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# How Securitization is Affecting the Relationship Between the United States and Putin's Russia: A Study of Securitization vs. Authoritarianism

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How Securitization is affecting the Relationship between the United States and Putin's  
Russia: A Study of Securitization vs. Authoritarianism

by

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**Abstract**

Since Vladimir Putin first took office at the beginning of the twentieth-century, many politicians and scholars have called his methods of ruling of Russia into question. This paper seeks to explain the reasons for the actions that Putin has taken while in charge of Russia, particularly in the respect to the claim that he has created an “authoritarian state” similar to the one of the former Soviet Union. In doing so, the paper will analyze three key aspects: Putin’s background, institutional background, and securitization. Additionally, the paper will be framed in a context that focuses on the US-Russian relations, and will focus on the Putin’s first term of presidency. However, as the conflicts in Russia continue to grow, it is essential to analyze Putin’s decisions and interactions in regards to Ukraine.

## Introduction

There is no question in the international theory discourse that there is a delicate relationship between the United States and Russia under the leadership of Vladimir Putin. Since his first rise to power at the turn of the century, Putin and his rule of Russia have been the focus points for many different field of study from international conflict to Cold War theorists. Nonetheless, there is a general consensus within the varying fields that study Putin that there is tension between the United States and Putin's Russia.

The big question is this: why? Unfortunately the question "why" seldom, if every, has a simple answer. Consequently, trying to understand why Putin runs Russia the way he does is not an easy question to answer. Like many other complicated answers, there is no one reason why Putin has applied the methods that he has during his presidencies. Rather, there are a multitude of elements that play into how Russia has functioned since the beginning of the century: Putin's Background, security efforts, and historical context and institutional background. All three of these elements have come together to create the leader and situations that we know today.

First, Putin's background is a large player in how the United States and most others view Putin and his control over Russia. Putin comes from a varied background that includes years of service in both the KGB and its successors (Bacon et al). Furthermore, Putin has been both glamorized and vilified by the media. In recent months, in light of the 2014 Sochi Olympics and the ever-growing tension in the Ukraine, Putin has been the cover of many tongue-in-cheek periodical covers such as the February 1<sup>st</sup> issue of the *Economist*, and the similar cover of that week's *New Yorker*, or there is also the March 3<sup>rd</sup> cover of the sensationalist UK publication, *The Sun*, who published a bare chested Putin on the front

(see appendix for images).

The second factor at play is the path of securitization efforts the Putin is implementing in Russian politics. Barry Buzan, a main theorist of Securitization states that security is the following: "Security is taken to be about the pursuit of freedom from threat and the ability of states and societies to maintain their independent identity and their functional integrity against forces of change which they see as hostile," ("New Patterns" 432). This paper will look at the different ways in which Putin has reacted to threats of security and how he has implemented changes that reveal his reactions.

Third is an institutional background that predates Putin's time in office of appointing former security agents into political positions. While there is no doubt in the discourse surrounding Putin and his placement of former intelligence agents into positions of political power, Putin is not the first Russian leader to have done so. This paper will look at regimes that occurred before Putin's and how their practices influenced Putin's.

This paper seeks to explain how these three elements, Putin's Background, securitization, and the institutional background, have combined to make the Russia that we are familiar with today. It will focus specifically on how these three elements have affected the US-Russian relationship in the post-Cold War era, particularly the relationship between 2000 and 2005. While the current atmosphere in Russia is one to consider, it will largely remain unaddressed in this paper, as it is larger than the scope of this paper.

### **Putin's Background**

A simple Google search will turn up not only news on Putin and current affairs in Russia, but also lists of products named after him as well as bizarre media events such as Putin guiding lost cranes home. This so-called cult of personality is troublesome for many,

both for scholars on the topic and for casual observers. As previously stated, Putin is somewhat of a media star, yet not in the way that many politicians are, but rather as a sort of larger-than-life character who populates the media with bizarre, at least to our western standards, news stories.

Putin is much more in the limelight than many other foreign leaders are.

Throughout the first months of 2014, Putin's image was plastered all over the world, from newspapers, magazines, and even on televisions. Though this was largely due to the Olympics, there is still a larger sense of political fame at play. Should you hop onto any myriad of internet websites, memes will come up linking him to numerous pop culture references, "Putin on a Ritz", for example, to painted, old-timey portraits with the phrase "Haters gonna die". While this may seem like the typical fanfare that happens on the internet, it walks a fine line between activism and being a joke.

