THE EPHEMERAL GAINS THEORY VS. RATIONAL APPROACHES

EXPLAINING VARIANCE IN RUSSIAN RESPONSES TO UKRAINE’S REVOLUTIONS

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Ephemeral Gains Theory vs. Rational Approaches

Explaining Variance in Russian Responses to Ukraine’s Revolutions

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This analysis demonstrates the applicability of the ephemeral gains theory, originally used to study extremist violence, to the general use of force in interstate relations. The theory argues that violence is likely to follow a particular type of loss (or its threat) in a state’s authority space, namely that of a gain made after a period of subordination (ephemeral gain). Applying the theory to indirect authority in a target state, a theory-testing process-tracing study of Russian foreign policy vis-à-vis Ukraine is conducted. The hypothesis that the case is typical in displaying a use of force after an ephemeral gain in the Euromaidan revolution of 2014 and its absence after a mere loss in the Orange Revolution of 2004 only receives partial support, as the latter loss is found to take the form of an ephemeral as well. Still, the case is of high illustrative value. President Putin’s reaction in 2014 provides evidence for psychological mechanisms expected after ephemera and the theory can explain variance in Russian reactions based on the intensity of ephemeral gains, especially when adding its second factor of mortality salience. After the theory-testing analysis, an inter-temporal comparison for 2004 and 2014 follows. It analyzes if factors related to diversionary war and realist theory have the potential to provide alternative, rational explanations for variance in the use of force. While the former receive no support, realist factors provide a plausible alternative, the author noting complementary potential between the theories.
Dedication

To the loving memory of my grandfather,

Henryk Zalewski.
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1. Introduction

Nine years after Ukrainians came out to protest on Kyiv’s Maidan Square in the ‘Orange Revolution’ of 2004, preventing pro-Russian presidential candidate Yanukovych from taking office after a fraudulent election, hundreds of thousands returned in winter 2013-4. They were reacting to President Yanukovych’s—finally elected in 2010—decision not to sign an Association Agreement with the EU. After a police crackdown led to an escalation of violence, Yanukovych fled Kyiv and the opposition established an interim government in late February 2014 (Wilson 2014; 44-5, 49, 94-6, 147-8).

Despite the similarity of protests leading to governmental changes seen as detrimental to its influence, Russia’s reactions varied. While it refrained from using force after the Orange Revolution, quick action followed in 2014. Disguised Russian forces surrounded Ukrainian installations in Crimea, a referendum to join Russia was held and the peninsula was annexed on March 18, 2014 (Wilson 2014: 110-4; 2015: 351). Moscow also began aiding separatists in eastern Ukraine (Wilson 2014: 129-30, 140-3; Czuperski et al. 2015).

The Russian response led to disbelief among observers. German Chancellor Merkel reportedly claimed that Russian President Putin was “living in another world” (Kalb 2015: 2) while analysts stressed feelings of “personal humiliation” (Larson & Shevchenko 2014: 276). So, did Russia act based of emotional biases in 2014, and if so, what differed in 2004?

These questions inspire a theory-testing process-tracing study of the socio-psychological ephemeral gains theory in a case of the use of force in interstate relation that goes beyond the theory’s original scope of application to extremist mass violence against civilians (Midlarsky 2011; Beach & Pedersen 2013). The theory argues that a particular type of loss, that of a gain made after a humiliating period of low authority, is especially likely to spark
inordinate violence resulting from a variety of emotional reactions (ibid.: 25-9). Ukraine seems like a typical case to illustrate the value of the theory outside the original scope of application to extremist mass violence. After Moscow lost control over Ukraine in the dissolution of the Soviet Union, this seemed only to have been exacerbated by the loss in 2004. However, the loss in 2014 appeared to differ in that it was preceded by a period of gain under President Yanukovych. Russia’s immediate use of force in reaction to that loss, as opposed to 2004, thus seems in line with the theory. Therefore, the first part of this study will test if these expectations hold up to empirical scrutiny through analyzing Russian authority space in Ukraine, while also including a process-tracing test of psychological mechanisms expected to link the ephemeral gain to the use of force.

To test if variance in the use of force in reaction to the revolutions may also be explicable by alternative, rational considerations, an intertemporal comparison will be conducted in a second step. It will analyze the plausibility of alternative realist as well as regime-stability related explanations by controlling for changes in the intensity of incentives and motives related to them between 2004 and 2014.

In sum, the author will 1) present the ephemeral gains theory and related literature as well as describe adaptations for its application to the use of force in interstate relations. Afterward, he will 2) explain the study’s two-step research design and case selection, 3) specify alternative explanations, and 4) conduct a process-tracing analysis of the case for the ephemeral gains theory. Finally, the findings of that analysis will be translated into 5) a comparative intertemporal template to assess the ability of the ephemeral gains theory to explain variance in the use of force compared to factors stemming from theories that are related to a rationalist paradigm.
2. The Ephemeral Gains Theory

2.1 Socio-Psychological Approaches

Midlarsky’s (2011) theory is informed by socio-psychological studies on emotions in decision-making and by prospect theory. Emotions such as anger, fear and humiliation which are commonly linked to violence in intergroup conflict figure prominently in the theory (cf. Bar-Tal 2013; Halperin et al. 2013; Lindner 2014). As they are discussed by Midlarsky (2011), their implications will be explained in presenting the ephemeral gains theory itself. Lessons from the application of prospect theory in political science are discussed before, as this author draws on recommendations and challenges identified for it in his application of the ephemeral gains theory beyond mass violence against civilians.

As Midlarsky (2011: 29) summarizes, prospect theory focuses on asymmetric reactions to losses and gains, losses inviting risk-taking and gains risk-aversion. This differs from a rational approach in that people value changes in their relative welfare based on a reference point and in that a loss is given more weight than an equal gain (Kahneman & Tversky 1979; in: Mercer 2005: 1; cf. Levy 2003: 215-6). What is not provided is an explanation for how reference points against which prospects are framed are set. Mercer (2005: 3-9) finds that status-quo satisfaction, comparisons to aspiration levels, heuristic thinking, historical analogies and emotional reactions are all used to assess if actors were in a loss or gain domain. Also, the theory has been developed in studies of individual choices. Levy (2003: 233) points out that this limits its utility in political science, speculating that its influence in international relations stems from more personalized decision-making in that field. Still, Vis (2011: 338) emphasizes that biases associated with prospect theory tend to receive confirmation in groups studies as well. Finally, Mercer (2005: 14) and Levy (2003:
both emphasize the importance of testing alternative, rational explanations. Given the relatedness of Midlarsky’s theory (2011)—focusing on a particular type of loss—and prospect theory, these limitations need to be taken into account.

On referents, Midlarsky’s (2011: 330) ephemeral gain and his specification of emotional triggers provide guidance on relevant factors as will become evident in the next part. Also, he focuses on leaders and expects that ephemeral gains have reduced effects in democracies, which mirrors the argument that socio-psychological theories based on studies of individual decisions are best applied in highly personalized settings (ibid.: 4, 374-6).

The necessity of testing alternatives stands out. The original motive for an emotion-based approach was the theory’s aim to explain the roots of extremist groups and why “they chose violence in the service of apocalyptic goals,” (ibid.: 15) rationalism offering little guidance. This study’s general application to the use of force means that there is a higher need to test for rational alternatives. Among others, the use of force in interstate relations is seen as a result of security motives under anarchy (Waltz 1979; Mearsheimer 2001),\(^1\) domestic interests in terms of diversion (Levy 1989), private information and incentives to hide it, problems to commit, indivisible goals and audience costs (Fearon 1994; 1995). As this study’s scope prohibits an analysis of all, rational explanations are derived from existing analyses of the case. In light of differing goals, rationality can be considered in an instrumental sense of making utility maximizing choices for set goals (cf. von Neumann & Morgenstern 1947; in: Berejikian 2004: 4). In these terms, utility in the ephemeral gains theory is loss reversal, decisions violating rationality due to emotional risk-taking.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) The author follows Keohane (1986: 173) in classifying structural realism as relying on the rationality assumption, even as Waltz (1979) is found to be ambiguous on the issue. Fearon (1995: 384-5) criticizes realism for not providing a full account of war in light of its costly nature making an ex-ante bargain based on its ultimate outcome a rational option for all sides. Problems and ambitions of realism in explaining specific wars are addressed in part 4.1.

\(^2\) Expected utility theory does not require risk neutrality, often assuming risk aversion (Kahneman & Tversky 1979: 264). Prospect theory differs in that risk affinity is expected for losses and aversion for gains, which results in separate utility functions for gains and losses as opposed to one in expected utility.
Finally, Midlarsky (2011: 4) focuses on individual leaders placed in their historical context. Therefore, personality related aspects should be constant when studying use of force over time, as their change could also explain varying risk affinity and variations in the propensity to use force. For example, Mishra and Lalumière (2011) emphasize varying risk propensities across individuals, while Coleman, Goldman and Kugler (2009) find that masculine gender identities are linked to a higher propensity to retaliate after humiliation. In sum, an explanation using the ephemeral gains theory should therefore focus on a period of consistent leadership and personalized decision-making.

2.2 The Ephemeral Gains Theory

In its original application, Midlarsky’s (2011: 2, 16-7) theory explains the rise of political extremist movements, defined behaviorally by their use of mass violence against civilians. Central to the theory is the development of authority space, the “proportion of society over which government influence legitimately extends,” (ibid.: 12) including the binary element of territorial control as well as intrastate control over societal groups. An ephemeral gain is identified as a key stimuli for processes leading to extremism. It occurs “when a severe loss (territory, population) or threats of its imminent occurrence, typically perceived as a catastrophe, is preceded by a period of societal gain, which in turn is preceded by a period of subordination” (ibid.: 25). Such a period of subordination would often be preceded itself by a period of real or mythical glory (ibid.: 27-8). Territory is considered to be connected to nationalist sentiments and its loss to feelings of insecurity, all of which can hinder rational planning (ibid.: 30-1).

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theory (ibid.: 282; Berejikan 2004: 6-7). The expectation of stronger risk affinity after ephemeral gains means that separate functions are implicitly assumed by Midlarsky (2011), here based on different types of losses, with ephemeral gains leading to higher risk-taking than losses that do not take this form.
Going farther than prospect theory, Midlarsky (2011: 25-9) thus differentiates types of losses. A sequence of losses being less likely to give rise to extremist violence than the ephemeral gain. This results from the loss of a gain being more surprising and more likely to spark a sense of urgency than a loss followed by another, where the second is explainable by the first. Here, the theory points to findings on emotions being felt more intensely when combined with surprise, also stressing that multiple ephemera have reinforcing effects (ibid.: 26-30). Thus, the ephemeral gain is expected to magnify emotions linked to aggression and risk-taking, such as anger, to inhibit rational planning often leading to stereotypical blaming, and to add to risk-taking dispositions of subjects in loss domains (ibid.: 29).

More precisely, Midlarsky (2011: 67; 308) differentiates three complementary pathways to extremist violence emanating from an ephemeral gain, all of which can invoke the action and risk provoked emotion of anger. In the first, the ephemerality of a gain triggers a threat perception with fears of a return to prior subordination that historical period acting as a referent. Feelings of threat are then associated with swift and hard reactions (ibid.: 30-5).

The second pathway is that of a perception of an unjust loss triggering anger, which in turn can lead to simplistic stereotyping, blaming of others and a longing for revenge (ibid.:}
Indeed, subjects in a state of anger are more likely to blame agency for the failures of others, to display stereotypical thinking and to agree with authority (ibid.: 45-7). Injustice perceptions may stem from two factors. First, an understanding of lacking fairness develops in cases of a perceived lack of reciprocity. In addition, a restriction in the pursuit of capabilities seen as violating autonomy can lead to it (ibid.: 41-3). Second, a perception of (international) rules being unjust can contribute to an emphasis on national honor stressing autonomy instead. Honor in this sense is marked by aiming to receive a peer group’s respect through displaying risky behavior (including risking death and penalization) and by violating rules (ibid.: 43-5). Midlarsky (2011: 44) provides the example of Germans emphasizing honor and autonomy after viewing the Versailles treaty as unjust.

Lastly, humiliation and shame can trigger violence. Humiliation follows an “abrupt diminution of pride,” (ibid.: 48) the referent being the period of real or imagined glory and/or the recent gain (ibid.: 54). In contrast, shame results from a violation of what is considered honorable conduct. Midlarsky (2011: 50) offers the example of Russia’s defeat against Japan in 1905 not only being humiliating due to previous Tsarist glory, but also violating the continental honor code of European powers not being defeated by non-Europeans, shaming Russia. Shame can give rise to new norms previously deemed inappropriate, those seen as bringing about shame being at risk of retaliation (ibid.: 48-51, 56).

An independent element leading to emotional reactions in Midlarsky’s (2011) theory is mortality salience, a heightened awareness of one’s mortality triggered by events such as casualties in conflict. It was found to magnify individual worldview defense in terms of a higher propensity to evaluate those positively who confirm and to stereotype those who

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3 Lindner (2014) sees humiliation from acts “rendering the other helpless to resist […] debasement” (ibid.: 293) as the “nuclear bomb of the emotions,” (Lindner 2006; in Lindner 2014: 293) in that it persists for long and often combines with a wish for revenge.
dis-confirm a held worldview. For example, common worldviews like patriotism strengthen under mortality salience, as does the propensity to act upon them. Especially in cases of unstable self-esteem, violence can be part of worldview defense (ibid.: 57-60). Mortality salience is also linked to a higher acceptance of charismatic leaders and stronger reactions to injustice, deaths of others being potentially seen as such. Finally, those feeling a strong link to the nation can associate their mortality with a danger to it. (ibid.: 60-3).

Midlarsky (2011: 333) found that the two elements could be jointly sufficient, more doubt remaining on necessity. This author does not conduct a review of the findings as his use of the theory in another space of application does not allow to presume them. Thus, both theoretical elements are treated independently, the focus being on the ephemeral gain.

2.3 Applying the Ephemeral Gains Theory Beyond Mass Violence

Attempting a broader application, the dependent variable (Y) is changed from mass violence against civilians to violence in interstate relations. It does not have to meet causality thresholds from war definitions. Militarized interstate disputes (MID) “composed of incidents that range in intensity from threats to use force to actual combat” (Jones et al. 1996: 163) can be included. However, the lower costs of threats make them unlikely to be irrationally excessive. Thus, the threshold is set to the MID category of a use of force, having “an impact on a target […] [as in] blockades, clashes, occupation of territory” (ibid.: 171).

The independent variable (X), the development of authority space displaying ephemeral gains remains unchanged. Notably, it can take the forms of no, one or multiple ephemeral gains at different points in time. Also, as in the original application, there should be an emotional connection to the space to trigger biases. However, given the less extreme type

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4 See the criterion of over 1,000 fatalities in the Correlates of War data set (Sarkees et al. 2003: 58).
of violence studied, it is sensible to broaden the concept of authority space. The binary element of direct territorial control remains important as the highest point of authority. However, measures of indirect control are borrowed from literature dealing with external influences on regime development, which seems applicable more generally (cf. Levitsky & Way 2010; Vanderhill 2013; Tolstrup 2014). In his study of EU-Russian competition in the post-Soviet space, Tolstrup (2014: 35-49) extends Levitsky and Way’s (2010) model of Western influence over target states in democracy promotion. They determine leverage of the target state vis-à-vis the (Western) state by the relative size and strength of its economy and military, its use for competing Western policy goals and the existence of support for it by other players (ibid.: 40-1). Influence would also depend on the strength of economic (e.g. trade flow), intergovernmental, technocratic (e.g.: education of elites in the West), social, informational (e.g. media penetration) and civil-society linkages (ibid.: 43-5; cf. Tolstrup 2014: 40). Criticizing this approach as overly structural and extending the model to non-democratic external actors, Tolstrup (2014: 38-48) argues to focus on elites. Especially “ruling elites are [considered] the dominant gatekeepers” (ibid.: 46). They impact linkages, particularly intergovernmental and economic ties. Vanderhill’s (2013: 22-32) analysis of autocratic influence on neighboring regimes shares his elite focus. She also emphasizes that ideological, cultural and historical similarity increase external influence.

Thus, changes in the relative size of the economy and military of the wielder of indirect authority and the target state as well as external support by other players in the form of “economic, military, and/or diplomatic support” (Levitsky & Way 2010: 41; cf. Tolstrup 2014: 40) require attention. Since Tolstrup (2014: 46) shows the key role of domestic ruling elites, they will be in the foreground. In fact, the importance of rapid change for the effect
of an ephemeral gain makes them more likely to trigger a sense of crisis than changes in economic ties or in the relative size of economies and militaries, as these are likely more gradual. The author also follows Tolstrup (2014: 45) in that economic and political linkages are “most important for facilitating a concentrated, time-specific pressure.” Still, ideological, cultural and historic ties can be indicators when external actors are faced with the need to assess the threat emanating from changes in ruling elites (Vanderhill 2013: 30-31).

