader’s Perception

As mentioned before, the world view of Russia's leader Putin is important in examining this war. Putin compares himself to Peter the Great (Guardian, 2022). In this sense, Putin believes that Russia will once again maintain its position around the world. Putin thinks that Russia is a superpower and argues that Russia's position in the international system cannot be filled by another country: “No matter how much someone would like to isolate

Russia, it is impossible to do this" (Putin, 2022). Putin also thinks that it is impossible to establish a West-centred world: "attempts by the collective West to enforce its version of the global order are doomed to fail" (Putin, 2022). Putin constantly accuses Westerners and conveys that Russia is facing a multidimensional threat from culture to politics. "Properly speaking, the attempts to use us in their interests never ceased until quite recently: they sought to destroy our traditional values and force on us their false values that would erode us, our people from within, the attitudes they have been aggressively imposing on their countries, attitudes that are directly leading to degradation and degeneration because they are contrary to human nature. This is not going to happen. No one has ever succeeded in doing this, nor will they succeed now" (Putin, 2022).

In his address preceding the attack on Ukraine, Putin's statements reflect a perception that the West is on the brink of launching an assault. He draws a historical parallel, comparing the perceived threat posed by Ukraine to the aggression faced by the Soviet Union during Hitler's attack in the Second World War. Putin's speech invokes historical lessons, notably referencing the Soviet Union's efforts in 1940 and early 1941 to avert or delay war. He points out that, in trying not to provoke the potential aggressor, the USSR refrained from immediate preparations to defend itself until it was too late. Consequently, when Nazi Germany attacked without declaring war on June 22, 1941, the country was ill-prepared to counter the invasion. Although the Soviet Union eventually halted the enemy and emerged victorious, it came at an immense cost. Putin underscores the mistake of attempting to appease the aggressor prior to the Great Patriotic War, highlighting the heavy toll it exacted on the people. "In the first months after the hostilities broke out, we lost vast territories of strategic importance, as well as millions of lives. We will not make this mistake the second time. We have no right to do so… Let me reiterate that we have no illusions in this regard and are extremely realistic in our assessments" (Putin, 2022). These statements effectively capture Putin's interpretation of the threat. Hence, within the framework of neoclassical realism, this portrayal unveils Putin's perspective on the world, Ukraine, perceived adversaries, and sheds light on his underlying mindset and background.

6.3.3. Domestic Institutions

In previous crises, Putin has implemented strategies to retain control over state institutions, enabling the removal of obstacles and swift enforcement of foreign policy decisions. Neoclassical theory emphasizes the importance of coordination among these institutions in shaping a nation's foreign policy. During Russia's incursion into Ukraine in February 2022, there was a noticeable absence of dissent within state institutions, indicating a significant level of coordination. The Judiciary, Duma, and Cabinet worked in unison to carry out Putin's foreign policy directives, reminiscent of the centralized control often observed in his private firm. Notably, Putin's affiliation, the United Russia party, held a commanding 72 percent of the Duma in 2022 (Freedom House, 2022). This majority control facilitated the parliament's endorsement of foreign policy measures, including border operations, underscoring the extent of Putin's influence over these institutions. For instance, following the 2022 attack, the Duma sought Putin's recognition of Donetsk and Lugansk, providing legal authorization for such actions (TASS, 2022). Other state institutions similarly aligned, demonstrating a unified execution of Putin's foreign policy directives. The prolonged tenures of Foreign Minister Lavrov since 2004 and Defense Minister Shoigu since 2012 accentuate Putin's considerable influence over these key positions and their respective institutions. However, the landscape becomes more intricate when examining non-state institutions. Several non-state entities openly opposed Putin's decision, organizing anti-war demonstrations. Their limited influence within the Russian political structure led to a relatively subdued response to the conflict. From an institutional viewpoint, this war might be interpreted as an invasion attempt.

6.3.4. State-Society Relationship

Neoclassical realists posit that leaders require societal support to amass resources for foreign policy, relying on a certain level of public satisfaction with the state's actions. However, in Russia's scenario, the state's control over extensive natural resources has fortified Putin's position. Despite public opinion polls indicating opposition to conflicts such as the annexation of Crimea and the Syrian involvement, Putin chose to overlook this dissent. Throughout the 2010s, his shift towards an authoritarian regime led to a growing rift between him and society. Nonetheless, he utilized influential media platforms to convey his objectives to the public. Consequently, a survey conducted a

month after the 2022 Ukrainian conflict revealed that 70 percent of Russians supported Putin's Ukraine policy, underscoring the considerable impact of media, especially in authoritarian regimes. While this support has waned during the conflict, it's crucial to acknowledge Putin's multifaceted efforts to sway public opinion. From the neoclassical realist viewpoint, statesmen aim to communicate in a language that resonates with the populace to garner support. Examining Putin's statements, this element becomes apparent: "I want to stress once again that Ukraine is not just a neighboring country for us. It is an inseparable part of our history, culture, and spiritual sphere. These are our comrades, those dearest to us – not only colleagues, friends, and people who once served together, but also relatives, people bound by blood, by family ties. Since time immemorial, the people living in the southwest of what has historically been Russian land have called themselves Russians and Orthodox Christians. This was the case before the 17th century when a portion of this territory re-joined the Russian state, and after" (Putin, 2022).

Hence, Putin endeavors to rally societal support by referring to Ukrainians as "brothers of the Russians," seeking to alleviate potential discontent among the populace. This statement indicates Putin's cognizance of Russian sensitivities and his use of language that resonates with these sentiments, evoking emotional responses. Following Russia's two triumphant military operations, Putin aimed to normalize these actions in state media. In 2016, Andrei Kolesnikov underscored that: “Peddling threats, foreign and domestic, including the threat of war, to the Russian people is a key tool of the Putin regime’s political strategy. At the same time, the Kremlin has embraced the so-called virtualization of war. For a large majority of the Russian population, war is experienced solely through mass media. Meanwhile, the appeal of modern war is driven largely by the absence of significant losses on the Russian side, something that directly plays into the level of popular support for the government. The Kremlin’s mythmaking regarding war relies on three key elements, some of which have clear antecedents in the Soviet-era discourse about war: Moscow’s wars are just, defensive, triumphant, and preventive” (Kolesnikov, 2016). The annexation of Crimea notably bolstered Russians' trust in Putin. Despite some dissenting views, Putin's argument about protecting Russians struck a chord with the majority. This circumstance presents a challenge for neoclassical realists in scrutinizing Putin's actions. The autocratic governance in Russia restricts the state's engagement with

society, posing a hurdle for neoclassical realists to comprehend public reactions to such actions.

General Results

The neoclassical explanations of Russian intervention in Ukraine examine systemic, state-level, and individual-level factors. These explanations emphasize shifts in the international system, Russia's threat perceptions, state institution coordination, public support, cost-benefit analyses, and historical imperialist tendencies. Neoclassical realists assert that changes in the international system, such as the West's perceived weakening due to Covid-19 and the rise of multipolarity, prompted Russia to assert its influence. Putin's concerns about NATO expansion and Ukraine's potential alignment against Russian interests further prompted decisive action. Centralized state institutions, under Putin's leadership, enabled swift foreign policy decisions. Additionally, media-driven public support helped legitimize Russia's intervention in the eyes of its society. However, a comprehensive understanding of Russia's actions in Ukraine requires consideration of other perspectives, notably Vladimir Putin's political personality. Putin's leadership style and decision-making have significantly shaped Russia's foreign policy, including the 2022 intervention in Ukraine.

In 2022, Vladimir Putin's decision to launch offensive actions in Ukraine can be understood by exploring his individual-level psychological determinants. An examination of his authoritarian leadership dynamics and distinctive traits provides insights into the challenges he faced while assessing potential outcomes. To gain a comprehensive understanding, it's crucial to merge neoclassical explanations with an exploration of Putin's psychological profile. Putin's personal traits and leadership style significantly shape his decision-making process, especially regarding assertive foreign policy and military utilization. Neoclassical explanations focusing on systemic factors, such as shifts in the international order and threat perceptions, must be integrated with an understanding of Putin's individual-level attributes.

This holistic perspective allows an exploration of how systemic factors intersect with individual-level attributes, leadership styles, and broader geopolitical contexts. By considering Putin's psychological makeup alongside neoclassical realist perspectives, a deeper comprehension of the motives behind his 2022 intervention in Ukraine emerges. This comprehensive approach enables a nuanced analysis of the interplay between Putin's

personal traits, the global landscape, and geopolitical complexities influencing Russia's conduct in Ukraine. An integrated examination of individual-level psychological determinants and neoclassical explanations offers a richer understanding of Putin's motives and the intricate factors influencing Russia's actions in Ukraine in 2022. This approach goes beyond traditional analyses, providing a nuanced perspective on decision-making processes and potential ramifications of the intervention.