Putin has been in the spotlight for years, and was even *Time Magazine's* Person of the Year in 2007, and therefore the internet is not where Putin's legacy ends. Various companies have named their products after Putin, including vodka brands. In fact, he has even had comics made about him, featuring himself and co-leader Dmitry Medvedev. Additionally, Putin has played into this caricature and in 2010 asked the country of Russia to help him name his new puppy – the ending name was eventually "Buffy."

For those of us who are indeed looking at Putin from a western perspective, it leaves a strange taste in our mouths. While we are certainly used to looking at politicians through mocking lenses, Putin is almost too absurd to mock. His larger-than-life persona has left us western viewers with images of a man who swims with dolphins, hangs out with world renowned martial artist, and yet one which he believe is violating basic human rights.

However, more digging will provide some interesting background information on Putin. His approval rating, at least during his first term as President (2000-2004), never dropped below 60% - a feat that is almost unheard of in modern day politics (White and McAlister 613). Furthermore, White and McAlister have also referred to him as “Super President” due to the fact that he has, essentially, been in charge of Russia for thirteen year now (White and McAlister 604). The term “Super President” also refers to the fact that Putin is in charge of all of the main decisions and policies carried out by the Russian government (White and McAlister 604).

Not only is Putin commonly thought of as holding exuberant power in present day Russia, but he was also a player within the Soviet Union. Putin from a very young age had decided that he wanted to be a spy for the Soviet Union, and it was a goal that he ultimately reached (Bacon et al, 30-2). Putin served as a low-ranking agent who worked under the KGB in East Germany (Bacon et al, 30-32). After the fall of the Soviet Union, Putin was able to secure himself a spot at the head of the FSB - the successor of the KGB (Colton and McFaul 8). This position was an appointment made by then President - Boris Yeltsin, who, less than a year later appointed Putin to be the Prime Minister of Russia (Colton and McFaul 8). Since his first election in office in the year 2000, it has been widely reported that many of those Putin is working with are former colleagues from this KGB days. Academic reports argue that at least 50% of his first cabinet was composed of former Soviet colleagues, but since many KGB records are still private it is hard to find an accurate count (Starr 1).

Furthermore, Putin’s exaltation of the FSB in modern Russia has been a hot topic for many academics looking at Putin’s effect on Russia, and has even been called Russia’s “new

nobility” by their own director (Soldatov and Borgan 80). Since he first took the presidential office, the FSB has become exponentially more important to Russia and its success (Soldatov and Borgan 96). Putin has also been outspoken about his trust for the FSB over other government agencies in Russia (Soldatov and Borgan 96).

Since his first term as president Putin has played a large role in the changes that have given the FSB their current status (Soldatov and Borgan 96). While the former KGB was split into multiple agencies by Yeltsin, Putin has merged those agencies to form what is currently the FSB (Soldatov and Borgan 83-5). Additionally, Putin has made several institutional changes including changing the FSB uniform to black – a move which lies in historical references (Soldatov and Borgan 86).

However, perhaps the most interesting detail is the fact that the FSB seems to supersede the power levels that the KGB ever had. While, as noted earlier, the KGB were not given much oversight, it still had to obey certain political structures (Soldatov and Borgan 81). The same is not true about the FSB, as it far more secretive and closed off than the KGB ever was (Soldatov and Borgan 81). They are supposedly behind spying on and sabotaging several journalists and non-governmental organizations functioning with regards to Russia (Soldatov and Borgan 81). Additionally, it has become one of the largest providers of future state workers (Soldatov and Boragan).

Under Putin’s first term the FSB’s power was heightened as Putin believed them to be the only government agency he could truly trust (Soldatov and Borgan 81). This meant that the FSB became the main enforcer of Kremlin rule and the main protectors of the Kremlin – a role that surpasses the duties of the KGB (Soldatov and Borgan 81). Additionally, they have been accused intimidating political and scientific communities to force them to stay



quiet on specific topics (Soldatov and Borgan 81). While some people liken this to the KGB, it is actually far more extreme than the KGB was and more closely relates to secret police who protect regimes in middle eastern countries (Soldatov and Borgan 81-2).