The inclusion of indirect control means that an analysis of the entire authority space of the acting state would necessitate a review of all its external indirect authority and measures for the relative value of it in different territories. In this study, the author focuses on the development of a state’s authority in the target country instead. This increases the necessity to identify emotional attachment to authority in that country to justify the assumption that this authority space is the primary referent for the acting state.

Finally, Midlarsky’s (2011: 28-54) mechanisms require testing, which does not necessitate major adaptations. While all pathways were shown to lead to extremist action, their underlying emotional biases received support in studies of smaller complexity. Thus, the feeling of surprise and urgency triggered by an ephemeral gain can plausibly magnify feelings of threat, fear, humiliation, shame, injustice and anger for the acting national leader, who is in the focus of this study, without leading to a fully developed extremist ideation that justifies mass violence against civilians, but still sparking an emotional, violent reaction. On the fear of reversion, the threat of experiencing a reversal to an unsatisfactory level of influence is plausible. However, while a fear of a reversal to prior subordination is evident in losing direct control over own territory, changes in indirect authority in other states

5 Since the existence of competing goals is included by the above-mentioned authors due to their focus on influence of states on another’s regime-type, which is not the main focus of the study of indirect authority space, it is left out.
triggering it requires discussion. First, a strong emotional bond to the outside territory (e.g. due to history, and/or the presence of people considered in a leader’s in-group) can mean that a fear of subordination there is consequential itself. When detrimental changes are reminiscent of a prior period of one’s interests being subordinated, they trigger fears of reversion. Second, if a period of low authority in that country was associated with subordination of the acting state, a potential return to it there can trigger a general concern.

In sum, a typical case would display the following (on an elaboration of case selection see 3.1). First, an emotional bond to the territory. Following Midlarsky’s (2011: 4) focus on leaders and their interactions with history, evidence can be derived from a leader’s biography as well as from historical narratives by which he may be influenced. Second, a rapid loss in the state’s direct/indirect authority space in the form of an ephemeral gain preceding violence. Third, evidence for at least one of the three mechanisms. It can take the form of public statements, but may also be found in secondary sources. In the search for plausible cases, attention is to be paid to personalized decision-making and an a priori appearance of an emotional reaction. Negative outcomes may provide evidence, but at the risk of post hoc argumentation. Since this study focuses on sitting national leaders and the effect of losses in their tenure, a use of force is expected to follow quickly based on the predicted feeling of urgency. Finally, as described, the focus on a particular type of loss—the ephemeral gain—which is seen as more likely to lead to violence than a simple loss appears to be one of the theory’s strongest contributions. Thus, a typical case most able to illustrate that the theory deserves a broadening of its space of application would display a dramatic loss not constituting an ephemeral gain and not followed by violence and an ephemeral gain followed by violence.
3. Research Design

This study proceeds in two steps, by 1) analyzing the degree of support for the ephemeral gains theory in an assumed typical case, before 2) controlling for alternatives.

3.1 Theory-Testing Process-Tracing and Case Selection

Since the ephemeral gains theory requires interpretative analysis—evident in Midlarsky’s (2011) approach—a qualitative design is chosen. Process-tracing is employed as it allows “to identify the intervening causal process […] between an independent variable […] and the outcome” (George & Bennett 2005: 206), which means that it enables this author to search for traces of the psychological mechanisms that link ephemeral gains to violence.

Beach and Pedersen (2013: 13-22) distinguish case- from theory-centered process-tracing, the latter taking a theory-building or testing form. Due to the low degree of theory adaptation, the testing variant is suitable. It is used if “there are well-developed theoretical conjectures but we are unsure whether they have empirical support” (ibid.: 146) or when the existence of a causal link between correlated variables is uncertain. The first scenario is key here. In the words of Beach and Pedersen (2013: 50), the theory is already cast as “entities engaging in activities.” It specifies entities (leaders impacted by ephemeral gains), activities (psychological mechanisms -> emotional decision) and the outcome (violence). Thus, the study tests if it receives support in a case without mass violence against civilians, which places it outside the scope of empirical testing so far.

Beach and Pedersen (2013: 150) emphasize the necessity of selecting typical cases, as “those were both X and Y are present (at least hypothetically), along with the scope conditions that allow a theorized mechanism to operate,” since mechanisms can logically not be expected where their preconditions are absent. As described in the previous part, since
this paper attempts to illustrate the relevance of the theory in a new application space, the negative variant of a dramatic loss that was no ephemeral gain and not followed by violence is added to the understanding of a typical case. This author relies on a priori assessment for case-selection, meaning that a test of the actual presence of X, Y and the scope conditions is part of the analysis, before testing mechanisms. In total, the goal is one of selecting a most-likely case, chosen when “we are unsure about whether a hypothesized causal mechanism exists at all” (ibid.: 151). Such a case can update an initially low level of confidence on whether a mechanism exists, but cannot “make any inferences about the range of its existence in a broader population” (ibid.: 152) in light of the selection strategy. Due to the aforementioned change of the space of application for the ephemeral gains theory, our a priori confidence in the existence of its mechanisms must indeed be minimal.

Ukraine was chosen as it appears to satisfy the conditions of a typical case. An ephemeral gain was present when pro-Russian President Yanukovych fled 2014, the previous rulers after the Orange Revolution of 2004 having been considered unfavorably in Moscow. In contrast to 2014, the Orange Revolution appeared to be a second loss after the Soviet Union dissolved, a sequence of losses not being expected to trigger the same type of extreme reaction as an ephemeral gain. The scope condition of personalized leadership appears given due to Russia’s authoritarian system, as does emotional attachment based on shared history. Finally, many observers were surprised by the use of force (Kalb 2015: 2). Also, experts referred to the role of emotions (Larson & Shevchenko 2014: 276) and identified unintended, counterproductive consequences (Delcour & Wolczuk 2015: 470-2).

Since comparisons are only to be conducted for decisions by the same leader, the use of force (Y) will only be traced for the period starting with Putin’s first presidency up to the
beginning of the Ukraine crisis (2000-2014), to test the initial hypothesis that it only occurred in 2014. Nevertheless, developments in authority space are traced for a longer time frame since the whole sequence of subordination followed by a gain that preceded the loss (which is the actual trigger of action) could extend beyond the period of Putin’s leadership. A detailed analysis of changes in authority space will be conducted starting from the last loss of direct authority in 1991 up to the use of force 2014, while the prior history of Moscow’s influence in Ukraine will be analyzed with regard to a search for triumphal periods. Of course, it could be argued that a longer analysis should be conducted. For example, this time frame leaves out losses in World War I and the German invasion in World War II (Wilson 2015: Chp. 7; Midlarsky 2011: 116, 367). Still, a cut-off point is necessary. The reasoning underlying this choice is the focus on an individual leader. With Putin having been born in 1952, it is assumed that ephemeral gains are most consequential if they occurred in his lifetime (Hill & Gaddy 2015: 7). Since Moscow never lost direct control over Ukraine in his lifetime until 1991, the focus of the detailed analysis is on 1991-2014.

The theory will receive support if an ephemeral gain is identified before the use of force and if evidence for mechanisms suggested by Midlarsky (2011) exists. As noted, the focus is on reactions of leaders sparked by a sense of urgency, thus an ephemeral gain can only be a direct cause if violence follows rapidly. More specifically, as this paper attempts to show the theory’s ability to explain variance in the Russian use of force between 2004 and 2014, different levels of explanatory power are considered. If the initial hypothesis is correct, then the Orange Revolution did not take the form of an ephemeral gain, whereas the Euromaidan did. If multiple ephemera are present, then the use of force in 2014 can still

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6 Putin and Dmitri Medvedev switched the roles of president and prime minister twice, in 2008 and 2012, the latter marking the beginning of Putin’s third presidential term. Still, Mankoff (2009: 54) found that foreign policy authority largely stayed with Putin regardless of institutional roles. Also, Putin had been prime minister under Yeltsin since August 1999. Precisely, he became acting president on December 31, 1999 (Hill & Gaddy 2015: 8).
be explained by reinforcement, suggesting that the last ephemeral was more intense. Still, this ex-post explanation is of lower predictive value and thus considered to provide a lower level of explanatory power. In such a case, a discussion of other explanations derived from the theory to differentiate effects will follow, as it may suggest avenues for further research.

3.2 Controlling for Alternative Explanations of Temporal Variance

This brings the author to the second step of controlling for the potential of rational theories to account for temporal variance. The results of the first step will be cast in terms of an intertemporal comparison for 2004 and 2014. Depending on the level of confirmation, X (development in authority space) will either differentiate effects by the presence of ephemera, or their intensity. Then, factors derived from rational theories will be analyzed. If they vary in the direction predicted to make the use of force more likely, they will be considered as weakening the explanatory power of the ephemeral gains theory by providing evidence for the plausibility of an alternative explanation for temporal variance (Blatter & Haverland 2012: 46-7, 52). It is important to note that this step’s focus on co-variation should not be confused with a design that competitively tests theories in the sense of assessing their relative causal impact. Such a design would require a more in-depth process-tracing analysis of mechanisms associated with alternatives and goes beyond the available resources here (cf. Blatter & Haverland 2012: Chp. 4 on congruence analysis). Thus, the ambition of this step in terms of a contribution to the debate on alternative theories is that of a plausibility probe, in this case a “modest […] comparative stud[y]” (Eckstein 1992:

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7 In a scenario of no confirmation of the ephemeral gains theory, the analysis will still be conducted to at least attain a preliminary assessment of the potential explanatory power of alternative explanations measured by their ability to account for variance in the Russian reactions.

8 The selection of an intertemporal comparison of reactions by the same state and leader to a revolutionary event in the same neighboring state is close to a most similar systems design (ibid.: 43). Still, even the limited degree of generalizability to cases in similar contexts in such designs is not assumed (ibid.: 68-70). This is because case-selection was based on a suspected typical case in the first step, meaning that it was focused on X and Y. While the case-selection rule for this method to select cases varying in X (hypothesis: $X_{t=2004} = \text{no ephemeral gain/low intensity of ephemeral gain motives}; X_{t=2014} = \text{ephemeral gain/higher intensity}$) has been followed, the author also selected on the dependent variable ($X_{t=2004} = \text{no use of force}; X_{t=2014} = \text{use of force}$), risking selection bias (ibid.: 43). Thus, the comparison is only employed to further assess the explanatory power of the ephemeral gains theory by controlling for the plausibility that factors derived from alternative, rational theories could also account for variance.
Such a probe can “confront theories with lesser challenges that they must certainly withstand if they are not to be toppled by greater ones” (ibid.). Here, to not be toppled by the ephemeral gains theory in explaining temporal variance, incentives for the use of force derived from alternative theories must at least change in the theoretically predicted direction between 2004 and 2014, even if such evidence does not provide the same level of confirmation as the first step of this study that includes a tracing of mechanisms. This reduced threshold is deemed appropriate in light of a conservative testing logic, as it only raises the risk of a false finding of decreased confirmation for the ephemeral gains theory.

Rational theories will be chosen based on a review of the most prominent explanations for the use of force in 2014. Regarding the appropriateness of setting the Orange Revolution as the time point for the comparison, three arguments can be made. First, since this paper’s focus is on the ephemeral gains theory and since the revolutions appear to have been the most dramatic losses in Russia’s Ukrainian authority space under Putin, such developments being the focus of the theory, a comparison of its ability to account for variance in the reaction to them is critical to its explanatory power. Second, the author will demonstrate that events in 2004 and 2014 are by themselves consequential for all theories considered. Third, civil strife can be seen as a window-of-opportunity for external interventions, the two revolutions being its main occurrences in Ukraine after 1991 (cf. Blainey 1988: 86). In terms of setting the dates at which the collection of evidence for 2004 and 2014 ends, the author will search for evidence specifying the moment when the use of force was decided and when the decision was made not to use force in response to the loss of 2004. Here, the point when Russia accepted the revolutionary change will be assessed.

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8 The level of instability caused by civil strife, of course, requires comparison. It will be discussed in the realist analysis conducted in this paper.
4. Alternative Explanations

This overview cannot be anything but incomplete due the amount of commentary on Ukraine. Still, to this author’s knowledge, explicit comparisons of 2004 and 2014 are rare. In an opinion piece from early March 2014, Treisman (2014) argues that an economic downturn explains the use of force in 2014 as opposed to 2004, in line with the argument that conflict with an out-group strengthens internal support (Levy 1989: 260-2). Countering him, Tsygankov (2015: 294-6) stresses that regime stability was high in 2014. Instead, he emphasizes continued ignorance of Russia’s security and economic interests as well as values, in an approach mixing realist and constructivist elements (ibid.: 286-8).¹⁰ Realism and regime stability based explanations are prevalent in the analysis of Russian conduct.

In a special issue of Democratization, Risse and Babayan (2015: 384) hypothesize that geostrategic concerns and fears for regime stability are key for autocratic interference in countries that are subject to Western democracy promotion. Analyzing Russian reactions in the post-Soviet space, Babayan (2015: 440, 444) argues that Moscow is driven by power ambitions, not regime survival concerns, even if it may engage in “regime strengthening” (Babayan 2015: 440, 444). Focusing on Ukraine, Delcour and Wolczuk (2015: 473) explain Russian actions by geostrategic concerns over ties to the West, finding less evidence for contagion concerns. Blaming the West for 2014, Mearsheimer (2014) views Putin’s intervention as a defensive realist reaction. Still, regime stability arguments are also prominent. Stoner and McFaul (2015: 176-181) focus on public opinion, protests and economic performance, arguing that conflict with the West serves a legitimizing function and that the

¹⁰ As this study searches for rational alternative explanations, his focus on security and economic interests is of higher relevance. While Tsygankov’s (2015: 290) main analysis includes an explanation for variation between 2004 and 2014, stressing that the Kremlin was hoping for cooperation with the West and decided to attempt to co-opt Yushchenko in 2004, his consideration of four alternatives does not take a comparative form, but focuses on if they explain 2014. He dismisses imperialism claims by emphasizing Putin’s limited commitment to such goals, diversionary arguments by stressing high approval ratings, a conservative majority for Putin and an economic crisis also being present in the EU (for this paper’s comparison see: 5.2.2), also emphasizing that divergent identity arguments overstate differences and that emotional explanations are insufficient (for a discussion see: page 48).
Euromaidan led to fears of similar events in Russia (cf. Wilson 2014: 36). Allison (2014), who analyzed realist, identity-based and domestic explanations, found support for realist and for domestic concerns, the latter being fears of a spill-over, also inspired by perceived Western involvement, that provided an incentive for action against post-Maidan Ukraine (ibid.: 1289-1295; cf. Kalb 2015: 164-5; Starr 1991 on democratic diffusion). Thus, factors related to diversionary war arguments on the domestic- and realist arguments on the structural-level stand out as controls from rational approaches (Waltz 1959).

4.1 Realist Considerations

Power-based explanations often refer to realism (Allison 2014: 1268-9; Mearsheimer 2014). The author derives power-based factors from structural realism. However, it needs to be noted that the founders of its main strands, Waltz’s (1979) defensive and Mearsheimer’s (2001) offensive realism, stress its limits. Waltz (1979: 69) is skeptical of his theory’s ability to explain specific wars and emphasizes that by dealing with structural outcomes, it is no “theory of foreign policy” (Waltz 1979: 121). In turn, Mearsheimer (2001: 335) claims to offer “at best crude predictors of when security competition leads to war.” Realism’s critics also question its anarchy assumption (Wendt 1999), empirical record (Schroeder 1994), ability to explain change and its ignorance of domestic factors and institutions (Ruggie 1986; Keohane 1986: 190-7). Still, they rarely question its relevance entirely. In light of these limitations, the author will partly break with structural orthodoxy by including unit-level indicators, while still focusing on structural concerns.

Waltz (1979: 97, 118-121) conceptualizes states as unitary actors varying in capabilities and operating in an anarchic system. As no superior power enforces rules, states rely on

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11 While they note that “Putin’s pivot to anti-Americanism, anti-liberalism, radical nationalism and an ever more aggressive foreign policy toward his neighbors is a direct consequence of recent Russian domestic and political developments,” (ibid.: 169) they also emphasize Putin’s perception of Western involvement in instigating the Euromaidan, meaning that his actions were a way of countering a perceived Western plot as well (ibid.: 180).
self-help to ensure their survival under a “brooding shadow of violence” (ibid.: 102). Since measures to increase security can be interpreted as offensive by others, a security dilemma ensues in which “one’s own comfort is the source of another’s worry” (Waltz 1988: 619; cf. Waltz 1979: 186-7). Thus, states consider the balance of power. An increase in ones relative share is expected to lead others to balance by increasing capabilities or forming alliances (Waltz 1979: 106, 118). Notably, states are assumed to aim for an “appropriate amount” (Waltz 1988: 616) of power that does not incentivize the creation of hostile alliances, while being sufficient to ensure security. In turn, Mearsheimer (2001: 29, 35) argues that states maximize power as they aim for hegemony. Considering geography, he claims that only a regional form of it is attainable, such hegemons working against the rise of peers (ibid.: 40-2). His maximizing assumption rests on the claim that a threshold for the necessary power advantage to achieve security cannot be set (ibid.: 34-5). Still, states are not constant aggressors, but weigh benefits and risks (ibid. 37-40). Both variants explain stability of the international system by its polarity. Waltz (1979: 163-176; 1988: 620-4) and Mearsheimer (2001: 45-6, 337-46) agree that bipolarity is more stable due to lower chances of miscalculation and lower power asymmetries than in multipolarity. Mearsheimer (2001: 337-46) also stresses that unbalanced multipolarity (such bipolarity only enduring shortly) with a power on the verge of reaching hegemony is less stable than its balanced version.12 In sum, both focus on capabilities, Mearsheimer (2001: 55) differentiating latent (population, economy) and military power. Both expect states to counter increases in the power of others, to which new alliance partners can contribute (cf. Waltz 1979: 118).