6.4. Individual-Level on Crisis: Vladimir Putin's leadership style in Ukraine 2022 Crisis

The summarized analysis of Putin's scores in Tables 7 and 8 reveals a distinctive pattern. While his scores for need for power and belief in the ability to control events fall within the average range, most other traits either lean towards the high or low end of the spectrum. Specifically, Putin exhibits high levels of distrust towards others, low conceptual complexity, and in-group bias, indicating a limited emotional attachment to his group or nationalism. Additionally, his task orientation score is low, suggesting a preference for cultivating relations with leaders loyal to his power, while his self-confidence score is high, reflecting readiness for assertive foreign policy and reassessing his capabilities. These traits scores offer valuable insights into Putin's decision-making process and leadership style. By understanding these traits, we can delve deeper into how his personality and mindset might have influenced Russia's foreign policy. Putin's adept navigation of the complex situation likely drew from his personal convictions and attributes, as reflected in these traits scores. This analysis provides a nuanced perspective on the interplay between Putin's individual traits and the strategic choices made during Russian military intervention in Ukraine in 2022.

Low Conceptual Complexity

Persistent low conceptual complexity is indeed a defining characteristic of Putin's leadership. As articulated by Herman, if this trait remains consistent, it becomes a defining feature of a leader. In the case of Putin, his leadership style indeed exhibits a sustained manifestation of low conceptual complexity. Conceptual complexity pertains to the range of flexibility inherent in a leader's perspective, as manifested in their internal dialogues or interpretations of various elements, including individuals, locations, policies, ideas, or entities. Individuals with lower conceptual complexity often tend to categorize

reality in simplistic terms of "good" versus "bad," "black" and "white," and "either-or." This tendency makes it challenging for them to discern nuances within their environment, leading to heightened reactions to stimuli.

Leaders like Vladimir Putin, characterized by low conceptual complexity, often exhibit a limited tolerance for uncertainty and embrace a dichotomous worldview. In their foreign policy approaches, this inclination can translate into a zero-sum strategy, marked by a division of the international landscape into distinct categories of "us" and "them." For Putin, the identity of Ukraine's leadership holds little fundamental significance; instead, his active foreign policy responses hinge on the loyalty of Ukrainian authorities to Russia. This response pattern remains unwavering, marked by its dichotomous and steadfast nature. A clear and consistent illustration of the enduring nature of this reaction can be witnessed in the case of the relationship between Saakashvili and Putin. Initially a member of the esteemed circle within the post-Soviet elite, Saakashvili transitioned into an outcast and became a subject of suspicion as soon as he embarked on anti-corruption reforms aligning Georgia with Western norms. In the context of the Ukrainian crisis, Putin's behavior aligns with his trait of low conceptual complexity. When the pro-western political orientations of the Zelensky administration became apparent, Putin characterized the Zelensky regime in stark terms, stating, "Ukraine is ruled by a Nazi regime... They do not respect Russian minorities in Ukraine." The rationale for taking action was narrowly defined: the perceived genocide of the Russian minority in Ukraine. The perceived necessity for military intervention was equally unequivocal: "We need to cleanse Ukraine from Nazis" (Putin, 2022).

Leaders characterized by low conceptual complexity tend to perceive the international landscape in starkly binary terms, with their reactions seemingly fixed as the sole correct response. This was particularly evident in Putin's approach to Ukraine in 2022. His low conceptual complexity became apparent through his incapacity to accurately discern authentic system signals and make well-informed judgments when crafting decisions. Additionally, there was a propensity to disregard alternative viewpoints from the political milieu. This deficiency in perceiving nuances led to miscalculations and a failed offensive on February 24, 2022. This offensive was driven by Putin's assumption of unwavering support from the United States and the European Union for Ukraine, as well as an

excessively paranoid anticipation of Ukraine's rapid accession to NATO, and an unfounded fear of a NATO attack on Russia.

Moreover, leaders with low conceptual complexity tend to lack flexibility in their foreign policy decisions. Given what Putin wrote in his article about the unity of the nations of Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus, it is likely that he will steadfastly pursue this course. In 2022, when he operated in Ukraine, it seemed to him not as a distinct nation but rather as part of a greater whole. As he stated, "I said that Russians and Ukrainians were one people – a single whole" (Putin, 2021). This perspective appeared quite personal to him, framing the Ukrainian crisis as an evil Zelensky versus Ukrainians and Russians as a unique nation. He seemed unaware of Ukraine's complexity as a nation with a separate national identity, culture, and geography. Indeed, the Ukrainian crisis revealed that Putin's decision-making style involved limiting the scope of information search, focusing on fundamental principles over specific policy details, and pursuing his vision of information even when it contradicted his preexisting convictions.

This provides some explanation for Putin's decision-making in the Ukrainian crisis, as military expert Alexander Khramchikhin reports: “Russian intelligence did not understand exactly where the actual counteroffensive would take place” (Khramchikhin, 2022). This fact is also supported by the disparities in Ukrainian and Russian mobilization that Putin overlooked. Khramchikhin noted the stark difference in mobilization between Russia and Ukraine, stating that "In Ukraine, the whole population is mobilized,... Ukraine receives real-time information from US satellites and long-range radar detection aircraft" (Khramchikhin, 2022). Later, Putin attempted to mobilize Russia to balance its manpower against Ukraine, but it proved unsuccessful. The newly mobilized Russian army consisted of untrained personnel who were unable to change the course of the war and resist the Ukrainian army effectively.

Putin's tendency to blame NATO is also consistent with a lower complexity information processing style. His worldview is rooted in the Cold War period, and he believes that confronting the US is necessary, effectively returning Russia to a Cold War position in the international arena. In Putin's view, any deviation from absolute confrontation with the West in Ukrainian policy is seen as a risk to the regional superpower position of Russia. “…We have spoken about this publicly many times, and, in effect, this is the subject of our sharpest dispute with Washington and NATO. We are categorically

opposed to Ukraine joining NATO because this poses a threat to us, and we have arguments to support this" (Putin, 2021).

Putin's stable low conceptual complexity trait during the Georgia, Crimea, and Syria crises confirmed his preference to have like-minded cabinets around him as well as his disregard for opposite thinking. As Dyson explains such leaders he analyzed, "With a low score on CC trait, the leader has expected a straightforward information processing style, characterized by limited search and an emphasis on binary categorizations, a decisive decision orientation with a minimum of inner government debate and discussion, and a relatively low degree of reconsideration of fundamental policies" (Dyson, 2008). Loyal to Putin cabinet colleagues unanimously support Putin. They operated Russian concepts on the Ukrainian war as "demilitarization" or "denazification".

Despite the unanimity within Putin's cabinet and the framing of the conflict with these simplified terms, Putin's leadership style, characterized by low conceptual complexity, led to a critical oversight. He failed to delve into the nuanced details inherent in the Ukrainian situation, which proved to be a grave miscalculation. This lack of calculation of the complexities of Ukraine's military and geopolitical dynamics contributed to the ultimately unsuccessful outcomes of Russia's actions in Ukraine. Putin's reliance on simplified narratives and his reluctance to consider the intricacies of the situation prevented him from accurately assessing the full scope of the Ukrainian crisis, ultimately undermining the effectiveness of his foreign policy decisions.

Average Belief in the Ability to Control Events

The interplay of various traits in Putin's leadership style provides insight into his ability to navigate complex decisions effectively. Among these traits are a moderately rooted belief in his capacity to control events and a moderate desire for power. Paradoxically, these very characteristics also equip him with the ability to exercise restraint and make careful decisions when the situation demands it. Moreover, he often shares responsibility with his loyal cabinet. The Ukrainian crisis presented a unique challenge, as the empirical factors driving the conflict aligned neatly with Putin's personal traits. While Putin possesses a propensity for assertive actions, he is also capable of refraining from making foreign policy revisional decisions. The Ukrainian situation was complex, and the stakes were high. Putin's success as a leader is not solely reliant on his loyal cabinet; rather, it is rooted in his moderate positions within various factions within the Kremlin. Putin has

established a domestic system within the Kremlin, positioning himself as the guarantor of the security of each member of his inner circle. This role allows him to resolve internal disputes within the elite by acting as a mediator between different groups. Putin's skill in navigating these intra-elite squabbles contributes to his broad acceptance as a figurehead at the helm of the Kremlin. One faction, comprised of individuals like Nikolai Patrushev, Sergey Ivanov, Alexander Bortnikov, Vladimir Ustinov, and Sergey Shoygu, leaned toward an assertive and active foreign policy stance. They favored robust approaches, including military interventions, to secure Russia's interests and were less inclined toward diplomatic negotiations. On the other side, a different group, represented by economic elites who had either left Russia or attempted to engage in diplomatic negotiations, included figures such as Abramovich, Nabiullina, Chubais, and Fridman (the oligarchs). They saw the benefits of diplomatic dialogue and sought to explore peaceful avenues to advance Russia's objectives.