12 Mearsheimer (2011: 372-84) analyzes the balance of power regionally and globally.
Based on this, the comparison will focus on two aspects. First, on the levels of threat of Ukraine joining rival alliances, an increase over time being in line with a use of force to preempt a detrimental development in the balance of power. Second, changes in the balance of power prior to the revolutions will be compared by assessing Russia’s position in the international system through the development of Moscow’s capabilities and position vis-à-vis other states. Notably, an increase in relative power could introduce a motive for restraint as Russia’s level of power may satisfy its security needs as well as lead to the use of force if new capabilities now enable it to counter a threat militarily. Conversely, a decrease may trigger a stronger defensive reaction as more is at stake or lead to restraint. From an offensive perspective with a fixed motive to maximize power, an increase in relative capabilities can be considered as increasing incentives for a use of force. Thus, only a lack of change in the balance of power provides no potential support.

Regarding changes in elites triggering a Russian concern about Ukraine joining a rival alliance, it needs to be noted that structural realism should be ignorant of unit-level factors. Still, a threat of a change in alliances triggered by a change in elites is central to authors loosely referring to the theory in explaining 2014 and as the underlying concern is clearly relevant on a structural level, it must be included (cf. Mearsheimer 2014, Allison 2014). This threat is also the reason why a change of intensity in factors related to realism is expected to follow from the revolutions, in line with the methodological part’s second argument for comparing 2014 to 2004. The prospects of Kyiv joining a rival alliance will be assessed by previous ties and the strategic orientation of potential partners. On the domestic level— included in light of the above-mentioned break with structural orthodoxy—the new elites and the level of public support for the alliances will be compared. Regarding the
weighting of evidence, it is to be emphasized that from a realist perspective assuming a lack of trust, verbal assurance are of low value (cf. Mearsheimer 2001: 45-6).

4.2 Diversionary War

First, Russian concerns over contagion based on Western democracy promotion and the potential inspiration provided by Ukraine for Russians, reported for both revolutions, will be addressed (cf. Wilson 2009; Horvath 2011; Allison 2014; Stoner & McFaul 2015). They provide the rationale to focus on 2004 and 2014 as having an independent effect on the value of a diversionary use of force. While it could be argued that these concerns should be constant in light of highly similar events, the author will discuss if a change in the degree of democracy promotion or the revolutions’ attractiveness is observable.

Then, as discussed in the review part, many explanations of 2014 also mention public opinion, economic factors and the occurrence of protests. Clearly, an analysis of Russian regime-stability is central as a potential underlying cause for variation in the reaction to the revolutions. Ever since Levy’s (1989: 262-7) review of diversionary war theory—also focusing on conflicts short of war—reported little consistency in empirical findings, review sections continue to find little change in the degree of support for domestic stability related arguments in the study of conflict (Miller 1999: 390-2; Bennett & Nordstrom 2000: 38-40; Tarar 2006: 169; Fravel 2010: 307-11). This is confirmed by the author’s cursory overview. Chiozza and Goemans (2003: 453) report a negative finding, leaders facing a threat to lose office being less likely to initiate conflict. Studying two most-likely cases, Fravel (2010) also finds little support. Miller (1999: 397-9) in turn discovers an influence of economic decline on autocracies joining ongoing disputes, but none for democracies or for autocracies facing protests or rebellions. Comparing single-party and military regimes, Lai and
Slater (2006: 117-121) show that the latter tend to initiate more MIDs, arguing that their relatively weak institutions require more diversion. Finally, focusing on rival dyads, Bennett and Nordstrom (2000: 52) find initiations of MIDs to follow decreasing growth. These inconclusive findings suggest caution regarding diversionary arguments, even if they are prominent for the case.

With Russia classified as on an authoritarian trajectory, at least since Putin’s first presidential term, controls for regime-stability are derived from a model of autocratic stability (Zimmerman 2014: Chp. 8, 9; Levitsky & Way 2010: 197-201). Gerschewski’s (2013: 14-18) model will serve as an orientation for this study. He argues that autocratic regime stability builds on three pillars: 1) legitimacy, 2) repression and 3) cooptation. In defining legitimacy, he relies on a Weberian notion requiring at least a toleration of rules by the population. Gerschewski (2013: 20-1) differentiates specific support based on reciprocity measurable by socio-economic indicators from diffuse support that can be observed by analyzing surveys, the occurrence of protests, secondary sources and official legitimacy statements. Repression could in turn be measured by indices such as Freedom House addressing political rights and civil liberties (ibid.: 21). It also seems sensible to go beyond such macro-indicators, by analyzing the repressive apparatus, with Levitsky and Way (2010: 56-61) proposing a focus on its scope and cohesion. Finally, cooptation is the binding of elites, e.g. through institutions or by informal means. Gerschewski (2014: 22-3) names different proxies for more quantitative approaches, stressing the difficulty to measure cooptation, especially when it has an informal character. In this qualitative study, the author will rely on secondary sources to assess it.

13 Zimmerman (2014: 300-1) identifies a return from full, to competitive authoritarianism at the 2012 presidential elections. Both for 2004 and 2013, Freedom House (2005; 2014) coded Russia as “not free”.
5. Empirical Analysis

5.1 Theory-Testing Process-Tracing of the Ephemeral Gains Theory

This part tests the hypothesized development of Russian authority space in Ukraine. It presents the ‘triumphal period’ focused on Russian interpretations with no pretense at completeness (cf. Midlarsky 2011: 27-8). Ephemeral gains as action provoking events are only considered since Putin’s first presidency (2000-2014), even as his activities and interpretations of events are analyzed for prior periods as well. Finding two ephemeral gains in Russian authority space, the study discusses how the theory can differentiate them. Finally, since one ephemeral gain occurred in close temporal proximity to the use of force in 2014, evidence for the mechanisms proposed by Midlarsky (2011) is analyzed.

5.1.1 Development of Authority Space

Since the operationalization of authority space relied on Tolstrup’s (2014) framework, his analysis of Ukraine for the period of 1991-2010 is included as a key source in line with Skocpol’s (1984) advice that “if a topic is too big for purely primary research and if excellent studies by specialists are already available in some profusion—secondary sources are appropriate as the basic source of evidence” (cited in: Beach & Pedersen 2013: 141). Of course, to triangulate and due to his focus on relations with the EU and Russia, not systematically analyzing U.S. influence, it is supplemented by additional evidence (ibid.: 128). For the period from 2010-2014 and the potential triumphal period, the author relies mainly on Wilson’s (2005, 2014, 2015) historical and analytic accounts as well as on a book long analysis of the crisis by Menon and Rumer (2015). Information on Putin is derived from a biographical analysis conducted by Hill and Gaddy (2015) and his interview-style biography (Putin 2000).
Before moving to the diachronic analysis, it should be noted that Ukraine’s military spending never exceeded 10% of Russia’s (SIPRI 2015). By 1996, all nuclear weapons on its territory had been transferred to Russia. Prior to it, Moscow reportedly had operational control, even if doubt remains (Mearsheimer 1993: 52-4; Pifer 2011: 28). Ukraine’s GNI (current USD) came the closest to Russia’s in 1998 (16% of it), after which Russia’s GNI grew exponentially (World Bank 2015). Thus, changes in relative military and economic power are not continuously traced. Also, the U.S. share in Ukrainian exports did not surpass 5% from 1996 to 2013 based on World Bank (2015) data.

**Figure 2: Hypothesized Development of Russian Authority Space in Ukraine**

**Triumphant Period**

The Kievan’ Rus—its origin being the Ukrainian capital—is seen by many Russians as “a single ancient Rus/Russian nation” (Wilson 2015: 2). The first prince with a Slavic name ruled it by 946 AD and in 988 AD, Vladimir the Great was baptized in Crimea, turning to the Orthodox faith. With the Mongol invasion of 1240 AD, the Kievan Rus’ collapsed (Kalb 2015: 30-35; Wilson 2015: 5). Moscow rose as a tributary, cutting ties by 1480 AD (Kalb 2015: 39-40). On Russian authority in Ukraine, a division is made between east and west. While Menon and Rumer (2015: 2-4) caution against simplification, disputes over

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14 This overview does not differentiate the level of indirect gains. The disparate height of the dashed line indicates the difference between direct and indirect authority. Of course, the argument can be made that the level of influence under Yanukovych will not have been as high as that immediately after the Soviet Union dissolved. Since the primary focus of the theory is on changes (losses, gains) and reactions to them, a general overview must suffice.
history do surface along these lines and they influence foreign policy preferences (ibid.: 24; Pifer 2009: 24). In the East, Crimea was taken by Catherine the Great from the Ottomans in 1783 along with other parts of southern and eastern Ukraine. While the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth controlled most of Ukraine until the 1660s, Russia advanced, capturing Kiev in 1667. With the Polish partitions, Russia gained more territory, parts of western Ukraine going to Austria. When Poland was restored after World War I, eastern Galicia went to Warsaw and remained under its control even after the Polish-Soviet war. The inter-war period also saw short-lived forms of Ukrainian statehood (Menon/Rumer 2015: 5-11; Kalb 2015: 68-72).¹⁵ In the 1920s, parts of a region called Novorossiya (‘New Russia’) in Tsarist times were transferred to the Ukrainian SR, Putin later referring to the Tsarist term and questioning the transfer (Menon & Rumer 2015: 8; Wilson 2014: 119-20). Galicia was incorporated in World War II, along with territories that had been held by Hungary and Romania. Crimea was transferred from the Russian SFSR to the Ukrainian SSR within the Soviet Union in 1954 (Menon & Rumer 2015: 6-7; Kalb 2015: 91-4).¹⁶ During World War II, its port city of Sevastopol rose to glory for its defense against Nazi forces (Reid 2015: 170-3; cf. Uldricks 2009: 68 on the importance of World War II memory under Putin). In the Soviet Union, Ukraine was a major food, resources and arms provider (Menon & Rumer 2015:14). Thus, all of today’s Ukraine was ruled from Moscow by 1945. Its southern and some of its eastern parts had been under Moscow’s rule for extensive periods, while especially western Ukrainian history is more mixed (Menon &Rumer 2015: 8-9). A liberal institutionalist view for which “the past held little of legitimate value” (Clunan 2014: 283) dominated in Russia in 1991-93. This soon changed, symbolized by

¹⁵ The Soviet defeat in the Polish-Soviet war was classified as the end point of an ephemeral gain influencing Stalin by Midlarsky (2011: 116).
¹⁶ Putin criticized Khrushchev’s decision as unconstitutional, stating that it was “for historians to figure out” (Putin 2014b) what drove it. According to Khrushchev’s son, it was the profane motive of streamlining the administration of a dam that fell into the jurisdiction of both republics (Kalb 2015: 92-3).
the popularity of the term ‘near abroad’ and elite surveys showing that the loss of former Soviet republics was among the elites’ primary regrets. By 1995, a consensus of Russia being “a rightful hegemon” (ibid.: 285) in the post-Soviet space developed, seen in the appointment of the assertive Foreign Minister Primakov in 1996 (ibid.: 282-6; Mankoff 2009: 28-31). Polls showed a majority of Russians viewing Ukraine and Russia as one nation, echoing a statement reportedly made by Putin in 2008, claiming that Ukraine is “not even a country” (Menon & Rumer 2015: 1; Tolstrup 2014: 65, 95). All this hints at an emotional attachment to Ukrainian territory for Putin and a large part of Russia’s elite. Thus, a focus on it as the referent appears justified, especially as Ukraine is seen as the most important post-Soviet state (Menon & Rumer 2015: 14).

As Hill and Gaddy (2015: 66-7) note, Putin “took a number of steps to establish physical links to Russia’s past—its imperial and, to a lesser extent, Soviet past,” focusing on Tsarist cultural goods and the restoration of Orthodox heritage.17 In 2011, Putin also made a statement equating Russia to the Soviet Union (ibid.: 56). Already in his millennium message, he stressed “derzhavnost’—the belief that Russia is destined always to be a great power” (ibid.: 39-40). Thus, entities that ruled large parts of Ukraine in the triumphal period were seen as representing the legacy of the Russian Federation led by Putin.

**Independence and the Kravchuk Presidency (1989-1994) – Continued Losses**

After the August 1991 coup against Gorbachev failed, Kravchuk—a western Ukrainian Communist Party leader—opted for independence, supported by 90% of Ukrainians in a referendum. The Soviet Union dissolved in December 1991, when the creation of a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was announced. Afterward, Kravchuk continued

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17 The melody of the Soviet anthem and the red banner as an official standard of the Russian army were both restored 2000, parallel to Tsarist symbols such as the tricolor flag and the double-headed eagle, showing the joint embrace of Tsarist and Communist legacy (Warren 2000).
to cut linkages (Menon & Rumer 2015: 20-2; Wilson 2005: 31; Tolstrup 2014: 65). Ukraine’s first president confronted an inconsistent Russian foreign policy as Yeltsin battled hardliners (Tolstrup 2014: 56-7). By Tolstrup’s (2014: 59) account, he followed a “clear-cut foreign policy of engaging the West and distancing Russia.” Nevertheless, Kyiv’s declaration of independence prescribed a bloc-free status and Kravchuk’s vision of a special zone in Central Europe met with little support from his neighbors who aimed for full Euro-Atlantic integration (Wilson 2015: 279, 287). Still, Ukraine resisted Russian pressure to join the Collective Security Treaty, only partially joined a CIS Economic Union, refused official membership in the CIS and left the ruble (Tolstrup 2014: 64). Kravchuk faced a separatist threat from Russophile elites in Crimea. In part due to their ties to Yeltsin’s internal rivals, the issue was defused when the two leaders reached a temporal agreement on the Black Sea Fleet (ibid.: 62-7; Wilson 2014: 105). Kravchuk also secured Western financial support for returning Soviet nuclear weapons. The Budapest Memorandum providing Russian and Western security guarantees was signed shortly after his presidency (Menon & Rumer 2015: 25). As Tolstrup (2014: 71) explains, “compared to U.S. support, EU assistance […] was minimal,” even after a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in 1994. As his position weakened while his rival, the eastern Ukrainian Kuchma, grew in popularity, a Donbas strike led Kravchuk to resign early in 1994 (Tolstrup 2014: 60). In the period, Russia used Ukraine’s oil and gas dependence for pressure (ibid.: 67-9). Economic linkages were extensive, but declining. While Russia’s share in Ukraine’s (inter-republican) export of goods was at 54.6% and the EU’s at 5.6% in 1990, it was at 34.8% in 1993 and 6.4% for the EU. Russian imports dropped from 58% to 45% (World Bank 2005: 2; cf. Tolstrup 2014: 53). In sum, Moscow’s authority was contracting.
The dissolution of the Soviet Union was called “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the [twentieth] century” (Hill & Gaddy 2015: 55) by Putin in 2005. He also described his real regret as that of Moscow “los[ing] its position in Europe,” (ibid.: 115) referring to a conversation with Kissinger who supposedly told him that Gorbachev should not have abandoned Eastern Europe so rapidly (Putin 2000: 81-1). Putin experienced the Soviet collapse in Dresden as a KGB agent, holding back protesters trying to enter his station (Hill & Gaddy 2015: 181-3). Returning to his hometown of St. Petersburg at a time of deep crisis with shortages of everyday necessities including food, Hill and Gaddy (2015: 118-9) speculate that the collapse must have left a particularly negative impression on Putin who never experienced the optimistic Perestroika period in the GDR. Working for the city’s mayor, Putin was responsible among others for enabling international resources for food exchanges in what must have been a humiliating experience for a man who joined the KGB inspired by Soviet patriotic movies (ibid.: 147-52; cf. Putin 2000: 41-2). Working for the Presidential Administration since 1996, Putin then rose through various functions, including responsibility for Russia’s regions, seeing Moscow’s decreasing grip, most evident in the First Chechen War (Hill & Gaddy 2015: 29-32; Judah 2013: 26). In light of his experiences and views, it is not surprising that the period following the Soviet collapse—of which losing Ukraine was a part—was to play the role of a subordinate period in 2014.

Kuchma and the Orange Revolution 1994-2004 – Traces of an Ephemeral Gain

Tolstrup (2014: 104) identified a “gradual rapprochement” with Russia in 1994-2000. An agreement on the division of the Black Sea Fleet in 1997 based in Crimea was followed by a recognition of Ukraine’s independence (ibid.: 106). However, Weitz (2010: 86) points

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18 Still, Hill and Gaddy (2015: 291) report a positive working relationship between Putin and Western businesses as well as U.S. diplomats in St. Petersburg.
out that “neither government was particularly satisfied with the outcome” which provided Russia with a lease for its base until 2017. While this could be interpreted as Russia securing the base, it also meant that Moscow conceded the loss of direct authority. Tolstrup (2014: 107-8) also claims that Russian economic pressure was reduced during elections, potentially in tacit support of Kuchma. Still, decreasing attempts at destabilization do not equal growing authority. Despite Kuchma’s origins and his 1994 campaign emphasizing close relations with Russia, “Ukraine’s 1996 constitution did not provide for dual citizenship, Russian as a state language, or federalization” (Menon & Rumer 2015: 27). By 1996, Kyiv was the third largest receiver of US aid and aimed for EU membership. Ukraine concluded a Distinctive Partnership with NATO in 1997, amid rumors of a membership aim (Kalb 2015: 123-4; Tolstrup 2014: 109; Wilson 2015: 291). Marking its close relations with NATO, Ukraine engaged in peacekeeping in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, while NATO military exercises took place in Ukraine by 1995. Kyiv even closed its airspace to Russia for a brief period during the Pristina airport incident of 1999. EU-Ukrainian relations were also marked by a growth of institutional ties (Menon & Rumer 2015: 28; Wilson 2015: 295; NATO 2007: 4; Tolstrup 2014: 108-10).19 Finally, while Russia’s share in Ukrainian imports remained at around 42%, its share in exports decreased by 17.9% to 24.0% from 1996 to 2000, while the EU-25 share rose by 6.6% to 27.6% (Vanderhill 2013: 57). In sum, the trade data combined with Ukraine’s growing ties to the West does not suggest Russian gains.

More critical are events since 2000, when tapes implying Kuchma’s involvement in the murder of a journalist were released, damaging his reputation. According to Tolstrup

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19 Kuchma still criticized NATO’s 1999 air campaign at a point when Ukrainian public opinion also turned against the alliance (Kalb 2015: 126-7).
(2014: 150), a Putin-Kuchma meeting in 2000 became a “turning point” in the bilateral relationship. Moscow resumed oil deliveries, reconfirmed Ukraine’s independence and assisted Kuchma in removing the reformist Yushchenko government in 2001 (ibid.: 151). Several ministers seen unfavorably in Moscow were dismissed. Ukraine participated in a CIS Anti-Terrorism Center, took part in CIS air exercises, allowed a closer connection of its energy grid with Russia, increased cooperation in arms production and granted Russia larger liberties in conducting military drills. Moscow provided advisors for the 2002 parliamentary elections, stabilized the gas price and demarked land and sea borders (Tolstrup 2014: 152-3). Larger integration attempts had more ambiguous results. Ukraine only became an observer to the Eurasian Economic Community and when a Common Economic Space was proposed in alternative, it agreed to join, but only concluded a framework agreement, claiming that a customs union and supranational institutions were incompatible with its EU accession aim (Petrov & Ryabov 2006: 146; Sushko 2003: 1-2).

While Ukraine increased military cooperation in the CIS, Kuchma also made strong overtures to NATO. In May 2002, Ukraine declared it aimed for NATO membership. A NATO-Ukraine Action Plan affirmed the goal, which was added to Ukraine’s military doctrine in June 2003. Kyiv also became the third-largest troop contributor to the Iraq war (Menon & Rumer 2015: 28-9; Foliente 2008). In 2004, Kyiv and the EU negotiated an Action Plan for the EU’s Neighborhood Policy (ENP) (Tolstrup 2014: 108-111, 156-162). When Moscow tried to claim Tuzla Island in the Kerch Strait through the construction of a dike in October 2003, Kuchma rebuffed the attempt. Ukraine placed border troops on the island and conducted live-fire exercises close to it (Wilson 2014: 113; Woronowycz 2003).

20 The meeting took place several months before the tape scandal (Wilson 2005: 51-4).
21 Through negative TV coverage and Russian charges that were brought forward against Deputy Prime Minister Timoshenko (ibid.: 151).
22 It mentions a “long-term goal of NATO membership” (NATO 2002), but is not a Membership Action Plan (MAP) that details steps to it (NATO 2015).
Signs of a reversal in Ukraine’s Western advances appeared in July 2004, when Kuchma—frustrated by a lack of Western support—replaced the section on NATO membership in Ukraine’s defense doctrine with the goal of “a substantial deepening of relations” (Menon & Rumer 2015: 29) and rejected the ENP Action Plan, complaining that it did not offer membership. Still, he then initialed it in September (Cameron 2006: 12). By July 2004, it was evident that Kuchma would not run in the October-December 2004 presidential elections. That month, Russia started to support his designated successor’s—Yanukovych who had become prime minister in 2002—campaign (Petrov & Ryabov 2006: 146-7). Thus, it is doubtful if these late signals were internalized as a gain since they occurred in a period dominated by elections that demonstrated their potential ephemerality.

After contacting the opposition candidate Yushchenko, the Kremlin concluded that his election would threaten a turn of Ukraine to the West, which was also evident in his campaign promise of making an Europe-oriented policy his “alpha and omega” (Vanderhill 2013: 46; Petrov & Ryabov 2006: 147). His campaign manager even reported to have informed Moscow of his side’s aim for NATO membership (BBC 2012). Russian advisors assisted in Yanukovych’s campaign, which tried to build on Ukraine’s east-west divide. The campaign’s anti-Western nature was evident in the slur ‘Bushchenko’ used against its opponent. Yanukovych stressed good relations with Russia and was visited by Putin several times (Petrov & Ryabov 2006: 148-51; Tolstrup 2014: 153-6; Wilson 2014: 125). Also, Russia provided financial assistance and channeled funds to Ukraine that allowed Yanukovych to take populist measures. Additionally, Yanukovych, Kuchma and Putin reportedly discussed election rigging strategies (Vanderhill 2013: 47-9; Tolstrup 2014: 154-5).

23 Still, Putin was reportedly surprised by the protest, having expected a hand-over of power (ibid.: 158). Even so, the above-mentioned signs and Kuchma’s position on Russian integration projects were “a far cry from integration with Russia” (Menon & Rumer 2015: 29).
However, Kuchma’s role was ambivalent. Russian political advisors complained about lacking support and as opposed to Putin and Yanukovych, he was reported to have been disinclined to forceful solutions to the protests which had formed on the Maidan after the second round of the elections in November 2004 (Petrov & Ryabov 2006: 153-4; Wilson 2005: 136-7). Indeed, Kuchma invited an EU mediation mission led by Polish President Kwaśniewski to Kyiv, which caught Russia off-guard. Yanukovych later claimed that Kuchma had betrayed him (Wilson 2014: 44; Wilson 2015: 320; Kuzio 2015: 177). Finally, Russia’s share in Ukrainian exports decreased to 18% by 2004. In turn, the EU-25 share rose to 30%, while Russian imports were stable (Vanderhill 2013: 57).

In sum, a picture emerges of the 1996-2004 period that is more complicated than a ‘rapprochement’ followed by a ‘turning point’ (Tolstrup 2014). Indeed, this author’s initial suspicion that the Ukrainian case is typical also in terms of the absence of an ephemeral gain in 2004 was based on Kuchma’s policy toward NATO. However, on a closer analysis of the position taken by the West—especially the U.S.—it is necessary to qualify the development of Russian authority space since 2000 as a gain, even if Kuchma’s overtures to NATO went farther than in the 1990s. This results from the element of support by another player (Levitsky & Way 2010: 40-1). While the EU was criticized for “inconsistency” (Tolstrup 2014: 158) up to the revolution in terms of reacting to Kuchma’s authoritarian turn, the relationship with the U.S. was clearly damaged earlier. In 2002, new tapes implied that Ukraine sold radar systems to Iraq in 2000 (Wilson 2015: 311-2). U.S. aid to Ukraine was reduced by 50% and relations fell to “their lowest level since the USSR disintegrated” (Kuzio 2003: 26). At the November 2002 summit that produced the NATO-Ukraine Action

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24 On different versions of how a crackdown was called off and Kuchma’s role in it, see: Wilson (2005: 136-7).
25 Notably, the EU enlarged in May 2004. Thus, while the 1996-2000 data for the EU-25 represents the EU and enlargement candidates, it represents the Union as a whole by 2004.
Plan, the seating order was arranged in French to ensure that Kuchma—who arrived uninvited—would not sit near President Bush (ibid.). It was believed that “Kuchma's very poor reputation in the West will ensure that Ukraine will not be able to move from its Action Plan to a MAP,” (ibid.: 32) meaning that there was no real threat emanating from Ukraine’s declarations in 2002-3, making them less significant than the improvements in relations with the West before the tape scandal (ibid.: 22). Thus, even when including NATO and the U.S., this author’s initial hypothesis of no gain in close proximity to the Orange Revolution is not confirmed. Still, the theory can provide explanations for different reactions in 2004 and 2014, as will be shown later in this section.

The ephemerality of Russian gains was proven by Yushchenko’s victory in the repeat of the second round of voting. After the EU-mediated negotiations had led to a deferral of the issue to Ukraine’s Supreme Court, it had ruled on the repeat on December 3. Three days later, Putin had declared that he would work with its winner, at a time when Yushchenko’s victory seemed inevitable (Tolstrup 2014: 156, 160-2; Petrov & Ryabov 2006: 160). Threats of separatism—a meeting of eastern Ukrainian leaders in November 2004 included speculation over separation and decided on a referendum on autonomy—did not materialize (Wilson 2005: 145-6). Thus, Yushchenko, scarred by an assassination attempt, came to symbolize Putin’s defeat, seen as a shock and humiliation (Petrov & Ryabov 2006: 145, 158; Larson & Shevchenko 2014: 273; Mankoff 2009: 250; Wilson 2005: 97-103). Putin’s disdain was obvious when he stated that “the most dangerous thing is to think up a system of permanent revolution” (Putin 2005) in early 2005 (cf. Wilson 2009: 372).

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26 An improvement in U.S.-Ukrainian relations was noted after Kyiv’s contribution to the Iraq coalition. Still, Kuzio (2003: 40) concluded that “from the US and NATO point of view, the Ukrainian troops in Iraq will not return US-Ukrainian relations to the high level that existed in the Clinton era as this will be impossible under Kuchma. The Bush doctrine values trust and Kuchma broke that in 2000,” emphasizing that chances for NATO membership would improve if Kuchma were no longer president. Pifer (2009: 23) also notes that Kuchma’s overtures to NATO were not treated seriously.
From Orange Rule to the Euromaidan – An Ephemeral Gain

The main figures of the Orange Revolution, Yushchenko and Timoshenko, soon clashed before the 2006 parliamentary elections, Timoshenko losing her post as prime minister. The elections then led to Yanukovych taking that position, after Yushchenko and Timoshenko failed to agree on a coalition. When this proved unstable, early elections in 2007 brought a return to the Orange coalition (Tolstrup 2014: 196-200; Wilson 2014: 48-9). Relations with Moscow were strained. Apart from Yushchenko’s pro-Western course, Russia was skeptical of his western and central Ukrainian support base which was considered pro-Western (Menon & Rumer 2015: 39-41).27 Moscow used gas supplies—cutting deliveries twice—and other economic levers for pressure (Tolstrup 2014: 203-4). Crimea became salient when Russian special forces landed there in 2005 without approval (Wilson 2005: 178).28 The peninsula also voted on making Russian an official language, supported by Russian TV coverage. Several eastern cities followed suit. This coincided with attempts to delegitimize the 2004 revolution, Putin complaining about “unconstitutional activities” (Steele 2005; Ambrosio 2009: 145-51; Tolstrup 2014: 202). His United Russia party (UR) also began cooperation with Yanukovych’s Party of Regions (Vanderhill 2013: 62).

Yushchenko’s Euro-Atlantic orientation was pronounced. Tolstrup (2014: 201) identified a particular downturn in relations with Russia in 2005, after which linkages would have remained stable. His election led to Ukraine not joining the Common Economic Space. Also, his foreign minister hinted in 2005 that Kyiv would not extend Russia’s basing rights in Crimea, auguring a loss of territorial access (Wilson 2005: 178). Yushchenko

27 Yushchenko characterized the 1930s famine in Ukraine as a “state-organized program of mass starvation” (ibid.) and fought for its recognition as a genocide by the UN. He also declared two nationalist leaders—Bandera among them—to be heroes of Ukraine, the latter likely in an attempt to manipulate Timoshenko’s 2010 presidential bid by alienating eastern Ukrainian voters (ibid.; Wilson 2015: 342).
28 The incident does not appear to meet the criteria set for a use of force as it had no impact on the target. Accordingly, it has also not been coded as a use of force in the MID4 data set (Palmer et al. 2015).
initiated close dialogue with NATO, planning for a Membership Action Plan (MAP) by autumn 2006. After it was put on hold during Yanukovych’s premiership, Ukraine applied for a MAP in 2008 (Pifer 2009: 23). While concerns of western European states about Moscow’s reaction led to it not being offered, NATO’s 2008 Bucharest Summit confirmed Ukraine’s eventual membership (ibid.: 25). After the 2008 Georgia war, Ukrainian-Russian relations deteriorated further when Yushchenko threatened not to let Russian ships return to Sevastopol (Wilson 2015: 336-7; Pifer 2009: 30-1). Ukraine also strengthened its relations with the EU, becoming part of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) launched in 2009. The program was seen critically in Moscow, Foreign Minister Lavrov warning of “an attempt to extend the EU’s sphere of influence” (Ward 2009; Tolstrup 2014: 205). In contrast to Ukraine’s strategic orientation, trade was stable. Exports of goods to the EU were at 26.9% in 2005 and 27.2% in 2009, exports to Russia constituting 21.9% in 2005 and 24.4% in 2009. Russian imports stayed virtually unchanged at around 35% (WTO 2006; 2010).

After the Orange Revolution had proven consequential given Yushchenko’s pro-Western course—even if Yanukovych’s short-lived premiership requires mentioning as does NATO’s refusal to issue a MAP—Yanukovych won the 2010 presidential elections with an anti-NATO and pro-Russia campaign (Menon & Rumer 2015: 44-5, Wilson 2014: 60-1). Bribing deputies from Timoshenko’s coalition—she was supposed to remain in office until 2012—who in violation of Ukraine’s imperative mandate changed allegiances, Yanukovych ended her government. He also reintroduced Kuchma’s 1996 constitution with stronger presidential powers. In 2011, Timoshenko was jailed after Yanukovych had gained more influence over the judiciary (Wilson 2014: 49-52; Menon & Rumer 2015: 49). Displaying a trend to authoritarianism, the 2012 parliamentary elections resulting in a Party
of Regions victory were criticized (Wilson 2014: 62). While a law on Ukraine’s non-aligned status closed the door on NATO already in 2010, Yanukovych continued negotiations with the EU on an Association Agreement (AA) with a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) component that had begun under Yushchenko (Tolstrup 2014: 204-5; Menon & Rumer 2015: 64). Even as he faced criticism for his domestic policies and as Timoshenko’s release became a central EU demand, Brussels seemed willing to sign the AA/DCFTA at the November 2013 EaP summit in Vilnius. Still, Russia’s authority space grew even before Yanukovych ultimately decided against signing the AA/DCFTA. This is evident in his decision to forgo NATO membership, but also in the prolonging of Russia’s base rights in Crimea until 2042, in stark contrast to Yushchenko’s position (Menon & Rumer 2015: 51; 76-8; Tolstrup 2014: 204-5). Additionally, he did not stop an increasing Russian infiltration of Ukraine’s security apparatus, created a centralized corruption network that led Moscow to pursue a strategy of building business dependence and joined the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU) as an observer (Wilson 2014: 50-1, 64, 112, 136; Wilson 2015: 345; Reuters 2013). Then, after meeting Putin prior to the EaP summit—Russia had raised economic pressure, allegations also include the use of files showing that Yanukovych had been a KGB informant after being arrested in the 1970s—Yanukovych chose not to sign the AA/DCFTA in Vilnius and resumed talks on ECU membership. In turn, Russia provided Ukraine with a 15bn USD loan and reduced the gas price in December 2013 (Kuzio 2015: 182; Menon & Rumer 2015: 51-2; 76-8). From 2010-2013, the EU’s share in exports of goods declined by 3.7%, while Russia’s fell by 1.6%. Russian

29 The ECU is a regional integration project launched in 2010. It aims to create a common customs framework and a unified market between its members. It served as the basis on which Putin’s prestige project of the Eurasian Economic Union—modeled after and in response to the EU—was to be built (Cadier 2014: 80-81). The Eurasian Economic Union launched 2015, without Ukrainian membership.