His balanced approach is based on an average belief in his ability to control events and a moderate need for power. Furthermore, he calculates risks carefully and avoids actions in foreign policy that could jeopardize his position, often choosing to delegate responsibility. For instance, he may delegate authority to semi-governmental entities like the Wagner Group, which is overseen by figures such as Evgeniy Progozhin. Putin occupied a distinct position within this intricate landscape. He assumed the role of a mediator or balancer, weighing the preferences of these competing factions. Rather than rigidly adhering to one approach, Putin adapted to the prevailing stance within the political elite of Russia, which, at the time, was predominantly influenced by the Siloviki—individuals associated with security and military apparatus. The Siloviki's inclination toward an offensive war strategy influenced Putin's decision-making. This dynamic explained why he could advocate for a negotiation process one day and, the next day, authorize military actions such as the use of Iranian drones to bomb Kyiv (Alibabalu, 2023). This ability to pivot between seemingly opposing positions reflected Putin's pragmatic approach to foreign policy, allowing him to respond to evolving domestic and international pressures while retaining balanced control over Russia's strategic direction.

Traits	World leaders (214)	Putin's traits before the deal (2020-2022)
DIS	0.01(0.06) Low< 0.07 High> 0.19	0.1365 High
TASK	0.63(0.07) Low< 0.56 High>0.70	0.6394 Average
BACE	0.35(0.05) Low<0.30 High>0.40	0.3383 low leaning average
IGB	0.15(0.05) Low<0.10 High>0.20	0.1113 low leaning average
SC	0.36(0.10) Low<0.26 High>0.46	0.4615 High
CC	0.59(0.06) Low<0.53 High>0.65	0.5790 low leaning average
PWR	0.26(0.05) Low<0.21 High>0.31	0.2254 low leaning average

Table 10: Putin's LTA Results in Ukrainian Crisis before Invasion 2022

Source: Created by author. Reference group of 214-world leaders developed by Hermann, 2003

Traits	World leaders (214)	Putin's traits before the deal (2020-2022)	Putin's traits after the deal (June-October 2023)
DIS	0.01 Low< 0.01 High> 0.01	0.1365 High	0.1241 High
TASK	0.73 Low< 0.67 High>0.79	0.6394 Low	0.6393 Low
BACE	0.34 Low<0.30 High>0.38	0.3383 Average	0.3457 Average
IGB	0.51 Low<0.44 High>0.58	0.1113 Low	0.1250 Low
SC	0.36 Low<0.26 High>0.45	0.4615 High	0.4327 High leaning average
CC	0.65 Low<0.61 High>0.69	0.5790 Low	0.5831 Low
PWR	0.26 Low<0.22 High>0.30	0.2254 (Low leaning average)	0.2413 Low leaning average

Table 11: Putin's LTA Results in Ukrainian Crisis after Invasion 2022

Source: Created by author. Reference group of 214-world leaders developed by Hermann, 2003

The Average Need for Power

Putin's moderate desire for power, as evidenced in other instances, leads him to share responsibility for policy decisions and processes with his cabinet. This division of power became particularly evident in the lead-up to the Ukrainian war. Notable figures in the Ukrainian crisis included the President of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, and the head of the private military company, Wagner Group, better known as Putin's cook, Evgeniy Prigozhin. Unlike Ukraine, which has been undergoing continuous military reform since 2014, Russia has taken a different approach to its military structure and strategy. Ukraine's military reforms have been driven by its aspirations to align with Western defense standards and NATO principles. These reforms aimed to modernize the Ukrainian armed forces, enhance their capabilities, and establish a more transparent and professional military apparatus. In contrast, Putin has maintained an approach according to his personal traits as an average need for power. Besides it has made certain modernization efforts, the core of Russia's military doctrine remains rooted in a large standing army, strategic nuclear forces, and a robust defense industry. Instead of pursuing wholesale reforms, Putin has focused on maintaining a strong conventional military posture while also investing in asymmetric capabilities, the formation of regional or semi-state armies in Russia, and enhancing its strategic influence.

Putin's moderate desire for power, as observed in various instances, prompts him to share responsibility for policy decisions and processes with his cabinet. This collaborative approach became notably apparent in the period leading up to the Ukrainian war. Key figures in the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis included the President of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, and the head of the private military company, Wagner Group, better known as "Putin's cook," Evgeniy Prigozhin. In contrast to Ukraine's continuous military reforms since 2014, Russia has pursued a distinct approach to its military structure and strategy, aligned with Putin's average need for power. While Russia has made some modernization efforts, its military doctrine remains centered on a large standing army, strategic nuclear forces, and a robust defense industry. Rather than opting for comprehensive reforms, Putin has prioritized maintaining a strong conventional military posture. Additionally, he has invested in asymmetric capabilities, facilitated the formation of regional or semi-state armies in Russia, and sought to enhance the country's strategic influence.

This approach diverges from Ukraine's efforts to modernize its armed forces, aligning with Western defense standards and NATO principles. Ukraine's military reforms aim to enhance capabilities, establish transparency, and build a more professional military apparatus. In contrast, Putin's strategy reflects his personal traits, emphasizing a robust conventional military posture and strategic influence over extensive modernization efforts. For instance, Kadyrov's army is estimated to consist of approximately 30 thousand fighters loyal to him. Additionally, one of Wagner's largest private military companies has been granted permission to recruit Russian prisoners for the conflict in Ukraine, although, according to Russian law, only the president has the authority to release prisoners. Wagner's quasi-state army has been known to carry out missions aligning with Russian government interests in various locations, including Nigeria, Crimea, eastern Ukraine, Syria, Sudan, and the Central African Republic. The Russian parliament (Duma) debated the status of companies like Wagner for several years, ultimately refusing to legalize and officially regulate their activities in 2019. Nevertheless, Wagner continues to operate within conflict zones in line with Russian foreign policy interests and collaborates with government services like the GRU (Military Intelligence Agency).

Putin has emphasized the significance of Evgeniy Prigozhin to him personally. This was especially evident after the murders of independent journalists Orhan Dzhemal, Kirill Radchenko, and Alexander Rastarguev, who were investigating Wagner's activities in the Central African Republic. During his annual press conference in 2018, journalists questioned Putin about Prigozhin's alleged involvement in the murders and his personal connection to the "Putin cook." Putin responded as follows: "All my chefs are FSB employees and hold military ranks. I don't have any other chefs. It's important for this to be clear and understood so that we don't revisit this issue." He also clarified his perspective on Wagner's activities, indicating a degree of autonomy granted by Putin to Prigozhin: "As for their presence abroad, if they are not violating Russian legislation, they have the right to pursue their business interests anywhere in the world (Putin,2018).”

Putin's moderate desire for power played a role in his readiness to share authority in the decision-making process concerning Ukraine in 2022. It became evident that he was willing to distribute control among various military and elite groups, including both state and non-state actors, demonstrating his capacity to delegate responsibility and collaborate on foreign policy decisions. However, this approach had unintended consequences,

leading to the rise of Yevgeny Prigozhin, known as "Putin's chef," who gained significant influence and started to criticize Russian military elites. After a series of public skirmishes between Prigozhin and Shoigu, coupled with Putin's indifference, Prigozhin decided to attempt a coup. It was an attempted coup, which faltered, and later, Prigozhin's plane was shot down by a missile, resulting in his demise.

6.4.1. Vladimir's Putin Leadership Style in Ukraine 2022

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, was perceived by the global community as an anticipated move from Putin's Russia directed towards Zelensky's Ukraine. The available material today allows us to delve into the intricacies of Putin's policy formation concerning Ukraine. The conflict, ongoing since 2022, has undergone several trajectory changes, enabling us to analyze numerous pertinent facts that have become evident in this conflict. Compiled evidence gathered thus far in the war aims to determine whether expectations regarding Putin's decision-making behavior are influenced by his personality, as analyzed earlier in examining his character in the Georgian, Syrian, and Crimean crises within this thesis. This section provides a summary of the expected behavior of Putin and its impact on politics, considering his personality, along with the data acquired to comprehend the role of Putin's personality in Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Table 4 illustrates Putin's expected behaviors before and after the case and how it affects foreign policy. As previously mentioned, Putin's pattern of scores on the seven traits illustrates the kind of leadership style that may be expected from him. Putin's receptivity to contextual information also suggests that he is perceptive of environmental cues, supporting the need to examine how his personality changed after the decision to intervene in Ukraine. When compared to other international leaders, Putin's attributes of belief in his ability to influence events and his need for power both fall in the middle. Considering Putin's average score in belief in his ability to control events, we anticipate that he will, once again, exhibit his inclination to maintain a balance and delegate responsibilities. This political orientation is grounded in his perceived internal locus of control and an average sense of personal efficacy in shaping the course of events.

Vladimir Putin cannot be unequivocally labeled as a militant president. Over his more than 20 years in power, he has intervened in four episodes involving the use of force in

Georgia, Syria, and twice in Ukraine. However, Putin has generally sought to avoid taking extremely provoking decisions in politics, even entrusting the reform of the presidential system to Medvedev during his presidency. Moreover, Medvedev, while serving as president, revised the military doctrine, indicating that Putin may have aimed to personalize his power without provoking the international system. Nonetheless, Putin's Munich speech made it abundantly clear that he did not forget about the Russian leading role in world politics, especially in regions under Soviet dominance. Putin contended that the idea of a unipolar world has not materialized and does not guarantee international security. He believed that, within a multipolar world, there should be no single hegemon. As stated by Putin, "In any case, I understood that the use of force can only be legitimate when the decision is taken by NATO, the EU, or the UN. If he really does think so, then we have different points of view" (Putin, 2007). Putin emphasized that the international system should not revolve around a single hegemon as the sole arbitrator in international affairs, stating, "It is a world in which there is one master, one sovereign. And at the end of the day, this is pernicious not only for all those within this system but also for the sovereign itself because it destroys itself from within" (Putin, 2007).