30 Menon and Rumer (2015: 51-2) point to more self-driven motivations in that the AA/DCFTA would have threatened Yanukovych’s corruption network.
imports fell by 6.3% (WTO 2011; 2014). Again, trade was largely disconnected from a pronounced change in political orientation, this time toward Moscow.

In sum, Russia made new gains in indirect authority since 2010 due to the rise of a leader Moscow had supported in 2004 and whose party was linked to UR. He increased his power, extended Russian base rights, decided against NATO membership and ultimately refrained from signing an AA/DCFTA. Given Putin’s promotion of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and ECU, full membership being incompatible with the AA/DCFTA, this was likely perceived as a victory against the West, even if Yanunkoych’s hesitance to join Putin’s frameworks deserves mentioning (Vanderhill 2013: 62; Menon & Rumer 2015: 63, 76, 112; Cadier 2014: 81-2; Tsygankov 2014: 284).

What undid these gains were demonstrations on the same Maidan Square in Kyiv that had symbolized the Orange Revolution. As Menon and Rumer (2015: 82) put it in reference to previous gains, their “reversal was dramatic and put Putin at risk of a historic defeat.” Onuch (2015: 34-5) divides the protest that came to be known as the ‘Euromaidan’ in four phases. It started forming in Kyiv after Yanukovych announced his decision not to sign the AA/DCFTA on November 21, 2013. It then became a mass event engulfing more cities after a police crackdown on November 30. An announcement of repressive laws in January 2014 when participation was declining—according to a diary in Yanukovych’s mansion full repression of the protest was decided at meeting with Putin (Wilson 2014: 80-1)—was followed by police action that led to the death of four protesters. Finally, all-out violence including the use of snipers broke out on February 18 and lasted until February 21 leading to the death of over 100 people (Reid 2014: 268; Wilson 2014: 86-94; Wilson 2015: 31).

Such a Russian preference is also indicated by her support for hard-liners in the Ukrainian government (Wilson 2014: 84).
On February 21 an agreement between opposition leaders—confirmed by the activist Maidan council—and Yanukovych was reached under EU mediation, but not signed by Russia (Menon & Rumer 2015: 80; Wilson 2014: 90-1). Yanukovych fled Kyiv early the next day. Assumptions on his motive include a fear of an overthrow after the deal met with an unfavorable mass reception and defections in his security and party apparatus (Kuzio 2015: 183; Menon & Rumer 2015: 81). The day after his flight, Ukraine’s parliament voted in an interim president and an interim government was established on February 27. It was dominated by Timoshenko’s Fatherland Party, but also included nationalists from the Freedom Party. The new authorities were not recognized and accused of fascism by Russia (ibid.: 93-4, 125, 147-8).

The Use of Force – Reacting to an Ephemeral Gain

The period from Putin’s first presidency in 2000 onward is relevant for the study of the use of force, in line with the focus on decisions by a single leader. The MID4 data-set covering it until 2010 does not record any incident reaching the level of a use of force. On the level of a display of force two are reported. A border violation in 2005 and an unarmed missile from Russia’s Sevastopol base falling onto Ukrainian territory in 2008 (Palmer et al. 2015). For 2010-3, this author found no evidence of a use of force. As the following demonstrates, there is no doubt of its occurrence by late February 2014.

A ‘people’s mayor’ was proclaimed in Crimea on February 23 (ibid.: 108). In the morning of February 27, armed men seized its parliament, which voted for secession and a referendum on it. Reportedly, these were disgruntled Crimean riot police, reports of Russian

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32 Exact figures differ, Reid (2015: 268) reporting 111 dead, including 17 police, while Wilson (2015: 349) counts 103 dead of which 13 were police.
33 It foresaw a return to the 2004 constitution followed by additional reform in September 2014, a unity government and new elections by December 2014, meaning that Yanukovych would have stayed in office until 2015, albeit with decreased authority (Menon & Rumer 2015: 80; Wilson 2014: 90-1).
34 For an account that emphasizes nationalists in government and a threat to Russian values emanating from them, see: Trygankov (2015: 293).
involvement also existing (ibid.: 10).\(^{35}\) Intimidation at the vote in parliament was confirmed by Igor Strelkov, a leader of the so-called local ‘self-defense’ with suspected ties to Russian military intelligence. In the night after the vote, “the full-scale Russian military invasion of Crimea began, starting with the seizure of Sevastopol and Simferopol airports” (ibid.: 111). After the referendum, Russia annexed Crimea on March 18, 2014 (Wilson 2014: 110-4, 130; Wilson 2015: 350).

As to the scope condition of personalized decision-making, Putin, who later admitted to the use of Russian forces, claims to have decided to seize Crimea at an overnight meeting on February 22-3 (BBC 2015; Wilson 2015: 351). Putin’s account of his 2014 decision demonstrates the level of urgency expected after an ephemeral gain, as it was reportedly taken immediately after Yanukovych fled. Even if one were to doubt this account, the beginning of the larger operation on February 28 still attests to a high level of urgency. While no comparable information is available for 2004, Mankoff’s (2009: 54-6) description of centralized foreign policy decision-making under Putin justifies a focus on him.\(^{36}\)

Even as the death toll was minimal, the blockade of Ukrainian installations constituted a use of force with an obvious impact on Ukraine and without Kyiv’s approval (Jones et al. 1996; cf. Allison 2014: 1258-68 on legal issues).\(^{37}\) After the annexation, ‘people’s mayors’ were also proclaimed in the east, bus-loads of protesters from Russia supporting demonstrations. By April 6, administrative buildings were taken over and by April 12, Strelkov’s group entered the region. Throughout the period, Russia positioned troops near Ukraine’s border, reports suggesting Russian advisors on the ground (Wilson 2014: 129-35).

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\(^{35}\) Other reports suggest that the referendum which was decided on February 27 was supposed to be about a higher level of autonomy within Ukraine. The referendum was initially scheduled for May 25, 2014, coinciding with Ukraine’s presidential elections (RFE/RL 2016). On March 6, it was moved to its original March 16 date and its question was specified to be about union with Russia (Loiko 2014; Herszenhorn 2014).

\(^{36}\) Still, Mankoff (2009: 56) does find some independent influence of Gazprom and Russia’s security organs.

\(^{37}\) Fully following the MID criteria one would have to address the complication that disguised forces are not to be considered in coding (Jones et al. 1996: 169-70). However, since Putin admitted to the use of Russian forces later, a strict interpretation is not made (Wilson 2014: 111).
Moscow’s direct involvement then became ever more evident by summer 2014 (ibid.: 139-43; Allison 2014: 1257). Clashes still occur, despite of a ceasefire accord reached in February 2015, with 9,160 deaths reported as of writing (Kramer 2016; UN 2016).

In sum, after losing gains preceded by a phase of low authority for a second time, Putin chose to establish direct authority in Crimea—the only Ukrainian province with a majority ethnic Russian population (Menon & Rumer 2015: 23)—by force. With the increase of Russia’s support for separatism in the east, the use of force escalated. This study focuses on the initial decision to use force as it is the closest to the sudden reversal of gains in February 2014. Russian actions in eastern Ukraine were described as part of an escalation dynamic, including a realization of having alienated Ukraine’s elites and population, which displays the importance of the initial decision (Menon & Rumer 2015: 84-5).

Differentiating 2004 and 2014?

The finding of two ephemeral gains in Russian authority space in Ukraine requires a discussion of the theory’s ability to differentiate their effects. While the reinforcement effect would suggest that the second ephemeral was simply more intense, there is no theoretically derived threshold allowing to distinguish a priori when such reinforcement is necessary, limiting this explanation’s predictive ability. So, can other indicators be derived from the theory that could have better explained why violence broke out 2014, but not 2004?

Surprise, which is crucial for the ephemeral gain as it magnifies emotions triggering inordinate violence, offers the first potential explanation. While protests against Kuchma were forming since the 2000 tape scandal, Ukraine’s population was seen as apathetic before Yanukovych’s decision not to sign the AA/DCFTA (Menon & Rumer 2015: 54-6; Wilson 2005: 51-70). Also, while the Orange Revolution was organized by a network of
opposition groups, the Euromaidan was less systematically prepared and more spontaneous, meaning that it was likely less anticipated by the authorities and in extension Moscow (Onuch 2015: 36). A different level of surprise at the loss appears even more plausible when considering that the 2004 protests occurred at a pre-set election date in contrast to the Euromaidan. Thus, it is more likely that Russia expected that its gains may prove ephemeral in 2004, which could have reduced the level of surprise at their loss.

A higher level of the previous gain in 2014 also provides an explanation. As described, Kuchma courted NATO and the EU until 2004, despite increasing concessions to Russia. He also cooperated only to a limited degree during the Orange Revolution. In comparison, Yanukovych excluded NATO membership already in 2010 and made no strong overtures to the West except for his continued negotiations on the AA/DCFTA. With regard to it, Putin appeared to have outbid the EU right before the protests started, adding an element of victory in close temporal proximity to the protests that were to undo his gains.

Still, while these arguments differentiate the ephemera ex-post in addition to the reinforcement effect, they are ad hoc in nature. Viewed in isolation, 2004 still appears as a highly surprising situation perceived as a catastrophe in Russia after a period of gains, preceded by a period of low authority which was in turn preceded by a triumphal period.

Considering mortality salience may be more effective when aiming for predictive value. While the Orange Revolution did not lead to any fatalities, the Euromaidan turned violent. Even as most casualties were protesters, over a dozen police also died. Against the background of reports on Russian infiltration of Ukraine’s security apparatus and training for the Berkut—Crimean Berkut later receiving Russian medals and citizenship—these deaths can be seen as associated with Putin’s in-group. He even praised the Berkut in a 2014
interview and expressed concern over their treatment in Ukraine in early March 2014 (Wilson 2014: 74-76, 110; Wilson 2015: 348; Putin 2014a; Putin 2014c).\textsuperscript{38} Additionally, Putin also spoke of killings after the Euromaidan, warning that “uncontrolled crimes” (Putin 2014a) may spread to the south-east. Thus, deaths on and after the Maidan may have sparked feelings of injustice. However, it should be emphasized that while police deaths are documented, Wilson (2014: 96) emphasizes that there was only “minimal disorder” after Yanukovych fled. Perhaps more important in the deaths of the police is that they symbolized a failure to dissolve the protest. Considering the signs that Putin preferred such an operation, this may have triggered a fear of a similar situation in Moscow which could prove life-threatening. When asked if he would fight “to the bitter end” (Putin 2015c) in a comparable situation, Putin replied that his KGB training “boils down to absolute loyalty to people and the country” (ibid.). Combined with Hill and Gaddy (2015: 63) finding that he holds a “firm conviction that his personal destiny is intertwined with that of the Russian state and its past,” and his fear expressed in 1999 of Russia “becoming not just a second but even a third tier country,” (ibid.: 61) a reminder of his mortality may have been associated with a risk to the nation. As to the distinguishing value of mortality, Putin referred to different levels of violence, stating that compared to 2004, “now, they [alluding to the West] have thrown in an organized and well-equipped army of militants” (Putin 2014b; cf. Putin 2014a, Allison 2014: 1289-90). Finally, his stereotyping and strong reiteration of views expressed prior to 2014—described in the following—indicates worldview defense. Still, the inclusion of mortality salience adds an element of over-determination as it combines with the reinforcement effect and the other accounts for the varying reaction in 2014.

\textsuperscript{38} The Berkut was Ukraine’s riot police. It was dissolved on the day before the Crimean parliament was taken (Reuters 2014).
Thus, while ‘ephemeral gain (2004)’ and ‘reinforced ephemeral gain + mortality salience (2014)’ indicates the change in intensity of effects over time in terms of the inter-temporal analytic step, larger-N studies are required to identify the relative importance of these elements in the population of cases of the use of force in interstate relations.

Figure 3: Development of Russian Authority Space in Ukraine

5.1.2 Mechanisms

Analyzing mechanisms, the author focuses on the main statements made by Putin after the Euromaidan in 2014. These are his initial remarks on March 4 (Putin 2014a), his annexation speech on March 18 (Putin 2014b), a call-in TV interview in April (Putin 2014c), his Victory Day speech in Crimea (Putin 2014d), a speech at the Valdai Discussion Club in October (Putin 2014e), an address to the Federal Assembly in December (Putin 2014f) and a press conference the same month (Putin 2014g). Special attention is paid to the first two, as they occurred in the closest proximity to the decision to use force.

Threat and Fear of Reversion

As described, the fear of a return to a period of subordination prior to the gains which proved ephemeral is central in Midlarsky’s (2011) theory. Two periods of low authority exist, that after the loss of Ukraine in 1991 until gains under Kuchma and the Orange rule. The latter was connected to a defeat under Putin as opposed to the Soviet collapse, which
as explained, Putin blames on Soviet leadership. He emphasized this in March 2014, claiming that Moscow had started a “sovereignty parade” (Putin 2014b).

Putin connected Russian authority space in Ukraine to the collapse of the Soviet Union, stressing that “it was only when Crimea ended up as part of a different country that Russia realized that it was not simply being robbed, it was being plundered” (ibid.; Wilson 2014: 185). Those plundering and subordinating were the victors of the Cold War, the West, accused of lying about NATO expansion and of following a policy of containment (ibid.). In his Federal Assembly address, Putin added not to have forgotten “support for separatism in Russia from across the pond”, which “left no doubt that they would gladly let Russia follow the Yugoslav scenario” (Putin 2014f; cf. Putin 2014g). In the 1990s, the country would have been “going through such hard times that realistically it was incapable of protecting its interest” (Putin 2014f.; cf. Hill & Gaddy 2015: 262). Notably, the period after 1990 is generally viewed as one where feelings of subordination and humiliation dominated, the debate also having focused on if it constitutes Russia’s Weimar (Clunan 2014: 280, 284-5; Larson & Shevchenko 2014: 277).39 Apart from his reminder of the role of Crimea in Russia’s subordination in the 1990s, Putin also spoke of ethnic Russians there having been dropped “like a sack of potatoes” (Putin 2014b; cf. Hill & Gaddy 2015: 3), “time and time again attempts [would have been] made to deprive Russians of their historical memory, even of their language and to subject them to forced assimilation” (Putin 2014b; cf. Wilson 2014: 125). Putin did not specify if this was related to both potential periods of subordination. In light of conflicts over mass starvation under Stalin and the

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39 Midlarsky (2011: 138-9, 373) refers to the end of the Cold War having been followed by assistance for Russia, the reversal of the Chechen victory of 1996 by Putin, and to Russia’s economic growth as factors that may contribute to Russian extremism not rising. Still, he notes that Russia’s invasion of Georgia could be a sign of future difficulties or contribute to a lower likelihood of extremism if gains are consolidated. Indeed, this author was able to get an impression of current work by Midlarsky applying the ephemeral gain’s theory to Putin by looking at Russia’s entire authority space with a stronger focus on the economy, as opposed to this paper’s particularistic focus on indirect authority in the target state.
status of Ukrainian partisans like Bandera, declared a hero of Ukraine in 2010 by Yushchenko, he likely referred to both (Menon & Rumer 2015: 40-1; Wilson 2014: 342).40

As to the loss in 2004, Putin connected the Euromaidan and Orange Revolution in his March speech, evident by the quotation in the mortality salience part and by him speaking of “another government takeover,” (Putin 2014b) actors being “disciplined by foreign sponsors” (ibid.). In his initial remarks, he stressed that “it is not the first time our Western partners are doing this in Ukraine” (Putin 2014a). He also referred to 2004 as an “absurd and a mockery of the constitution” (Putin 2014b). At Valdai, he emphasized that “apparently, those who constantly throw together new ‘colour revolutions’ consider themselves ‘brilliant artists’ and simply cannot stop.” (Putin 2014e). Thus, the loss of 2004 was salient. Still, the emphasis in terms of subordination was on the 1990s. Of course, this can stem from the fact that the Orange Revolution described as “the Kremlin’s greatest foreign relations blunder since 1991” (Petrov & Ryabov 2006: 145) and “not only a defeat, but a scandalous humiliation” (ibid.) occurred under Putin, providing incentives to downplay its significance. On the other hand, the degree to which a perception of subordination to the West was justified—the West being considered the key reference point of Russia’s foreign policy and status perception (Forsberg 2014: 323; Mankoff 2009: 16)—may have been higher in the Yeltsin years, Larson and Shevchenko (2014: 272) emphasizing that Yeltsin’s alcohol problem added “insult to injury.” Still, the intuition that “for Putin, as a statesmen and Russian leader, the ‘loss’ of Ukraine to the EU for the second time, after he had ‘lost’ Ukraine during the 2004 Orange Revolution, was not an outcome he was prepared to accept” (Menon & Rumer 2015: 75-76) appears correct based on Putin’s reference to the

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40 Yamukovych claimed—as opposed to Yushchenko—that the mass starvation of the 1930s was not a genocide. Bandera’s ‘Hero of Ukraine’ title was revoked 2011 and Ukraine passed a law to increase the status of Russian in July 2012 (Menon & Rumer 2015: 45; Levy 2011, Tsygankov 2015: 289, 291).
Orange Revolution (cf. Larson & Shevchenko 2014: 276). With protests starting a day before its ninth anniversary, on the same square, memories of the 2004 ephemeral must have been highly salient (Wilson 2014: 66).

Having referred to periods of perceived subordination, Putin also expressed a perception of threat. In his March speech, he warned that the West may be aiming to create a similar situation in Russia by using a “fifth column, this disparate bunch of ‘national traitors’” (Putin 2014b). In his call-in interview, he stressed that after Yugoslavia “was cut into small pieces”, now “someone would like to do the same with us” (Putin 2014c), also speaking of efforts to pull apart Ukraine and Russia. Putin accused the West of continuously “try[ing] to contain Russia’s growing capabilities.” (Putin 2014f) and aiming to “tear out [her] teeth and claws” in a Russian bear analogy stressing nuclear deterrence (Putin 2014g). Russian action in Crimea would have been an expression of “protecting our independence, our sovereignty, our right to exist” (ibid.). He also stated that Russians in Crimea were under threat in March (Putin 2014b), later claiming that a threat to “the Russian speaking population” (Putin 2014c) was guiding him in his decisions after the Euromaidan.

Thus, both scenarios for fears of a reversal to a subordinate state described in the theoretical part are observable. First, the loss of Crimea after the dissolution of the Soviet Union was singled out as a symbol for Russia’s larger subordination to the West. That this was combined with accusations of Western involvement in 2014 and 2004 as well as claims of the West’s historically bad intentions, signals a fear of a reversion triggered by the ephemeral gain concerning the acting state. Second, the declared concern for ethnic Russians in Ukraine, combined with claims of their previous mistreatment, fits to the scenario of a fear of a return to subordination on the territory over which indirect authority expands.
Excursus: On the Gap Between Statement and Reality and on Previous Views

It needs to be emphasized that the author does not judge the correctness of Putin’s views (cf. Wilson 2014: 11 for a critique of the 1990s humiliation narrative and Allison 2014: 1262-3 on threats to ethnic Russians). Indeed, an emotionally skewed perspective would fit the theory’s predictions. While the argument that Putin made his statements for domestic consumption, but did not act upon the expressed views cannot be fully disproven, the existence of triggers for the predicted psychological mechanisms combined with the close resemblance of his statements to these mechanisms indicates the opposite (cf. Allison 2014: 1282 on the instrumental use of identity rhetoric). Also, as Hill and Gaddy (2015: 263) emphasize, his March 18 speech reflected themes that ran through his presidency. Claims of the West spreading ‘colored revolutions’ existed since they began (Wilson 2009). Putin hinted at foreign support for terrorism and others wanting to take Russia apart after the 2004 Beslan attacks and as described, long held a negative view of the Soviet collapse (Putin 2004; cf. Hill & Gaddy 2015: 315-6). From the theory’s perspective, this seems unproblematic, especially as 2014 was a reinforced ephemeral gain. Previously held fears, suspicions and grievances can simply turn more intense after an ephemeral gain.

Injustice, Dishonor and Blame

The second mechanism of a perception of the loss being unjust due to a lack of reciprocity or due to a view that existing rules are deficient is mirrored in Putin’s rhetoric. On Crimea becoming part of Ukraine, he stressed that “the people could not reconcile themselves to

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41 Allison (2014: 1282-9) is skeptical of the explanatory value of Russian statements on a threat to ethnic Russians, pointing out that the Kremlin’s policy in this realm has been historically inconsistent, emphasizing that “identity tags used seem to be attached to an exercise of structural power” (ibid: 1287).

42 “Some want to tear off a big chunk of our country. Others help them to do it. They help because they think that Russia, as one of the greatest nuclear powers of the world, is still a threat, and this threat has to be eliminated. And terrorism is only an instrument to achieve these goals” (Putin 2004).
this outrageous historical injustice” (Putin 2014b; cf. Hill & Gaddy 2015: 3). In the language of justice as fairness, he lamented a lack of reciprocity. As Russia recognized “de facto and de jure that Crimea was Ukrainian territory,” (Putin 2014b) it would have “expected Ukraine to remain our good neighbor” (ibid.). Thus, the Euromaidan was seen as Kyiv not reciprocating. Putin also stressed that “Russia strived to engage in dialogue with our colleagues in the West,” but that it “saw no reciprocal steps,” (ibid.) listing his grievances from NATO expansion to missile defense (cf. Hill & Gaddy 2015: 311). He also complained about not being allowed to freely develop capabilities, claiming that while de jure eliminated, Cold War export controls would “in reality […] still [be] in effect” (Putin 2014b). He later complained that despite Russia’s attempts to cooperate, the West “never stopped building walls” (Putin 2014g). This mirrors analysts who focus on Moscow seeking equal status with the West, describing Russo-Western/U.S. relations as a history of (mis-) perceived status insults, contributing to increasing Russian assertiveness (Larson & Shevchenko 2014, Forsberg 2014).43

On the role of international rules, Putin did not stress that the rules in place are unfair, but that the West’s interpretation is one of “whatever Jupiter is allowed, the Ox is not” (Putin 2014c). He made the connection between the ephemeral gain at the Euromaidan and his dissatisfaction specific stating that “like a mirror, the situation in Ukraine reflects what is going on and what has been happening in the world over the past several decades” (Putin 2014b; Hill & Gaddy 2015: 265). Referring to the U.S. and its allies, he stressed that they

43 Larson and Shevchenko’s (2014: 276-277) analysis has parallels to this one, them deriving emotions of anger and humiliation from status insults. They also intuitively refer to parallels between 2014 and 2004. However, this element is not explicitly theorized and their focus on social identity theory in the study of U.S.-Russian relations differs from this paper’s focus on authority space in Ukraine and the ephemeral gains theory. Still, the parallels indicate that future studies may have to test for alternative socio-psychological approaches. Notably, a focus on status insults can be seen as convergent with Midlarsky’s (2011) humiliation mechanism, also carrying an element of subordination. Finally, Tsygankov (2015: 297) criticizes their and emotion focused approaches in general as “not sufficient” (ibid.: 297). This, of course, is true—and likely true for rational approaches—the target of this paper not being to establish sufficiency, but to demonstrate the ephemeral gains theory’s applicability and ability to provide a plausible explanation for temporal variance.
“prefer not to be guided by international law in their practical policies, but by the rule of the gun,” (Putin 2014b) trying to “force the necessary resolutions from international organizations” (ibid.). Of course, such complaints were present in the past, Russia’s National Security Strategy of 2000 warning of “attempts to create an international relations structure based on domination by developed Western countries […] under US leadership and designed for unilateral solutions (including the use of military force)” (Weitz 2010: 200). Such sentiments were also expressed in Putin’s 2007 Munich Security Conference speech (Hill & Gaddy 2015: 316-7; Larson & Shevchenko 2014: 277). Given this perception of a dysfunctional system of international rules with the ephemeral gain in 2014 being another demonstration of it, it is not surprising that an emphasis on autonomy—demonstrative of the fallback to honor—was present. Putin continued his Jupiter-Ox metaphor, stressing that “the ox may not be allowed something, but the bear will not even bother to ask permission” (Putin 2014c). He later stated that “if for some European countries national pride is a long-forgotten concept and sovereignty is too much of a luxury, true sovereignty for Russia is absolutely necessary for survival” (Putin 2014f) and demonstrated his readiness to face sanctions already in the annexation speech, displaying the defiant risk-taking attitude expected for honor-based behavior (Putin 2014b). Finally, while Putin attempted to explain the legality of the annexation, there is little doubt that it broke international rules, another sign of an honor-based behavioral orientation (Allison 2014: 1258-68).

His claims of injustice were followed by stereotypical blaming. Despite the role of the West in the Euromaidan having been reportedly even smaller than in 2004, Putin blamed it for the occurrence (see: 4.2). Even starker was his description of Ukrainian authorities. Despite being made up mostly of figures from Timoshenko’s Fatherland Party, he claimed
that “nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes and anti-Semites [who] executed this coup” (Putin 2014b) and that “the intentions of these ideological heirs of Bandera, Hitler’s accomplice during World War II” (ibid.) were clear. Still, while referring to the interim authorities as illegitimate, he also said that some contacts were upheld, even as full ties could only develop after elections in his initial remarks, adding that these would not be recognized if “accompanied by the same kind of terror that we are seeing now” (Putin 2014a).

Humiliation-Shame

Finally, an “abrupt diminution of pride” (Midlarsky 2011: 48) when losing authority space, the referent being the triumphal period perceived as entitling a state to control, was evident. Putin’s annexation speech was replete with historical references to the described period of the Kievan Rus’, Vladimir the Great’s baptism and the history of Sevastopol (Putin 2014b; Hill & Gaddy 2015: 269). He also stated in his May 9 speech that “Crimea and Sevastopol [had returned] to their native land” (Putin 2014d). On March 18, he emphasized that the peninsula had only been moved to the Ukrainian SR under Khrushchev (Putin 2014b). He further stressed that “in people’s hearts and minds, Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia” (ibid.), that Ukrainians and Russians are “one people,” (ibid.) and that after the end of the Soviet Union the “Russian nation became one of the biggest, if not the biggest ethnic group in the world to be divided by borders” (ibid.). In his 2014 parliamentary address, he went as far as to compare the significance of the site of Vladimir the Great’s baptism and of Sevastopol for Russians to the role of the Temple Mount for Jews and Muslims (Putin 2014f). Thus, Putin used the triumphal period to deduce Russian claims to authority in Ukraine, stereotyping opponents by reference to Moscow’s historical enemies.

Taking into account the steps taken to link the Russian Federation to Tsarist and Soviet
history and his personal feeling of connection to it, the salience of the triumphal period of Russian authority in Ukraine is not surprising.

A fear of humiliation after the Euromaidan—a reminder of the humiliation after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which when considering his remark on Russia’s inability to defend itself is close to humiliation defined as “rendering the other helpless to resist […] debasement” (Lindner 2014: 293)—is evident in Putin’s statement that “we are against having a military alliance making itself at home right in our backyard or in our historic territory. I simply cannot imagine that we would travel to Sevastopol to visit NATO sailors” (Putin 2014b; cf. Larson & Shevchenko 2014: 276-7 on humiliation in 2014).

While losing authority was threatening humiliation, there is less evidence that the 2014 defeat was seen as shameful in violating a code of honorable conduct. What is arguably the closest to shame based on the behavior of a member of the leader’s in-group is Putin’s disdain for Yanukovych. He stressed that he warned him of leaving Kyiv, stating mockingly on his alleged decision to pull back security forces: “nice move, of course” (Putin 2014c) and claimed that during EU mediation, Yanukovych had been “ready to agree to anything” (ibid.). Indeed, while claiming that Yanukovych had been at risk of being killed, when asked if he sympathized with him, Putin answered to have “completely different feelings,” (Putin 2014a) asking rhetorically if Yanukovych had done “everything the law and the voters’ mandate empowered him to do” (ibid.). However, the blame was still mostly placed on external actors like the West and Ukrainian nationalists.

Summary of Results

In sum, the highest level of confirmation for the theory as being able to predict the non-use of force in 2004 by an absence and its use 2014 by a presence of ephemera is not reached
since the initial hypothesis of no gain prior to 2004 did not hold. Still, an increased intensity of the effect of the second ephemeral is highly plausible. Reinforcement, a higher level of surprise and previous gains as well as mortality salience all point to it. For 2014, all mechanisms received support, even if there was little evidence for shame. In light of the confirmation for mechanisms linked to the action provoking emotion of anger in Putin’s statements, combined with his decision to use force having followed immediately after a reinforced ephemeral gain and mortality salience, it appears highly plausible that Putin’s reasoning was impacted by the very forces identified in the ephemeral gains theory.

5.2 Probing Alternative Explanations for Variance in the Use of Force

Before testing other explanations for temporal variance, the time-points at which the use of force occurred as well as at which a decision not to use force can be assumed are specified. Putin claims to have made his decision on Crimea in the night leading into February 23. Still, it is safer to rely on the situation on the ground. Here, Wilson (2014: 110-1) describes that the main military operation started by February 28. With regard to 2004, Putin declared that he would work with any election winner on December 6, which is when Tolstrup (2014: 156) ends his account of the Russian role in the Orange Revolution. Petrov and Ryabov (2006: 160) find that after EU mediation in early December, Russia “realiz[ed] the inevitability of Yanukovych’s defeat,” Wilson (2005: 153) claiming that Moscow “backed off” for the third round. Thus, this date is chosen to mark a decision to not respond with force, at least directly, to the change in leadership.44

44 For a discussion of traces of evidence that a use of force was contemplated as well as on the plausibility that it could have been conducted, see the segment on Ukraine’s capabilities in the realist part of this study (5.2.1).
5.2.1 Realist Considerations

Mearsheimer’s (2014) realist account of Russian actions is one of the West—driven by liberal thought and ignorant of Moscow’s interest (ibid.: 8)—provoking Russia by expanding NATO and the EU as well as by supporting a “coup” (ibid.: 1) in Ukraine. Russia, “a declining power,” (ibid.: 12) would have reacted defensively to prevent a shift in Kyiv’s allegiance (ibid.: 9; cf. Tsygankov 2015: 295). Such an argument emphasizing the threat of Ukraine turning to the West could also have been made in 2004 if Moscow had used force. In light of this author’s finding of a higher threat of Ukraine joining NATO in 2004, it may even have been more convincing. Instead, the author argues that an increase in Russian capabilities combined with a different strategic orientation of the West is more likely to account for variance from a realist perspective.

First, a few remarks on the absolute value of Ukraine and Crimea specifically are in order, which is seen as constant in this probe. As Allison (2014) explains, Russia’s seizure meant full control over its Black Sea Fleet base, with Crimea also being considered valuable for Moscow’s offensive capabilities. Russia no longer had to pay rent or to refrain from fleet expansion. It also conquered several Ukrainian bases and can lay claim to hydrocarbon reserves at Crimea’s shores (ibid.: 1277-82). Finally, Mearsheimer (2014: 5) notes Ukraine’s importance to Russian security based on geographic proximity.45

Prospects for Ukraine’s Future Alignment

The Orange and the Euromaidan revolutions were associated with a threat of a turn in Ukraine’s strategic orientation. As shown, NATO was prominent in Putin’s 2014 account

45 If operations in the east were planned by February, then the dependence of Russia’s military on supplies from the region would also be relevant (Choursina & Gomez 2014).
However, there is evidence of Ukraine joining NATO being likelier 2004. In March 2004, the alliance expanded adding Bulgaria, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Romania as well as the Baltic states, displaying its readiness to admit former Soviet republics (Stent 2014: 77-8). Kuchma’s overtures provided a basis to be picked-up, as the 2002 NATO-Ukraine Action Plan mentioned Kyiv’s membership goal (cf. Kuzio 2003: 40 for an optimistic account of Ukrainian membership prospects after Kuchma). Even if Yushchenko avoided foreign policy in his campaign, as described before, Moscow was aware of strong indications for his Western orientation (Kuzio 2005: 39). Indeed, developments after the analytic time-frame attest to it. As Pifer (2009: 23) notes, “by early 2006, officials in Kiev and NATO capitals envisaged the possibility of Ukraine obtaining an MAP in the autumn.” While the Bush administration only unveiled its ‘Freedom Agenda’ that saw NATO expansion as part of democracy promotion in January 2005, it had “pursued [it] well before” (Stent 2014: 82-3).46 In contrast, President Obama de-emphasized Eastern Europe, democracy promotion and NATO enlargement, despite the 2008 NATO summit outcome (Stent 2014: 218, 265-6; Wilson 2014: viii, 8-9, 27; cf. Menon & Rumer 2015: 65-7; Delcour & Wolczuk 2015: 464). Indeed, the disagreement between the U.S. and European allies, Germany in particular, in Bucharest was a hint at the difficulties Kyiv would experience in trying to join the alliance, especially in the absence of strong U.S. support (Stent 2014: 165-8; Allison 2014: 1296). Furthermore, Russia demonstrated its resolve in the 2008 Georgia war, which was followed by a ‘reset policy’ received as “an American course correction, an admission that the American side was responsible for the deterioration in bilateral ties” (Stent 2014: 212) in Moscow. Even as relations cooled with Putin’s

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46 Wilson (2009: 370) explains the view from Russia (and China) as follows: “the Bush administration’s lofty rhetoric on democracy promotion was a sham, a means of disguising its ultimate goal of preserving US global hegemony.”
return to the presidency 2012, U.S. responses to increasing anti-Western rhetoric would have been restrained, as Washington focused on cooperation on Afghanistan, Iran and Syria (ibid.: 250-4). Regarding signs from within Ukraine, the interim government established on February 27, 2014 was—as noted—dominated by members of Timoschenko’s Fatherland party, the interim president being a close associate of hers (Wilson 2014: 147; BBC 2014). When Ukraine applied for a MAP in 2008, she had been prime minister. However, neither the interim government nor Timoschenko announced an intention to pursue NATO membership prior to Russia’s use of force. Timoschenko also took a reluctant position during the 2008 Georgia war as opposed to Yushchenko’s support for Tbilisi (Wilson 2015: 336-8). As to public opinion on NATO membership, a poll in September/October 2013 found that it was favored by 20% of Ukrainians, compared to 27% in 2004 (Sushko & Prystayko 2006: 128; NB News 2013). In sum, the change in the strategic orientation of the U.S., the split in NATO which came to the fore in 2008 and the reaction to Russia’s demonstration of resolve in Georgia all indicated a lower risk of Ukraine joining NATO in 2014. In turn, domestic factors analyzed in extension of realist orthodoxy appeared constant, with indications for support of NATO membership in the new ruling elite existing in both periods, but having to be seen against the background of low public support.