This became obvious from Putin's economic policy aimed at saving resources during the COVID-19 pandemic and gave signals suggesting that Putin was preparing for a large-scale offensive. In this context of the impact of Putin's low average score on internal locus of control on the decision-making process related to Ukraine in 2022, it was suggested that Putin believed he would encounter significant challenges in shaping the course of events and harbored doubts about the successful implementation of his plans. One of the anticipated challenges was the stringent sanctions policy imposed by the West, which threatened economic stability. This is substantiated by Putin's acute awareness from the outset that his agenda for intervening in Ukraine in 2022 hinged on safeguarding the Russian economy during the coronavirus pandemic, and he exerted every possible effort to achieve this objective. Consequently, during the coronavirus pandemic, Putin implemented a "self-isolation" policy for Russians. However, the state did not compensate citizens or businesses for the losses incurred due to the restrictive government regulations (Inozemtsev & Shkliarov, 2020).

The combination of personality traits, such as the belief in one's ability to control events and the need for power, also plays a crucial role in a leader's capacity to perceive

challenges and respond to them, both on the domestic and international level. Putin, who received average ratings for both of these attributes, falls within the category of leaders who, depending on the specific circumstances, can either challenge established limits or respect them. The ultimate leadership style adopted by these leaders is influenced by a combination of other personality traits (Hermann, 2002). It also validates his reputation as a realist who is both tough-minded and strategic, making him approachable to both hardliners and proponents of dialogue, even if only with the assistance of third parties (Bremmer & Charap, 2007). This type of personality determines Putin's actions in maintaining a moderate position between two influential groups in Russian domestic politics, the Siloviki and the Liberals. In the Ukrainian crisis of 2022, Putin continued to pursue a moderate policy of balance between intra-elite groups in the Kremlin such as dividing foreign policy decwision-making between state and non-state military authorities.

In other instances, Putin, because of his high self-confidence, appears to have overestimated the degree to which he could influence events. In his article about historical unity with Ukraine, Putin excludes the possibility of Ukraine determining a political vector, based on the assertion of historical unity. This perception of threats and interpretation is evident in leaders with high levels of self-confidence. Putin's challenge against the established Ukrainian authority on issues of independence has not, however, always yielded successful results. "When the USSR collapsed, many people in Russia and Ukraine sincerely believed and assumed that our close cultural, spiritual, and economic ties would certainly last, as would the commonality of our people, who had always had a sense of unity at their core. However, events – at first gradually, and then more rapidly – started to move in a different direction" (Putin, 2021). Furthermore, Putin's high self-confidence has made him particularly sensitive to criticism, and his low conceptual complexity has inclined his perspective toward simplistic, black-and-white terms. Additionally, he tends to respond critically to opposing viewpoints and reacts firmly to alternative perspectives. This tendency is well exemplified by the law passed by Parliament on March 4, 2022, regarding misinformation. This law stipulates criminal penalties for disseminating information that contradicts official government data. For instance, if someone from the Russian Federation shares information refuting the official casualty figures resulting from the 2022 Ukraine invasion or spreads non-official details

on social media, they can face imprisonment as specified in Federal Law No. 32-FZ of March 4, 2022.

Considering Putin's low score on conceptual complexity, one can anticipate that he tends to frame situations in a black-and-white manner, maintain a largely undifferentiated view of his political environment, engage in limited information search before making decisions, and generally exhibit reluctance to reconsider policy choices (Dyson, 2006). There is indeed evidence to suggest that Putin approaches decision-making concerning Ukraine in this manner. First, Putin gave a clear-cut definition of the V. Zelensky regime: it is “neo-nationalists”, this “Ukraine is governed by the fascist regime . . . They are ruled by direct NATO agents .....”. With a strong sense of Putin's role as Russia's historical missionary, the need for military action was also categorically evident: “It is necessary to immediately stop this nightmare – the genocide against the millions of people living there, who rely only on Russia, only on us” (Putin, 2022). Furthermore, his low score in Conceptual Complexity is substantiated by a rather superficial analysis of the situation in Ukraine around the time of the February 24 intervention. Putin seemed to rely on a superficial analysis from Russian intelligence services to assess the situation, framing Russia's involvement in Ukraine as a savior from the forces of Nazism, much like what had transpired in Crimea in 2014. Indeed, accounts of the early days of the conflict underscore Putin's characteristic political style, one that places a higher emphasis on his fundamental beliefs than on specific details. This style is marked by limited information search and a tendency to be less responsive to information that contradicts his established beliefs, even when it conflicts with objective facts. This pattern helps explain Putin's speech to the nation regarding the necessity of military operations in Ukraine, which he detailed in his article on the historical unity between Russia and Ukraine.

On February 21, 2022, Putin addressed the nation regarding the invasion of Ukraine: "I would like to additionally emphasize the following. Focused on their own goals, the leading NATO countries are supporting the far-right nationalists and neo-Nazis in Ukraine, those who will never forgive the people of Crimea and Sevastopol for freely choosing to reunite with Russia. They will undoubtedly try to bring the war to Crimea just as they have done in Donbas, to kill innocent people just as members of the punitive units of Ukrainian nationalists and Hitler’s accomplices did during the Great Patriotic War. They have also openly laid claim to several other Russian regions. If we look at the

sequence of events and the incoming reports, the showdown between Russia and these forces cannot be avoided. It is only a matter of time. They are getting ready and waiting for the right moment. Moreover, they went as far as aspire to acquire nuclear weapons. We will not let this happen" (Putin, 2022).

Putin's low conceptual complexity score further elucidates his moralistic disposition and penchant for drawing historical comparisons. However, simply invoking a "historical mission" alone does not suffice to justify foreign policy decisions. Putin's explanations failed to unite domestic policy, as many individuals adhering to Soviet Union ideology did not endorse the war, particularly Russian citizens with Ukrainian heritage. Nevertheless, Putin, known for his tendency to view issues in starkly binary terms of good and bad, opted for a historical missionary narrative to rationalize the invasion. He later articulated in the preface of his article: “When I was asked about Russian-Ukrainian relations, I said that Russians and Ukrainians were one people – a single whole. These words were not driven by some short-term considerations or prompted by the current political context. It is what I have said on numerous occasions and what I firmly believe" (Putin, 2021).

This fact is confirmed by the crucial point that Putin's perspective on historical unity doesn't so much shape his foreign policy as it does indicate his inclination to interpret historical matters and unity in a fundamentally binary manner. This, in turn, suggests a tendency to view foreign policy through an ideological lens. Putin's absolutist stance concerning NATO and the West aligns with his propensity for simplified information processing and black-and-white thinking. In Putin's view, there is no room for a partnership position with NATO; instead, he frames it purely in terms of confrontation reminiscent of the Cold War era. He believes that any deviation from complete submission to Russian authority by Ukraine, both in domestic and foreign policy, constitutes a direct threat to Russia from NATO and the West.

Putin's substantial distrust of others underlies his perception of the international environment as dangerous and threatening. This perception, in turn, poses Russia's position in the region, significantly influencing its assertive foreign policy stance. This becomes especially notable because, in Putin's view, the Ukrainian issue is deemed an "international threat" against Russia, beyond the scope of Ukrainian domestic politics, and this perspective remains largely non-negotiable. Putin's challenge to the established

domestic policies is evident, but the Russian invasion of Ukraine over the course of February 2022 has yet to yield significant successful outcomes. Part of this can be attributed to his pronounced distrust of others, which has made him less amenable to compromise, and reluctant to enter into power-sharing agreements or form alliances, despite an average score in terms of his need for power. In dealing with the Ukraine crisis, Putin is anticipated to adopt a direct and confrontational approach, unhesitatingly resorting to the use of force and sending clear signals about how others should respond, often with minimal justification. This inclination underscores his preference for confrontational and provocative rhetoric, a characteristic feature of his leadership style.

Although this no-nonsense, provocative style resonates with a segment of the Russian electorate, particularly those who favor strong and uncompromising leadership, it does not elicit sympathy within Western political circles. Putin's Russian actions in Ukraine become clearer when analyzed in the context of his personality traits. Direct military confrontation with Ukraine is not merely a territorial matter but an essential element of Putin's approach, serving as a symbolic confrontation with the West, which holds particular importance for him and his supporters reflected by Putin’s dual perception of the international environment. This occurred during the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, when Putin's subjective perception of his influence in the domestic and international arena did not align with objective reality. He appeared inclined to project power beyond his actual capabilities. This is exemplified in Putin's various unsuccessful attempts to utilize the blackmail of using nuclear energy as a response to the Ukraine crisis, as demonstrated in his statement from two years prior: "We will go to heaven as martyrs, and they will simply die” (Putin, 2020).

Putin's high level of distrust is evident in his use of nuclear blackmail as a political instrument both unit and international levels to influence the population, a tactic he employed in his speeches to the nation and other public addresses. This approach mirrors how leaders with high levels of mistrust interpret international pressures, heightening tensions and dividing the world into "them" and "us." However, Putin's reaction had the opposite effect, failing to deter Western sanctions and military support for Ukraine, and impeding the prospects of a swift resolution to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

Putin's leadership style seems to exert a significant influence on Russia's decision-making regarding the Ukrainian crisis. He has adopted a step-by-step foreign policy strategy

characterized by a moderate domestic locus of control and high self-confidence. On one hand, due to his average belief in controlling events and an average need for power, he seemed to favor the hybrid warfare strategy that has been in use since 2014. However, his low conceptual complexity and a high level of distrust of others inclined Putin toward an assertive foreign policy.

The evidence suggests that while pursuing this strategy, Putin believed that the international environment's constraints were surmountable in Ukraine. He appeared to assume that the Ukrainian government would capitulate without significant resistance, envisioning a swift and victorious invasion. He also expected that the internal situation in Ukraine would be conducive to Russian interference, with the population not offering substantial resistance and even supporting his actions. With a low conceptual complexity score, Putin has developed a foreign policy approach marked by a simplistic, binary perception of the Vladimir Zelensky regime and the Western influence on it. This perspective has further bolstered Putin's inclination toward military intervention as a means to oust the Ukrainian government, leading to his response to the NATO challenge framed in uncompromising and absolutist terms.

This approach underlines Putin's preference for seeing issues in terms of right and wrong, which has in turn influenced his readiness to use military force and his stance toward NATO. It reflects a stark division of the world into "us" and "them," leaving little room for nuance or compromise. Furthermore, his heightened distrust of others led him to make decisions within a narrow circle of trusted advisers who shared his political views. This approach prevented him from obtaining a comprehensive analysis of the consequences and the course of the conflict. This decision-making style has, in part, contributed to Russia's policy of isolation, the absence of meaningful dialogue, and the breakdown of relations with the West.

Putin's leadership traits, notably characterized by a moderate domestic locus of control, self-confidence, low conceptual complexity, and a high level of mistrust, have wielded substantial influence in shaping Russia's approach to the Ukrainian crisis. His low conceptual complexity within Russia has propelled assertive actions in regions like Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, stemming from a proactive stance to protect what he perceives as Russia's sphere of influence. This self-confidence, coupled with a steadfast conviction in safeguarding Russian-speaking populations in neighboring countries, has

driven assertive policies and interventions in Ukraine. Furthermore, Putin's inclination toward straightforward solutions over nuanced approaches has led to direct, forceful responses to the crisis, while his deep-seated mistrust, particularly regarding Western intentions and NATO expansion, has amplified Russia's skepticism about Western involvement and reinforced the narrative of safeguarding Russian interests against perceived foreign threats. Collectively, these traits intertwine to significantly influence and shape Russia's approach and actions throughout the Ukrainian crisis.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a comprehensive analysis of Russian foreign policy by employing a framework of neoclassical realism with special attention to political leadership. It addressed a significant gap in system-level explanations of critical events by delving into the unit-level analysis, particularly focusing on the role of Vladimir Putin as a key political figure in the context of Ukraine in 2022. The chapter sheds light on the significant role that Vladimir Putin's characteristics play in shaping the course and outcomes of the Ukranian invasion in 2022. By closely examining of Ukranian episode, the study underscored how a leader's personality traits can influence their behavior in critical situations, further illustrating the link between individual characteristics and policy outcomes. An in-depth analysis of Vladimir Putin's decision-making process revealed the pivotal role of his leadership style in shaping foreign policy choices and the trajectory of the 2022 Ukrainian invasion. His key leadership traits, characterized by low conceptual complexity, high distrust of others, strong self-confidence, and a low in-group bias, proved to be instrumental in shaping his decision-making approach. Following the decision to invade Ukraine on February 24, it becomes evident that Vladimir Putin played a significant role in this critical episode's decision-making process. His influence extended not only to the choice and direction of Russian foreign policy but also to the broader spectrum of domestic policy decisions.

This study has illuminated the importance of individual political personalities in interpreting and shaping critical events. It has emphasized how the traits of a political leader interact with unit-level variables to impact policy decisions. Of note, Putin's most prominent personal trait, indicative of his inclination toward military foreign policy decision-making, is rooted in his low conceptual complexity and high level of distrust of others. Consistently low levels of conceptual complexity explain Putin's tendency to view

politics as a battleground between opposing worldviews, resulting in his less neutral and more personal perception of the international environment. His categorical, black-and-white outlook, coupled with a high level of distrust, influences Putin's assertive approach to international politics, his willingness to make bold and risky decisions that affect Russian foreign policy, and his tendency to surround himself with like-minded individuals.

Putin's deep reverence for the Slavic identity of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, along with his ambition to restore Russia to its status as a major global player, presents a complex challenge. His proclivity for ambivalence predisposes him to view politics as a perpetual conflict between good and evil, just and unjust, Russia and the West, underpinned by his strong belief in the historical unity of Russia and Ukraine, and the enduring struggle of Russia against a united West for it. This chapter has offered valuable insights into the interplay between political leadership and international events, emphasizing the significance of individual characteristics in shaping foreign and domestic policy decisions on the world stage. Putin's leadership style and personality traits have played a crucial role in shaping the course of events, both in Ukraine and beyond.

General Results

The Effects of Critical Cases on Putin's Leadership Style and Decission-making

This thesis is a result of collected spontenious material of Putin as his direct responses to journalists and interviews from January 2005 to January 2022. The data were gathered using the Nexis software program and official materials from Kremlin.ru, employing search terms such as "Putin," "war in Georgia," "war in Ukraine," "war in Syria," and "interview," with specific date ranges and keywords.The results were then analyzed using the Profiler Plus program and compared with data from 214 world political leaders as proposed by M. Hermann. These reference groups provided a baseline against which to assess Putin's personality. Interviews resulted in a total more than 400 000 words separated by cases and timelines, before and after the invasion. This analysis generated scores between 0 and 1 for each leadership trait based on the coding scheme provided in the Tables. A score closer to 1 indicated that Putin demonstrated a specific quality more frequently. To assess whether Putin scored high or low in a particular trait, the results were compared to the averages of other world leaders.

Hermann's framework suggests that individuals should be classified as high or low in seven traits based on whether their scores fell outside one standard deviation from the mean of the relevant reference group. Combinations of these traits help interpret a leader's character in terms of responsiveness to constraints, openness to information, and motivation toward the world (Dinler, Balci, 2021, p. 3-7). The primary objective here is to spotlight the distinctive personality traits that set Putin apart from similar political figures. While it's certainly valuable to recognize the traits he shares with others, individual-level analysis hinges on the idea that these individual differences are pivotal in influencing outcomes. Therefore, understanding the nature of these differences becomes the critical explanatory factor (Dyson, 2006). The results have been computed and organized into ten tables within the description chapter of the leadership trait analysis. These tables encompass Putin's traits before and after critical events, as well as general tables detailing all traits. The primary goal is twofold: firstly, to elucidate Vladimir Putin's leadership style and secondly, to highlight the variations in his traits before and after significant events, allowing us to examine the impact of critical episodes on his leadership style and its reflections on Russian foreign policy. The neoclassical realism framework aims to provide theoretical support in examining critical cases alongside Putin's leadership style to gain insight into the role of individuals in the foreign policy decision-making process.

	World leaders 214	Georgia 2008 before	Georgia after	Crimea 2014 before	Crimea After	Syria 2015 before	Syria after	Ukraine 2022 before	Ukraine after
DIS	0.01 Low< 0.01 High> 0.01	0.0926	0.1249 ↑	0.1470	0.1332 ↓	0.1557	0.1635 ↑	0.1365	0.1241 ↓
TASK	0.73 Low< 0.67 High>0.79	0.6623	0.6414 ↓	0.7257	0.6552 ↓	0.6592	0.6426↓	0.6394	0.6393
BACE	0.34 Low<0.30 High>0.38	0.3136	0.2886↓	0.3299	0.3372↑	0.3428	0.3494	0.3383	0.3457↑
ING	0.51 Low<0.44 High>0.58	0.1445	0.1684↑	0.1742	0.1536↓	0.1472	0.1868↑	0.1113	0.1250↑
SC	0.36 Low<0.27 High>0.45	0.4431	0.4518↑	0.4284	0.4721↑	0.4274	0.4637↑	0.4615	0.4327↓
CC	0.65 Low<0.61 High>0.69	0.5654	0.5783↑	0.5908	0.6063↑	0.5638	0.5958↑	0.5790	0.5831↑
PWR	0.26 Low<0.22 High>0.30	0.2367	0.2604↑	0.2542	0.2400↓	0.2568	0.2582	0.2254	0.2413↑

Table 12: Putin's Results in LTA before after Four Cases. The Effects of Critical Episodes on Putin's Leadership Style

Source: The dynamics of Vladimir Putin's traits before/after cases. Created by author. Reference group of 214-world leaders developed by Hermann, 2003

In the Georgian crisis, prior to the events, Putin exhibited high levels of distrust of others, low task focus, an average leaning towards a belief in the ability to control events, low in-group bias, high self-confidence, low conceptual complexity, and an average need for power. Following the events, Putin continued to display high levels of distrust of others,

low task focus, an average leaning towards a belief in the ability to control events, low in-group bias, a higher leaning towards self-confidence, low conceptual complexity, and an average need for power. Notably, the post-event analysis revealed a decrease in self-confidence scores. During the Crimean crisis, Putin's traits before the crisis included high distrust of others, average task focus, an average leaning towards a belief in the ability to control events, low in-group bias, high leaning towards self-confidence, low conceptual complexity, and a low leaning towards need for power. After the events, Putin maintained high levels of distrust of others, exhibited a lower leaning towards task focus, a higher leaning towards a belief in the ability to control events, low in-group bias, high self-confidence, low conceptual complexity, and a lower leaning towards a need for power. The significant trait differences before and after the invasion were observed in the aspects of distrust of others, in-group bias, and the need for power, while the traits of belief in the ability to control event and self-confidence increased.