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47 Stoner and McFaul (2015: 173-5)—the latter was U.S. Ambassador to Russia from 2012 to 2014—criticize arguments of what they coin as a ‘too little’ school blaming Obama’s ‘reset’ for signaling weakness. They stress that steps such as not inviting Putin to a 2012 NATO summit, signing the Magnitsky Act—Russian officials were sanctioned after the prison death of a Russian lawyer—sending a delegation including gay athletes to the opening celebrations at Sochi, meeting with Russian human rights activists, stopping the administration’s pursuit of arms control, canceling a U.S. Russia summit and cutting talks on missile defense were taken after Putin was elected. They also emphasize that Putin was undeterred in 2008 from war with Georgia under Bush, doubting if deterrence was possible by focusing on U.S.-Soviet/Russian history. Still, many of these measures were outside the security realm (on missile defense, see below). Also, a general shift in orientation of the U.S. between 2004 and 2013 is evident and must be taken into account in an intertemporal comparison, even if another decrease in the quality of U.S-relations after the Snowden affair occurred in a period that not referred to in Stent’s (2014: 270-2) systematic analysis used above. If Putin could have been deterred goes beyond this plausibility probe as it focuses on causality. In light of Stoner and McFaul’s (2015) argument, it would require a detailed analysis of the Georgia war, also focusing on the more ambiguous conditions under which it began, which could decrease commensurability (cf. Stent 2014: 171-6). Also, the counterfactual of whether a response with sanctions and a strong focus on Eastern Europe in 2008 could have changed Moscow’s calculus in 2014 requires more discussion than a general enumeration of historical failures in deterring the Soviet Union and Russia (Stoner & McFaul 2015: 174-5).

48 Allison (2014: 1272) finds that the first draft legislation—it never moved to a vote—to introduce NATO and EU membership goals only reached the Rada secretariat on March 5. Ukraine’s interim President expressed a wish to change Ukraine’s non-bloc status by April 1 and Timoshenko expressed support for NATO membership only on April 26, all these events occurring after Russia used force (House of Lords 2015: 58; Karmanau 2014; Siruk 2014).

49 After a polarized election campaign it was 12% lower in early 2005 (ibid.). By November 2005, it was at 21% (Pifer 2009: 24).
Regarding EU accession, the EU was described as experiencing a growing ‘enlargement fatigue’ by O’Brennan (2013), who identified an increase of reluctance in the field of enlargement by 2005, when the EU’s planned constitution failed in referenda in France and the Netherlands, in part due to the low popularity of Eastern Enlargement. It then increased, with the EU’s economic crisis (cf. Wilson 2014: 4-7). Despite the EU’s symbolic prominence on the aptly named Euromaidan, this made membership a distant possibility.\(^5\) In 2004, Kuchma was negotiating an Action Plan for the newly launched ENP, modeled after the EU’s enlargement policy (Kelly 2006). The ENP attempts to employ EU conditionality for democracy and stability promotion without offering membership (Brözel & van Hüllen 2014). In an analysis encompassing the period of the Orange Revolution and the beginning of Yushchenko’s presidency, Roth (2007: 510) found a split on extending a membership perspective to Kyiv. The fault-line ran between the South led by France opposing and new members supporting it as did Scandinavian members and the UK. Berlin linked its stance to Paris. Ultimately, the EU never offered membership. While the growth of enlargement fatigué may even suggest decreased prospects, this study will assume constancy in light of the preliminary nature of the analysis.\(^5\)

The threat of close economic integration was more pronounced 2014. The AA/DCFTA was the “the most extensive international agreement with a third country ever concluded by the European Union” (Sushko et al. 2012: 6) and awaited signature. In 2009, the EU had also launched the EaP. While its strongest advocates were states that saw Russia as a security risk—notably Poland—it still did not include a promise of membership, seen as

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5 This was confirmed by later events when lobbying, particularly by Poland and Sweden, for extending an EU membership perspective to Kyiv failed at the 2015 Riga EaP Summit, in large part due to German objections (Bidder & Weiland & Wittrock 2015). Of course, the summit was held after the Ukraine crisis had erupted, meaning that it provides only limited evidence on the actual membership prospects of Ukraine in late February 2014.

51 Domestically, there was strong elite support for European integration in both periods, evident in the very nature of the Euromaidan protest as well as in the aforementioned emphasis on European integration by Yushchenko. As to public support, 58% of Ukrainian’s supported EU membership in November 2013, while 50% of Ukrainian’s supported it after the election in 2005 (Worldwide News Ukraine 2013; Sushko & Prystayko 2006: 128).
the result of a compromise with more hesitant EU members (Menon & Rumer 2015: 111). As mentioned, the AA/DCFTA made Ukraine’s full participation in the ECU and EEU impossible. In realist terms, it threatened Russia’s relative latent power by decreasing its market access relative to the EU (cf. Menon & Rumer 2015: 69, 73-7; Hill & Gaddy 2015: 248, 358-60; Allison 2014: 1271 on Russian concerns and the ECU-EaP competition). Still, Yushchenko’s election also ended prospects of Kyiv joining the Common Economic Space. Nevertheless, due to Russia placing a stronger emphasis on regional integration frameworks and countering the EaP, suggesting a stronger interest, as well as due to the extent of the AA/DCFTA, a bigger threat of closer relations short of membership with the EU must be noted for 2014. Of course, the fact that the AA/DCFTA came fully (but provisionally) into effect later, may suggest that it was not Moscow’s main concern (EU Commission 2015; cf. Allison 2014: 1272). Still, Russia could have hoped to deter either side. Finally, Menon and Rumer (2015: 115-18) note that the agreement could have been seen as auguring EU and later NATO accession.

In sum, while prospects for EU accession did not differ strongly, even if the AA/DCFTA may have had an impact, the potential of deeper European integration was stronger. It leading to NATO membership appears as a distant concern when considering the negative signs on Ukraine’s membership prospects in 2014. In this study, the higher direct threat of NATO accession in 2004 is weighed stronger than the EU related finding, as a realist perspective warrants a focus on military alliances. Thus, variance in the threat of Ukraine joining a competing alliance is not likely to explain variance in the use of force.

52 On April 6, 2016 a non-binding referendum in the Netherlands on the AA/DCFTA with Ukraine brought about a negative result. As of writing on April 12, the consequences of the vote for the agreement are not yet clear (van Tartwijk 2016).
The Balance of Power

As Table 1 shows, Russia had doubled its defense spending by 2013, while key European states decreased theirs. Its budget also grew faster than that of the U.S. While Germany, France, the UK and Italy all outspent Russia in 2004, it was ahead in 2013. The size of its military continued to outdo them. Russia was also better positioned geostrategically. Before the Orange Revolution, the U.S. left the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2001 and started preparations for a missile defense system. Even if official negotiations only began 2007, informal talks on stations in Poland and the Czech Republic were held since 2002 and Bush approved sites in 2004 (Stent 2014: 153-4; Stephanova 2008: 24). The U.S. also conducted the Iraq war while Baghdad owed 8bn USD to Moscow, which was its top trade partner in 2003, and established military bases in both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, gaining a significant presence in Central Asia (Stent 2014: 66; 88).

Table 1: Balance of Power in Europe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Potential Power</th>
<th>Actual Power</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2004</td>
<td>2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: GNI, population and size of military data derives from the World Bank (2015). Data on nuclear warheads is found in Kristensen and Norris (2013). For defense spending, SIPRI (2015) data was used. The table is an adaptation of Mearsheimer (2001: 384) with the addition of defense spending and the U.S. Total military power of the U.S. is included in the table. The U.S. stationed 114,860 active duty military personnel in Europe in 2004 as compared to 79,895 in 2013 (United States Department of Defense 2004, 2013).

53 While the system was supposed to counter the threat of Iranian and North Korean missiles, Russia claimed to be concerned about the potential of an extension of the technology and its subsequent effect on her nuclear deterrent (Stent 2014: 153-4).
54 While Russia ultimately agreed to a military presence of the U.S. in the region to support the Afghanistan campaign, this only occurred after Putin failed to convince Central Asian leaders from denying access to Washington (Stent 2014: 65).
Also, Russia lost influence in Serbia and Georgia after revolutions in 2000 and 2003 (Stoner & McFaul 2015: 167). Finally, Chechnya was still unstable as the assassination of Moscow’s vicegerent Kadyrov in May and the Beslan attacks in November 2004, parts of a larger terror wave, demonstrated (CNN 2004; Hill & Gaddy 2015: 92). In contrast, the 2014 Sochi Olympics close to Chechnya were a sign of increased stability (ibid.: 256-7). By then, the Iraq war had not provided significant gains to the U.S. and Russia’s diplomacy helped prevent U.S. strikes on its Syrian ally (Walt 2013; Smith-Park & Cohen 2013). The U.S. base in Uzbekistan was closed in 2005, creating a “net gain for the Kremlin” (Stent 2014: 121). After an uprising in Kyrgyzstan in 2010, its new leader had declared that U.S. basing rights would not be extend, the U.S. having to leave by July 2014 (ibid.: 237; Dzyubenko 2014). Also, Georgia’s government changed in 2012 and a new president came into office 2013, these changes were interpreted as signaling a less assertive stance of Tbilisi (Stent 2013: 238; Antidze 2013; Whitmore 2013, Rukhadze 2013). Finally, missile defense was down-scaled, even if a base in Poland is still planned for 2018 (Mearsheimer 2014: 6; Wasilewski 2013). Nevertheless, when applying Mearsheimer’s (2001) criteria of a change in the balance of power toward an unbalanced state—he considered Europe to be bipolar through the 1990s (ibid.: 380)—as occurring when one state becomes a potential hegemon, then the stark contrast with the U.S. as well as an aggregation of the data for the European states in terms of a potential balancing coalition does not show Russia reaching such a status, especially when also considering its relatively low potential power (cf. Hill & Gaddy 2015: 395). Still, the increase in Moscow’s capabilities

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55 Kyrgyzstan’s previous leader had not bulged to Russian pressure to close the base in 2009, some suggesting Moscow’s involvement in the uprising against him. Still, Russia and the U.S. cooperated to dissolve the crisis (Stent 2014: 237).
56 This point is not to be weighed heavily since official talks—as noted—started in 2007. Thus, it is unclear to which degree missile defense played a role in Russia’s calculus 2004, as plans were still preliminary (Boese 2004). Still, Stent (2014: 154) does note that Moscow reacted unfavorably when informed about U.S. plans after Bush had approved sites in 2004. Also, the initiative clearly showed a U.S. focus on the region by then.
57 Globally, Russia is clearly no potential hegemon given the discrepancy with the U.S., which also started to outgrow her by 2013 (World Bank 2015).
is not inconsequential either. The conflict in Ukraine hardly qualifies as an attempt to establish regional hegemony in Europe. Also, with the Budapest Memorandum not being a mutual defense treaty, Moscow—holding the world’s second largest nuclear arsenal—will have anticipated in 2004 and 2014 that the West would not intervene directly (Synovitz 2014). With higher reserves (see: 5.2.2), a stronger military, and a better geostrategic position in 2014, Moscow’s ability to endure other actions by the West, such as the provision of arms to Ukraine or sanctions increased (cf. Hill & Gaddy 2015: 352-4 on conscious attempts to decrease economic dependence). Finally, the question of Ukraine’s capabilities arises. While the macro-indicators all point to a dominance of Russia, Allison (2014: 1258, 1285-6) notes that Moscow’s timing could have been impacted by instability in Kyiv triggering the suspicion that Ukrainian troops would not react as loyalties may have been unclear. In turn, regarding Russian support for a scenario of Eastern Ukrainian separatism and union with Russia in 2004, Petrov and Ryabov (2006: 159) note that “apparently some members of the Russian leadership […] advocated such radical measures” (ibid.: 159). Still, they claim that this would only have been possible had Kuchma consented. This implies that the fact that Kuchma—who remained president until the transition to Yushchenko in January 2005—had control over Ukraine’s security apparatus may have deterred Moscow from increasing its territorial control. This is a difference that has to be noted as another factor in terms of the balance of power that could explain variance.58 However, it is highly speculative. Interim President Turchynov—appointed by Ukraine’s parliament on February 23, 2014—had been the head of Ukraine’s security services after the Orange

58 Hill and Gaddy (2015: 332-8) described that Russia focused on military reform and a new type of warfare combining political and economic elements after the 2008 Georgia war, even if “Russia did not have all the capabilities it needed” (ibid.: 339) by the time of the Crimea operation. This went along with measures to decrease economic dependence on the West and to create economic counter-leverage (ibid.: 352-358).
Revolution, thus not being inexperienced in matters of national security (ibid.: 151). Wilson (2014: 111) notes that it was only by March 11 that Moscow established military dominance in Crimea, implying that Ukraine could have reacted in a time frame of almost three weeks after Turchynov’s appointment. Also, Ukraine’s authorities seem to only have allowed for the use of force in self-defense on March 18, after a first death was reported in Crimea, meaning that inactivity by the military must not equal disobedience (Salem 2014). Allison (2014: 1260-1) explained Ukraine’s restraint as possibly impacted by the Georgia war, where President Saakashvili’s decision to use force was used by Moscow as a casus belli. However, a willingness not to provoke a wider conflict due to massive discrepancies in military power seems plausible for 2004 as well, even in the absence of the Georgia war. Of course, an exact assessment of these factors will only be possible when archives are opened. Still, these indicators do suggest that while the higher instability in 2014 may have lowered Ukraine’s ability to react compared to 2004, the importance of this element and thus the degree to which it was consequential to Putin’s decision remains in question. Even more so, as the speculation rests on the premise that Moscow would not have used force if it had suspected a Ukrainian reaction. Of course, if Kyiv’s fears of a Georgian scenario were justified, this may be in doubt.

Discussion of the Results

In sum, a lower intensity of the threat of Ukraine joining a rival alliance in 2014 was identified. However, changes to the balance of power still mean that a realist explanation cannot be discounted. Moscow’s increased ability to withstand Western actions short of war increased, while the West tilted away from Eastern Europe. Also, higher instability in Ukraine may have opened a wider window-of-opportunity. Russia acting based of higher
capabilities would be consistent with an offensive realist view of maximizing power—i.e. aiming for hegemony in the ‘near abroad’—by aiming for gains beyond the status quo ex-ante as well as with a decision for an active defensive strategy—what Allison (2014: 1272) calls “strategic denial” of NATO and EU membership—as opposed to 2004, when its capabilities may have been insufficient.59 This is in line with Mankoff’s (2009: 7-8) finding—mirrored by Menon and Rumer (2015: 98)—of Russia turning more assertive as its capabilities grow and with Hill and Gaddy’s (2015: 317) focus on Russia being “un-chained” when gaining higher financial independence in 2006, enabling its resurgence.60

Despite this finding, a detailed analysis is certainly necessary before concluding that the result leaves no room for an independent explanatory power of the ephemeral gains theory. Assuming a defensive goal, the threat of Ukraine joining NATO was not urgent in 2014 and Russia seemed better positioned. The question if it was in Moscow’s interest to risk stronger balancing against Russia arises even if we were to assume that a lack of capabilities fully explains the inaction in 2004. That the danger of such balancing was not only theoretical is evident in Washington’s renewed focus on Central and Eastern Europe as seen in troop movements in Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria, Romania and Poland (Lendon 2015).61 Also, if the target was to prevent the AA/DCFTA, then the conflict’s outcome points to miscalculation (cf. Allison 2014: 1272). From an offensive logic, the gain of Crimea—and at a later point separatist enclaves in the east—at the cost of an increasingly pro-Western (and pro-NATO) Ukraine inclined to view Russia as an existential threat casts doubt on Putin’s calculations in 2014 (cf. Delcour & Wolczuk 2015: 470-2;
Wilson 2014: 15; Vorobiov 2015). If these initial indications of an overestimation of the level of threat in 2014 compared to 2004 (defensive view) or overreach in 2014 (offensive view) were to prove justified, then the ephemeral gains theory’s—that shares realist concerns over levels of authority and territorial control—expectations of a higher level threat perception and anger leading to stronger reactions in 2014 could explain such biases.