In the Syrian crisis, prior to the events, Putin displayed a high level of distrust of others, low task focus, an average belief in the ability to control events, low conceptual complexity, an average need for power, a high leaning towards self-confidence, and an average need for power. After the invasion, there was an increase in in-group bias, conceptual complexity, self-confidence, and distrust of others as significant traits. In the context of the Ukrainian crisis in 2022, Putin exhibited high levels of distrust of others, low conceptual complexity, low in-group bias, high self-confidence, an average level of task focus, a lower leaning towards a belief in the ability to control events, and a lower leaning towards the need for power before the crisis. The traits differences observed after the invasion are increase in-group bias, conceptual complexity, need for power and decrease distrust of others, self-confidence.

The leadership trait analysis methodology combines specific traits to elucidate a leader's style. It is this methodology that determines and explains the impact of particular events, classified as traumatic, on a leader's style. These combinations of traits are summarized in final tables 9 and 10, which facilitate the analysis of trait dynamics before and after such events. The primary purpose of this combination of traits is to comprehend Putin's leadership style in the context of executing Russian foreign policy and to gauge how critical events influence leaders' personalities. This research focuses on examining Putin's traits spanning the period from 2008 to 2023 and evaluates the shifts in traits before and

after pivotal events. To assess these changes, the results for each case were segmented into two periods: before and after the decision to intervene. By comparing the results before and after the events, the research identifies significant shifts in Putin's traits.

To delineate the shifts in Putin's individual trait scores pre and post the decision to intervene, distinct tables are constructed for each case pre and post events. Additionally, a consolidated table outlines indicators showcasing the magnitude of change across these four instances. The empirical insights derived from the scrutiny of leadership traits underscore the substantive influence of critical junctures on Putin's persona. This examination illuminates how his responses to pivotal moments have notably shaped and altered his personality over time, offering a profound understanding of the evolving nature of his leadership traits in response to significant events.

The most dramatic change in Putin's traits is observed in the decreased level of distrust of others, which saw a considerable increase after the Georgian crisis. This suggests that during his time in office, Putin developed heightened suspicion within his inner circle, likely anticipating challenges to his authority, especially after his second term as prime minister during Medvedev's presidency. Shortly after Putin returned to the presidential role, populist and highly popular politician Zhirinovsky even proposed that Russia needed a new royal family, with Putin as its head. This implies that Putin's transition towards democracy and his decision to cede power to Medvedev caught many by surprise. Putin's return to the presidency marked a notable shift in Russia's dynamics, witnessing a more assertive foreign policy characterized by actions like the annexation of Crimea, signaling a willingness to challenge Western influence. Concurrently, domestically, a tightening grip on dissent unfolded, reflecting a crackdown on opposition voices and independent media. This dual approach highlighted Putin's pursuit of consolidated power through assertive global posturing and a firm stance against internal dissent, revealing a deliberate strategy aimed at reinforcing Russia's influence both on the international stage and within its borders.

When examining Putin's task focus among his traits, it becomes evident that he exhibited relatively stable preferences in developing relationships rather than concentrating solely on problem-solving. Notably, there was a significant increase in the TASK trait before the Crimea crisis, signifying that Putin, who tends to be consistent in his traits, found the Ukrainian crisis to be a matter of great significance, prompting him to focus on the issue.

He was genuinely concerned about Ukraine and made considerable efforts to address the problem in his own way. Leaders with relatively stable traits, such as Putin, tend to make rational decisions based on their belief in the importance of personalities and their preference for nurturing constructive relationships in resolving issues. The shifts in the TASK traits before the events in Crimea highlight the personal significance of Ukraine for Putin. In a later article in 2021, he explicitly stated that Ukraine, in his view, constitutes an integral part of Russia without distinct borders.

Putin's consistently low In-group bias and high level of distrust of others reveal his realistic approach to foreign policy. He perceives the international environment as conflict-prone, but because he sees other countries as imposing constraints on his actions, he maintains some degree of flexibility in his responses (Hermann, 2002, p. 18). Moreover, Putin's low In-group bias suggests that he is not a strongly nationalistic leader; his identity leans more towards the concept of a broader union rather than a narrow focus on national identity. However, he does hold a belief in the union of Slavic identities, as he mentioned in his 2021 article discussing the historical, cultural, and geographical connections between Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus.

Putin's belief in the ability to control events remains stable across the four critical cases, with no significant changes before or after the events. This trait signifies a proactive foreign policy stance. According to statistical results, whether critical events had successful or unsuccessful outcomes, they did not significantly impact Putin's leadership style. Leadership trait analysis compares belief in the ability to control events with the need for power, as both traits are indicators of an individual's approach to foreign policy. In Putin's case, his stable traits from 2008 to 2022 place his foreign policy in a middle ground between challenging and respecting constraints.

With his capacity to influence Russian decision-makers and the public, Putin has proven himself to be a charismatic leader who derives strength from his pragmatism. Under his leadership, Russia has managed and controlled a delicate process aimed at enhancing its foreign policy. The analysis of Putin's leadership traits demonstrates his adaptability and versatility. Time, the American publication, recognized Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia, as Person of the Year for his commitment to stability and Russia's growing influence in the world. They noted, "In domestic policy, he secured his political future,

and in foreign policy, he expanded his influence in the international arena, albeit not always beneficial."

The empirical evidence from four significant critical cases reveals that Putin was capable of engaging in negotiations in each instance. However, there was a high likelihood of him misinterpreting stimuli from the international system based on his personal interpretation. These traits reaffirm Putin's approach of adopting a wait-and-see active foreign policy in all four critical cases. In each scenario, he did not show reluctance towards the negotiation process. In fact, this approach became a defining aspect of his leadership style, where, after a significant military action, he often called for negotiations. An example of this is observed in Ukraine in 2022 when Putin employed both personal war strategies and called for negotiations within a single day.

Putin consistently maintained a stable, low conceptual complexity trait both before and after the critical events. Scholars like Dyson and Hermann consider this trait a crucial factor in shaping foreign policy decisions. The combination of traits, conceptual complexity and self-confidence, explains a leader's receptivity to or reluctance towards conceptual information. Across all four critical cases, Putin's score on conceptual complexity remained higher than his self-confidence, indicating his enduring openness to conceptual information. Leaders who are open to information tend to be more pragmatic and responsive to the interests, needs, ideas, and demands of others while actively pursuing options they believe will succeed (Hermann, 2002, p. 18).

CONCLUSION

Scholars in the field of international relations have increasingly focused on the issue of leadership, seeking to understand why states with similar international standings display distinct responses to global events. When examining international crises, researchers grapple with why different states react differently to identical challenges on the global stage. They scrutinize the rationality of a leader in achieving a balance between security, power distribution, and the impact of their personal traits in pivotal situations. The examination of leadership assumes particular importance when analyzing nations where leadership traditionally wields significant influence. It is arguably inconceivable to investigate Russian foreign policy without comprehensively examining the role of Putin. Consequently, the inquiry into leadership and the methodologies employed for its study assume heightened relevance. Furthermore, empirical data substantiates the pivotal role played by leaders in shaping international relations. In this complex environment, the perspectives of leaders involved in foreign policy-making can exert a significant influence on government actions.

Scholars addressing these inquiries have observed internal pressures and leadership mechanisms to formulate a decision-making framework within foreign policy theory. This study aims to employ the results obtained from the leadership trait analysis proposed by M. Hermann to elucidate how Putin interprets systemic or state-level constraints during crises in Georgia, Crimea, Syria, and Ukraine in 2022, and what significance his political personality plays in Russian foreign policy. In the recent years, Russian foreign policy has garnered considerable scholarly attention within the academic realm, where diverse methodological approaches have been employed to dissect its intricacies and ramifications. Scholars have made substantial strides in elucidating the nuances of Russian foreign policy at the state level, centering on the actions and strategies enacted by the Russian state within the global arena. The extant literature pertaining to Russian foreign policy from a state-level vantage point epitomizes the principal trajectories observed in the domain of international relations. Predominantly, realist and neorealist perspectives constitute a dominant discourse within the scholarly discourse on Russian foreign policy.