5.2.2 Diversionary War

As noted, arguments focusing on regime stability are prominent. They not only rely on the domestic situation, but also on fears of democratic contagion and the role of the West in democracy promotion. There is reason to assume that the effect of these external factors should have been at least constant, meaning that the changes in the pillars of autocratic stability will distinguish diversionary motives (Gerschewski 2013). If anything, contagion concerns should have been higher in 2014. The peaceful Orange Revolution did not imply the same degree of instability to a Russian audience as the Euromaidan and reportedly received higher support in Russia’s opposition (Wilson 2014: 186). On democracy promotion, Delcour and Wolczuk (2015: 466) find “no evidence that the EU or the US were involved in any way in instigating the mass protest or providing any material or organizational support” in 2013-4. As described in the realist part, U.S. democracy promotion was seen as lower than during the Orange Revolution, with Washington deemphasizing the post-Soviet space. The EU’s approach to its neighborhood is characterized as having prioritized stability over democracy promotion with the launch of the ENP (Delcour & Wolczuk 2014: 461, 463-4). Generally, Western democracy promotion in 2014 will thus not be assumed to have provided a higher diversionary motive compared to 2004. Also, the Orange Revolution occurred shortly after the Georgian revolution of 2003, Tbilisi’s re-
establishment of control over its Ajaria province and an ongoing crisis in Abkhazia after the electoral defeat of Moscow’s preferred candidate, all accompanied by protests (Horvath 2011: 3-6). In contrast, protests preceding 2014—the ‘Arab Spring’—occurred in a larger temporal distance, in countries from different cultural spheres and had mostly turned into instability, democratic backsliding or civil war by 2014, all reducing their appeal.

**Legitimacy**

As discussed, Stoner and McFaul (2015: 175-181) see low growth and protests against Putin’s return to the presidency in 2011-2, combined with low approval ratings, as having led to a more assertive foreign policy. Treisman (2014) also points to economic performance. While Allison (2014: 1289-94) focuses on Western involvement and contagion concerns, he also mentions the 2011-2 protests. Referring to Treisman (2014), Tsygankov (2015: 295-6) in turn stresses that “the Kremlin did not feel especially weak” in 2014.

**Table 1: Russian Public Opinion**

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<td>Approval of Putin</td>
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<td>Approve/Disapprove (%)</td>
<td>69/29</td>
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<td>61/37</td>
<td>65/34</td>
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<td>Situation in the country</td>
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<td>Right/wrong track (%)</td>
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<td>40/41</td>
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<td>43/41</td>
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<td>Approval of government</td>
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<td>Approve/Disapprove (%)</td>
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<td>39/59</td>
<td>43/56</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Sentiment Index</td>
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<tr>
<td>0-100</td>
<td>72</td>
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<td>Economic Optimism</td>
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<td>0-100</td>
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<td>37</td>
<td>39</td>
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Source: Levada (2013: 58-9; 2016). The social sentiment index is a compound index focusing on the respondents’ satisfaction with his/her private life, the country’s situation, appraisal of authorities and future expectations. It is indexed to 100% for March 2008. Economic optimism is an aggregate index of individual assessments of Russia’s economic and one’s own financial situation as well as of current economic policy. The author uses data for January 2005, which is the closest poll to December 6, 2004. Its value is determined by the shares of positive and negative responses.

Indeed, GDP growth varied strongly being at 7.2% in 2004 compared to 1.3 % in 2013 (World Bank 2015; cf. Stoner & McFaul 2015: 176). Still, GDP per capita (PPP) in current
USD was up from 10,231 (2004) to 22,522 USD (2013) (World Bank 2015). Furthermore, the oil price (Brent Europe) could have invited optimism for Russia’s oil and gas dependent economy, being at an annual average of 38.62 USD in 2004 and 108.56 USD in 2013 (EIA 2015; cf. Gill 2015: 204). Also, Russia had built reserves of 498bn USD by February 2014, compared to 117bn by November 2004—paying back its IMF debt in January 2005—which provided it with a significant buffer (Central Bank of Russia 2015; Hill & Gaddy 2015: 317). Perhaps even more importantly, Rose and Munro (2011: 97) found that Russian perceptions of the economy diverge from macro-economic indicators. Indeed, Table 2 shows that economic optimism was slightly higher in 2014.

As to diffuse support, Putin received a smaller majority in the 2012 (63.6%) than in the 2004 (71.3%) presidential elections (Gill 2015: 96, 107). The degree to which these results are comparable is not fully evident as there are indications of lower fraud for the 2012 election, still the difference is stark (Zimmerman 2014: 288). Indicators for support closer to the revolutions show smaller differences. Putin’s approval rating rose to a virtually equal level as in 2004 by February 2014, which coincided with the Sochi Olympics. Other indicators were worse 2004, more people seeing the country as being on the wrong track and disapproving of the government, the social sentiment index also registering slightly higher discontent (Table 2). While Stoner and McFaul (2015: 181) point out that less than half of the Russian population wanted Putin to return for another term by 2013, the election was only scheduled for March 2018 (leaving four years, almost similar to 2004). Also, of

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62 Comparing these values to Germany, Russia’s GDP per capita (PPP) was 33% of Germany’s in 2004, catching up to 59% by 2013 (World Bank 2015).
63 Of course, as spending and expectations rose with the oil price, the limitations of this direct comparison need to be noted.
64 Another factor that may have increased specific support is higher stability in Chechnya (see part 4.1), the share of Russian’s who were ‘very afraid’ of terrorism was decreasing between 2004 and 2013 (Levada 2015: 164; cf. Gerschewski 2013: 20 on stability and security as sources of legitimacy).
65 In 2008, the presidential term was extended from four to six years (Hill & Gaddy 2015: 2).
those willing to vote given the option to name any candidate, 66% named Putin, the Communist Zyuganov coming second with 12% and one of the most prominent leaders of the 2011-2 protests, Alexei Navalny, being polled at a mere 1% in January 2014 (Levada 2014). Regarding the 2011-2 protests, Hill and Gaddy (2015: 251) describe how by a mixture of cooptation and repression, the movement “had been crushed” by fall 2013. It proved unable to “build up any momentum” (Gill 2015: 44) in part due to a lack of leadership and high ideological diversity. In late 2013, 78% of Russians reported that they would not participate in protests in their area, while a higher proportion was willing to rally in support of than in opposition to the government (ibid: 73). Tsygankov’s (2015: 296) hint at amnesties in 2014 as a sign of confidence also points to a low importance of this threat. Still, the protests between December 2011 and September 2012 were “a new peak” (Gill 2015: 41).

In comparison, the period from Putin’s ascendancy to the Orange Revolution was marked by an absence of protest (ibid.: 37). However, 2004 saw an increase in strikes (not registered for 2013) (Robertson 2011: 148; Federal States Statistics Service 2016; Judah 2013: 87).66

The level to which legitimacy statements based on anti-Western rhetoric and nationalism after the 2011-2 protests required conflict seems limited. The at times nationalist positions of the opposition, partly taken up by Putin, were seen as an “introverted nationalism” (Wilson 2014: 29) aimed against funds for and immigration from the Caucasus (cf. Gill 2015: 63-6 on Putin’s limited use of ethnic nationalist rhetoric). Indeed, Navalny condemned the annexation of Crimea as “imperial chauvinism” (Dolgov 2014), even if he—as opposed to more liberal figures—did not favor its return to Ukraine. Even as parts of the

66 Outside the analytic time-frame, pensioner protests erupted on January 9, 2005, two weeks before Yushchenko’s inauguration (Robertson 2011: 174-8). Still, as Putin had declared his decision to work with the winner of the elections in December by then, an about-face does not seem highly plausible.

In sum, a mixed picture emerges in the legitimacy pillar. One the one hand, GDP growth and electoral outcomes prior to the revolutions suggest worse conditions in 2014. Protests prior to the Euromaidan were more pronounced and even if a high determinacy is questionable, Putin’s increased anti-Western rhetoric may have been an incentive to react more strongly. On the other hand, Putin’s approval ratings had caught up to the highest values during the Orange Revolution by February 2014, GPD per capita was higher, as were reserves and the oil price. Public opinion on economic optimism, social sentiment, government performance and Russia’s path improved. Finally, the 2011-2 protests died down before 2014, with polls showing a big majority for Putin and the lack of a viable alternative candidate. In light of these mixed results, the focus will lie on the other pillars.

Repression

Among others, Gerschewski (2013: 21) proposes the ‘civil liberties’ and ‘political rights’ measures of Freedom House as quantitative indicators for repression. For 2004 and 2013, Russia received identical ratings of 5 in civil liberties and 6 in political rights (highest 1, lowest 7) (Freedom House 2005; 2014). From the perspective of regime-stability motives, this does not provide a strong indication for changes in repressive ability. Levitsky and Way (2010: 56-61) suggest a focus on scope and cohesion. On scope, Judah (2013: 100-1)
describes a growth of the security institutions’ budget from 2.8bn USD in 2000 to 36.5bn USD by 2010. In direct reference to Levitsky and Way (2010), Taylor (2011: 94-99) finds that Russian state agencies strengthened in terms of cohesion and scope in their ability to police the opposition.\(^{67}\) Additionally, in what Horvath (2011: 14-18) identifies a package of counter-revolutionary measures after the Orange Revolution, the pro-Putin Nashi (‘ours’) youth group was created, presumably to fill the streets in case of protests. The Kremlin also took measures to increase its ability to influence the NGO sector by raising registration requirements and monitoring in 2006, then requiring NGOs that receive foreign funds to register as ‘foreign agents’ in 2012. Treason laws were also broadened and stronger state interference with the internet was enabled (Horvath 2011: 18; Levitsky & Way 2010: 199; Gill 2015: 46-7, 53-4; Ambrosio 2009: 45-53, 61-68). Also, party registration barriers were raised over time including a 2006 law allowing to exclude ‘extremist’ parties, all while the Kremlin maintained strong influence over the Central Election Commission (Zimmerman 2014: 257; Robertson 2011: 160-1)\(^{68}\). In sum, repressive capabilities increased, not indicating a higher diversionary motive in 2014.

**Cooptation**

Putin took various steps to increase control over the political, economic and media elite after taking office. A monopoly union was established, control over regional governors was increased as was that over the media by deposing oligarchs who ran critical TV channels. By October 2003, the arrest of Khodorkovsky, followed by the seizure of his Yukos oil and gas company, marked Putin’s success in subduing Yeltsin-era oligarchs (Robertson

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\(^{67}\) The FSB—successor the KGB, with Putin having been its head—is also described as having established itself in a central position among the power ministries under Putin (Taylor 2011: 70).

\(^{68}\) Certain measures were relaxed in reaction to the 2011-2 protests. Direct elections of governors were reintroduced, but the rules for their election are seen as skewed in favor of UR and involve consultation of the president. Also, the number of members necessary to register a party was reduced (Zimmerman 2014: 285-6).
2011: 149-51; Levitsky & Way 2010: 197-8; Gill 2015: 51-3; 57-8). Afterward, a class of state-tied entrepreneurs began to emerge, while state control of key sectors increased (Gill 2015: 59-60, 188). In 2001, UR was created, which amongst others serves a “rent extraction and patronage” (ibid.: 152) function in the Duma, as a moderator of low level elite conflict, aids in control over the state and takes on a general patronage role as well (ibid.: 152-6).

While 35 governors were party members in 2004, the number rose to 77 out of 83 by 2008 (ibid.: 154). Also, 60 of Russia’s 100 most powerful people listed by Forbes were members in 2010 (Judah 2013: 95). In 2011, almost two-thirds of UR members worked for the state (Gill 2015: 113).69 Even as UR increasingly lost legitimacy—Putin increased his distance by creating the All Russian People’s Front umbrella party in 2011 (Zimmerman 2014: 273)—in the 2011-2 protests, its election result of 49.3 % in 2011 was still up 11.7% compared to 2003 (Gill 2015: 101-4, 149). The Kremlin also relied on state-sanctioned opposition parties (Robertson 201: 157-60).70 Regarding elite unity, Gill (2015: 182-3) finds that Putin brought two groups—operatives from the power ministries and his former St. Petersburg associates—into the elite circle. Conflicts between elites in government “never threatened to destabilize the elite” (ibid: 185). Gill (2015: 190) identifies a successful emphasis on loyalty in Putin’s elite management, unity becoming a “powerful part of the elite ethos.” The elite also saw no notable defections in 2011-2, the change of positions between Putin and Medvedev in 2008 and 2012 not “translat[ing] into elite tension or conflict” (ibid: 194). Robertson (2011: 187) mirrors this speaking of an “extraordinarily unified” elite in his analysis before the 2011-2 protests. In 2012, Putin also took steps to decrease the

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69 However, Gill (2015: 149-60) emphasizes the party’s limited institutional role, mainly due to its reliance on Putin and his ability to operate through in informal channels. Also, the degree to which state officials participate in its activities is questionable and its patronage role outside the legislature limited. The party generally would have generally failed to “develop as an effective ruling party” (ibid.: 149).

70 The nationalist Rodina party defected during pensioner protests in early 2005. Its leader Rogozin went on hunger strike and even made reference to rumors on state involvement in the 1999 apartment bombings (Horvath 2011: 8-9; 19). While this occurred after December 6 and is thus not consequential for Putin’s decision studied here, it indicates some elite instability. By 2014, Rogozin was reintegrated into government (Tsygankov 2015: 293).
amount of foreign assets held by elites (Hill & Gaddy 2015: 352-4). In sum, no elite unrest occurred prior to both revolutions. That the 2011-2 period with protests and a coordinated switch in roles between Putin and Medvedev did not lead to instability can be read as the elite passing a litmus test. While Putin had just defeated the last renegade oligarch before the Orange Revolution, he had been in power for almost 13 years when the Euromaidan began. If path-dependency is a guide, we may expect that the elite grew more reliable (Mahoney 2000; in: Gerschweski 2013: 25-27). UR provides some quantitative evidence for this, albeit its decreased legitimacy by 2011-2 needs to be noted.

Discussion of the Results

In total, the evidence for a decrease in regime stability or increase in the threat of contagion that could explain a decision to use force in 2014 as opposed to 2004 for diversionary reasons is low. The Russian repressive apparatus grew stronger, while there were no signs of elite unrest. The finding on legitimacy was more mixed, with growth and data from the last elections suggesting a potential decrease as did the 2011-2 protests. However, surveys demonstrated that Russians did not differ strongly in their approval of Putin and were slightly more optimistic about the economy in 2014. They enjoyed a higher GDP per capita, were more supportive of government policy and more likely to believe that their country was on the right path. Noting that future studies may try to dissect the relative weight of the aspects in the legitimacy pillar, combined with the repression and co-optation element, this study does not see the diversionary hypothesis as passing the plausibility test of having the potential to explain variance in the use of force between 2004 and 2014. Given the factual evidence reviewed herein, if there was a higher perception that diversionary action
was necessary for regime stability purposes in 2014, it could have been driven by the different intensity in the emotional biases expected by Midlarsky (2011). Here, the element of mortality salience linked to the violent nature of the Euromaidan that could have increased the fear of a similar event in Moscow provides one hint. Another stems from the element of stereotyping and blaming, which could have led to a higher perception of Western involvement, in turn increasing the fear of a spread of protests.
6. Conclusion

The application of the ephemeral gains theory to the use of force in interstate relations offers a promising avenue for further research. Proposing a focus on indirect authority in the target state, this analysis of Russia’s role in Ukraine found that ephemeral gains were displayed in the Orange and Euromaidan revolutions. Moscow’s use force in 2014 showed all the signs of psychological mechanisms expected after them. It indicated a sense of urgency, while fears of a reversal to subordinate states, claims of injustice, feelings of humiliation, stereotyping, blaming and a stress on honor were all discernible from Putin’s rhetoric. The theory’s ability to explain temporal variance received more mixed support, precisely because both revolutions marked the end of a period of gain preceded by one of a low level of authority, constituting ephemeral gains, meaning that the presence of an ephemeral gain alone was unable to distinguish variance in the use of force. However, explanations that indicate an increased effect of the second ephemeral can be derived from the theory. The assessment of their relative importance is a task for larger-N studies. An intertemporal comparison testing the ability of the increase in the effect predicted for the second ephemeral gain to account for variance in the use of force vis-à-vis factors derived from realist and diversionary war theory showed that structural realism provides a potential alternative explanation, while diversionary motives received no support. Still, doubt remained regarding the ability of a higher intensity of realist motives to fully account for the use of force. Indeed, the ephemeral gains theory offers ways to explain increases in threat perception regarding factors associated with both alternatives that may go beyond what would be expected of a rational actor. This convergence offers a valuable path for research taking a more in-depth approach in the study of alternative theories.
Bibliography