Researchers subscribing to this theoretical framework accentuate the dynamics of power politics, state-centric interests, and the pervasive security dilemma. Through this lens,

analyses of Russian actions pivot upon its quest for power projection, security enhancement, and the cultivation of influence, particularly in its proximate geopolitical environs and traditional spheres of influence. Central to this analytical framework are seminal concepts such as the balance of power, security dilemmas, and geopolitical calculus. Furthermore, a substantial cohort of scholars perceives Russia as a paramount great power, thus situating their analyses within the framework of great power competition. This scholarly cohort scrutinizes Russia's endeavors to assert its eminence on the global stage, delineating its intricate interactions with other great powers such as the United States, China, and the European Union. Additionally, scholars delve into Russia's concerted efforts to foster a multipolar world order, discerning the underlying motivations and strategic imperatives therein (Bobo Lo, 2015; Sakwa, 2012; Tsygankov, 2019; Tsygankov; Tarver-Wahlquist, 2009; Eitelhuber, 2009).

Moreover, the doctrine of Eurasianism emerges as a salient theoretical construct, accentuating Russia's aspirations for regional hegemony. This theoretical perspective underscores Russia's unique civilizational identity and its purported role as a pivotal bridge connecting Europe and Asia. Scholars interrogating Russian foreign policy through this lens scrutinize the influence of Eurasianist ideologies on Russia's engagements with its neighboring states, particularly within the post-Soviet geopolitical landscape. Initiatives such as the Eurasian Economic Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organization are construed as manifest embodiments of Russia's Eurasian foreign policy orientation. Simultaneously, a scholarly discourse encapsulates the dichotomy between revisionism and status quoism in the realm of Russian foreign policy. Proponents of revisionist paradigms contend that Russia endeavors to disrupt the existing international order, primarily challenging Western hegemony through assertive actions such as the annexation of Crimea and support for separatist movements. Conversely, advocates of the status quo perspective posit that Russia's foreign policy comportment is animated by a pragmatic pursuit of safeguarding perceived security interests and fostering stability within its immediate geopolitical periphery (Dugin, 2014, Laruelle, 2008; Shlapentokh, 2007). In addition, scholars emphasize the pivotal role of domestic factors in shaping the trajectories of Russian foreign policy. Through analyzing the interplay of domestic political dynamics, regime stability, economic needs, and public opinion, scholars shed light on the intricate decision-making calculations and political priorities of

the Russian leadership. This analytical framework allows for a general understanding of the primary motives that drive Russia’s foreign policy positions and its consequential behavior on the world stage.

A large number of works are devoted to explicating Putin's foreign policy and his decision-making process through the prism of the individual level of analysis. The scholarly discourse surrounding Russian foreign policy from individual level of analysis, particularly under the auspices of Vladimir Putin's leadership, has been a subject of considerable scrutiny within academia. While substantial research has been devoted to elucidating Putin's leadership style and its implications, notable lacunae persist in comprehending Russian foreign policy under his stewardship. This undertakes a critical examination of extant literature, aiming to identify avenues for further inquiry and bridge existing lacunae to foster a more profound understanding of how individual levels of analysis explain Russian foreign policy. The corpus of literature about Russian leadership typifies a structured amalgamation of biographical insights and interpretative frameworks. Scholars navigate the intricate tapestry of historical, political, and cultural underpinnings to delineate the contours of leadership paradigms within Russia. Central to scholarly inquiries existing literature on Putin's leadership are meticulous explorations of his individualistic attributes, encompassing personal upbringing, formative experiences, and professional trajectory.

Furthermore, a burgeoning cohort of scholarship converges on parsing Putin's psychological makeup and leadership ethos, delving into an array of factors underpinning his foreign policy inclinations. Noteworthy scholars such as Mark Galeotti provide nuanced characterizations of Putin's leadership as a fusion of pragmatism and authoritarianism, contextualized within broader geopolitical imperatives and the dynamics of power consolidation within Putin's inner sanctum. Galeotti's analyses pivot upon a holistic appraisal of Russia's security apparatus and its centrality in shaping foreign policy trajectories, elucidating the nuances of Russia's assertive posturing and geopolitical ambitions.

In a contrasting vein, scholars like Catherine Belton unravel the intricate nexus of power dynamics and economic imperatives, elucidating their profound sway on Putin's foreign policy calculus. Belton's scholarship illuminates the interplay between economic interests and political machinations within Putin's inner circle, unraveling the intricate web of

influence that shapes Russia's geopolitical stance. Moreover, Masha Gessen's scholarly oeuvre presents a divergent perspective, foregrounding Putin's authoritarian proclivities and coercive governance tactics. Gessen's analyses underscore the strategic manipulation of public sentiment and the labyrinthine power dynamics within Putin's inner circle, shedding light on the entwined nexus of identity politics, nationalism, and authoritarian governance.

Additionally, scholarly works such as those of E. Götz underscore Putin's pragmatic leadership ethos, foregrounding Russia's pursuit of power projection and influence maximization, particularly within its immediate geopolitical periphery. Götz's analyses underscore the role of historical legacies, Putin's KGB background, and opposition to Western hegemony in shaping Russia's foreign policy prerogatives. Furthermore, psychological inquiries, exemplified by works like Immelman and Trenzeluk, furnish insights into Putin's psychological profile, delineating dominant, expansionist, and conscientious personality traits that underpin his leadership style and decision-making calculus. In synthesis, the variegated tapestry of scholarly insights proffer a nuanced understanding of Putin's leadership ethos and its ramifications for Russian foreign policy. Integration of these perspectives engenders a holistic comprehension of the intricate interplay between individual characteristics, decision-making dynamics, and the broader contours of Russian foreign policy under Putin's stewardship.

Upon reviewing the existing literature concerning Russian foreign policy, it has become apparent that a pressing imperative exists to examine Vladimir Putin as an indispensable facet in elucidating Russian behavioral dynamics through psychological determinants. The crux of this necessity lies in interpreting political decisions through the lens of political identity, achieved by directly scrutinizing leadership style rather than relying solely on historical and biographical narratives, which conventionally constitute the predominant individual-level analysis in existing scholarly discourse. Prevailing scholarly inquiries tend to portray Putin as a composite of historical and biographical particulars, underpinned by the presumption that the Putin of 2008 persists unchanged to the present day—an adept manipulator surrounded by a retinue of loyal confidants, with much of the explanatory focus revolving around his formative experiences within the KGB. However, the present study posits that while parallels may exist between the Putin

of 2008 and his contemporary iteration, they nonetheless represent distinct political personae.

Vladimir Putin has been in power for over twenty-one years, initially serving as Russia's prime minister following his presidency from 2000 to 2008, and subsequently, as prime minister from 2008 to 2012, before making a triumphant return to the presidency of the Russian Federation in 2012, a position he has held to the present day. This lengthy tenure establishes Putin as a prominent figure in both Russian domestic and foreign politics. An examination of his leadership style from 2008 to 2022 provides valuable insights into Russian foreign policy. His political persona has consistently featured assertive rhetoric, often employing idioms that are typically viewed as strong, thus enhancing his image in the eyes of the electorate. Having initially served as a defensive leader image during the Chechnya conflict, he later articulated a sense of nostalgia for the bygone era of the Soviet Union. While Putin may have enacted similar foreign policy decisions in moments of crisis, his perspectives on the international milieu and attendant challenges have evolved appreciably over time. The temporal trajectory spanning 2008 to 2022 has witnessed a discernible shift in Putin's leadership paradigm, affording a markedly disparate terrain for the scholarly scrutiny of his political persona. This proposition finds empirical corroboration within this study, which evidences that Putin's psychological determinants influenced his foreign policy vision throughout his incumbency.

This study underscores the multifaceted nature of international relations by employing a methodology that embraces a multi-methodological approach to scrutinize Putin's leadership style while demonstrating its practical application in real-world scenarios. The research underscores the interplay between systemic and individual levels of analysis, aligning these insights with empirical data drawn from specific case studies. The methodology employed in developing this thesis implies a multifaceted theoretical foundation for delineating Russian foreign policy and the role of Vladimir Putin within it. Specifically, the neoclassical realism framework was utilized to establish the system/state levels, while the political psychology tool, Leadership trait analysis, was employed for individual-level exploration. This approach encompasses diverse perspectives, surpassing traditional state/system-centric analyses focused on material power. The outcome is a determination of fresh insights into the evolving dynamics of contemporary Russian foreign policy. System-level variables are external factors that

influence state behaviour, such as polarity, systemic modifiers, and the strategic environment. Unit-level variables, on the other hand, are internal factors such as leaders' perception, strategic culture, and domestic institutions, which shape the state's foreign policy decisions. In doing so, this dissertation unravels the complexity of international relations, showcasing how the integration of actor-specific theory with neoclassical realism can yield valuable insights into foreign policy and leadership dynamics within the international arena.

For this reason, this dissertation is dedicated to exploring the concept of actor-specific theory in the context of foreign policy and international relations. Its primary objective is to demonstrate the applicability of the neoclassical realism framework and an LTA profile of Vladimir Putin, developed through an analysis of leadership qualities by M. Hermann. Through case studies of significant events such as the Georgian, Crimean, Syrian, and Ukrainian crises, this research sheds light on how foreign policy can be effectively examined by considering the pivotal role of individuals in politics. The neoclassical realism framework is employed to provide a strong theoretical foundation for a comprehensive analysis of leadership attributes. The dissertation effectively showcases the utility of this approach in evaluating critical international events at both the systemic and individual levels of analysis.

In his work, "The Blair Identity, Leadership, and Foreign Policy," S. Dyson argues that an analysis of leadership trait has the potential to elucidate foreign policy by comprehending political leadership. According to Dyson, three key traits—belief in the ability to control events, the need for power, and conceptual complexity—play a significant role in shaping foreign policy preferences, whether towards military actions or negotiation processes. In the context of these traits, Putin's behavior during these invasions can offer alternative explanations. Putin tends to favor military operations due to his stable low conceptual complexity. Still, his moderate need for power and belief in his ability to control events restrain him up to a certain point, when he himself leans towards a wait-and-see policy. This moderation in the need for power and belief in the ability to control events can be linked to his experience in the KGB, which is one of the most widely accepted explanations of Putin's personality among scholars.

This study reveals the foundational challenges within international relations and, using Putin's example as a focal point, underscores the significance of personality within the

broader landscape of international relations and the formulation of foreign policy decisions. The fusion of neoclassical realism and political psychology has proven its effectiveness, highlighting the pivotal role of political personality in shaping foreign policy decisions and thereby exerting influence on international relations as a whole. The neoclassical realism framework, complemented by the insights garnered from the LTA methodology, facilitates a comprehensive analysis of Russian foreign policy. Departing from conventional approaches, which often delve into Putin's individual level through historical and biographical analysis, this paper presents Putin as a political figure who, owing to his distinct leadership style, has maintained power for 24 years. It explores this phenomenon from diverse perspectives, enriching our understanding of Putin's political leadership.

Additionally, this dissertation illustrates that neoclassical realism serves as an effective theoretical framework for comprehensively understanding foreign policy. It acknowledges the fundamental role of power politics analysis in foreign policy, which encompasses the intricate interplay between uncertain environmental factors across systemic and individual levels. In contrast to the prevailing trend in existing literature, which primarily explores explanations of Russian foreign policy through systemic or individual-level analyses, this dissertation stands out by emphasizing Putin's conception of Russian national interests. It delves into the nuanced complexities of Putin's personal worldview on the international stage, scrutinizing how it is shaped by regional dynamics and responsive to broader systemic pressures. By foregrounding Putin's distinctive perspective on Russia's global role, the dissertation presents novel insights into the formulation of Russian foreign policy.

However, future research should concentrate on the direct relationship of psychological factors to a leader's behavior under specific conditions. This could lead to the developing of a more systematic theory elucidating foreign policy behavior through a psychological lens. A notable aspect of investigating leadership from a political psychology perspective is its direct engagement with the psychological decision-making process and the rationale behind a leader's acceptance of decisions, contrasting with the focus on individual personality psychology. Further inquiry could explore the distinct political persona of leaders, diverging from classical psychological theory, which often emphasizes biographical factors, or from political theory and international relations, which may not

fully account for the psychological dimension. A significant advantage of political psychology lies in its capacity to interpret a leader's foreign policy behavior exclusively through a leader's understanding of international processes.

These shifts in leadership style succinctly capture key moments in Putin's career and their cascading effects on his leadership attributes and foreign policy decisions. The transition from Prime Minister to President marked a significant transformation, resulting in a more dynamic and assertive approach to international relations, exemplified by Russia's resurgence in the Middle East and the annexation of Crimea. The response to opposition protests fueled heightened political assertiveness, leading to a recalibration of Putin's leadership style and a shift in the geopolitical landscape. In all instances, Putin displayed openness to information, setting a foreign policy course aimed at maintaining Russia's regional dominance since his historic Munich speech in 2007. He consistently pursued this goal, believing that the success of these interventions would shape Russia's position in the region. Additionally, Putin's receptivity to context suggests sensitivity to situational cues, highlighting the evolving nature of his traits following crucial decisions to intervene. In Putin's own words, "Fifty years ago, the streets of Leningrad taught me one thing: if a fight is inevitable, you have to strike first."

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S.Pygachev, interview to Gordon, (the head of B.Yetsin elections company, the head of Mrjprombank, Pugachev introduced Putin to Yeltsin, and in 1999-2000 he was one of the leaders of his campaign headquarters).

APPENDIX

Appendix 1: The Lists of Putin's Interview Used in Profiler Plus Program. Georgia before Invasion 2007-2008

1.	19.12.2007	TIME
2.	16.10.2007	IRNA (Iran)
3.	6.04.2008	The President's News Conference Sochi
4.	29.08.2008	CNN interview with Vladimir Putin
5.	15.01. 2008	German Television's Channel One ARD
6.	06.08.2008	Xinhua and to the Renmin Ribao
Total: 29833		

Appendix 2: The lists of Putin's Interview Used in Profiler Plus Program. Georgia after Invasion 2009-2010

1.	10.05.2009	Japan's kyodo tsushin news
2.	12.09.2009	Abhazian media
3.	14.10.2009	Chinesse media
4.	15.01.2009	German TV chanel one
5.	23.11.2009	GQ
6.	01. 12.2010	CNN Larry King
7.	09.05.2010	Lesson from history movie
8.	22.05.2010	Intergovernmental broadcasting company
Total: 21615		

Appendix 3: The Lists of Putin's Interview Used in Profiler Plus Program. Crimea before Invasion 2012-2014

1. 06.09.2012	Vladivostok APEC Summit
2. 02.10.2012	VTB Capital RUSSIA CALLING
3. 10.10.2012	Meeting with Prime Minister of Iraq Nouri
4. 11.01.2012	Russian Government News
5. 14.06.2013	RIA Novosti
6. 02.04.2013	German TV
7. 07.01.2013	BBC
8. 23.12.2013	BBC Monitoring
9. 19.06.2013	G-8
10. 19.01.2014	'This Week' Interview
Total:43 568	

Appendix 4: The lists of Putin's Interview Used in Profiler Plus Program. Crimea after Invasion 2015-2016

1. 7.05.2015	Corriere della serra
2. 29.09.2015	CBS TV ahead of US visit
3. 08.02.2015	Egyptian daily

4.	5.09.2016	Interview to Bloomberg
5.	16.12.2016	Nippon TV and Yomiuri newspaper
6.	13.11.2016	Brics india visit
7.	27.10.2016	Valdai meeting
Total: 57 062		

Appendix 5: The lists of Putin's Interview Used in Profiler Plus Program. Syria before Invasion 2014-2015

1.	17.01.2014	'This Week' By ABC News
2.	03.2014	Interview before the Sochi Paralympics
3.	05.2014	Channel One, Rossiya-1, NTV, and RBC TV journalists.
4.	06. 2014	Vladimir Putin's interview with Radio Europe 1 ,TF1.
5.	11.07. 2014	Interview to Prensa Latina and ITAR-TASS
6.	11.17.2014	BBC, ABC News, CCTV, Rossiya-1, Channel One, Around the Rings. The interview, Sochi.
7.	14.07.2015	ITAR-TASS
8.	09.11.2014	BBC

9.	25.11.2014	The Prague Post
10.	06.11.2016	Italian newspaper «Il Corriere della Sera»
11.	08.02.2015	Egiptian news
12.	23.02.2015	VGTRK
13.	28.06. 2015	Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)
14.	01.09.2015	TASS/ Xinhua
15.	10. 05.2015	Italian newspaper Il Corriere della SeraAhead
16.	29.09.2015	CBS, PBS
Total : 86220		

Appendix 6: The Lists of Putin's Interview Used in Profiler Plus Program. Syria after Invasion 2016

1.	23.06.2016	Xinhua News Agency of China
2.	05.08.2016	AZERTAC
3.	05.09.2016	Bloomberg
4.	12.10.2016	TF1 TV channel
5.	13.10.2016	Rossiya Segodnya
6.	13.11.2016	Nippon TV, Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper
Total: 47 770		

Appendix 7: The lists of Putin's Interview Used in Profiler Plus Program. Ukraine before Invasion 2022

1.	20.02.2020	TASS News Agency
2.	21.02.2020	TASS News Agency
3.	25.02.2020	TASS News Agency
4.	04.03.2020	TASS News Agency
5.	08.03.2020	TASS News Agency
6.	09.03.2020	TASS News Agency
7.	17.03.2020	TASS News Agency
8.	27.08.2020	Rossya TV channel
9.	07.10 .20220	Rossya TV channel
10.	14.06.2021	NBC
11.	13.07.2021	Interview in Kremlin
12.	14.10.2021	CNBC
13.	13.11.2021	Rossya TV channel
14.	22.10.2021	Valdai 18th

15.	23.11.2021	Annual Press Conference
Total:89 435		

Appendix 8: List of Interview Ukraine after Invasion 2023

1.	16.08.2023	meeting with government members
2.	16.06.2023	conference with arab media
3.	16.10.2023	interview to china media
4.	05.10.2023	Valdai Forum
Total 28.570		

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