While there seems to be undeniable proof that Putin has placed an emphasis on security and espionage organizations during his reign, there is some argument on if his own background is responsible for it. While Putin served for over a decade in the KGB, he was never a particularly high-ranking member of the office (Bacon et al 32). Furthermore, Putin was the head of the FSB for less than a year before being promoted to Prime Minister (Soldatov and Borgan 85). This had led scholars to argue that his past is not his motivation for the strengthening of the FSB citing that he does not have enough time experience in the secretive services for it to affect his view on security (Bacon et al 31). Additionally, there are those who argue that while he worked for the KGB, the majority of his service was spent in other countries, and thus he was never full exposed to the culture of the KGB within Russia (Bacon et al 32). In other words, even though Putin spent time in both the KGB and FSB, the time was not substantial enough to create a bias towards those organizations.

### **Institutional background**

When looking at Russia's future it's important to also look at what happened immediately after the Cold War. Though Putin has been in control for more than anyone else since the Cold War, there was nearly ten years of history that happened between the end of the war and the Putin's rise to power. Understanding the institutional background is key in being able to fairly analyze the current state, as if you fail to look at the background, you fail to look at the full picture.

Though, as this paper has mentioned, the KGB was broken up when the Cold War ended, it does not mean that those who had been in the KGB was exiled from society. In fact, many of them were embraced by the new, democratic Russia and found jobs under the leaders that occurred between the fall of Soviet Russia and Putin's presidency (Bacon et al 28). Yeltsin in particular gave many former KGB agents places within this offices and cabinets - including Putin himself (Bacon et al 28). Furthermore, many of these men still hold high-ranking positions in offices, and while this may be true, it's important to remember that these men did not rise to these levels of power under Putin, but rather under his predecessors (Bacon et al 28-9).

This is not to say that Putin has not helped to further the process of securitization within Russia. As Bacon and his colleagues say in their book *Securitizing Russia*, Putin's work should be seen as an "acceleration as opposed to a continuation," (30). While Putin didn't start the process, he has made in more effective and has brought it to new levels within post-Soviet Russia. According to studies, Yeltsin had anywhere from 11.2 to 17.4 percent of his representatives come from a security background, but in 2003, Putin's level was at 25.1 percent (Bacon et al, 30).

However, there are some who argue that Putin's placement as Prime Minister was orchestrated by Yeltsin in order to further this trend (Bacon et al, 30). After Putin winning the presidency it was soon theorized that perhaps there was a reason that Yeltsin has picked Putin to be his Prime Minister and later primed him to be his successor (Bacon et al, 30). This was fueled by the thought, which ended coming to realization, that Putin would be willing to continue Yeltsin's trend of appointing former security agents (Bacon et al 30).

What is notable, and viable, about this theory is that Yeltsin's grooming of Putin

happened at a time when US and Russian relations were at their most contentious during the post-Cold War era (Simes 41). Fed up with the Clinton administration's treatment of Russia, Yeltsin pushed a new constitution through parliament that essentially made the President the largest holder of power (Simes 41). This was immediately followed by Putin's placement into the role of Prime Minister (Simes 41).

Furthermore, it is argued that this Yeltsin wanted to create an authoritative Russia and that this is why he picked Putin to be his heir (Bacon et al 30). It was believed to be a strategic move to further control of the country and return to a more authoritative state than Russia was experiencing (Bacon et al 30). Criticism was high that it would too much focus was being placed on the military aspects of the country as opposed to the political and civilian aspects of the country and that it marked dangerous territory for Russia to go into it (Bacon et al, 30).

While some may argue that these fear and assessment were valid, there are still other things to keep in mind when looking at how Putin has continued what Yeltsin started, and it is still important to look at other theories besides authoritarianism. Bacon and his colleagues make the point that while these people came from a security background that doesn't automatically mean that they will have a security bias (30). Additionally, if you prescribe to that point of view than you have to also believe that anyone else from comes from a non-political background will be strictly bias based on whatever other background that they come from.

### **Securitization**

Securitization is a theory on international relations that was created by the Copenhagen School (CS) and focuses on expanding the meaning of security to include

threats that do not fit into the general security mindset, (Buzan, "Macrosecuritisation..." 254). In other words, securitization focuses on threats that are non-traditional in the way that they are not based in what has historically been thought of as state security. This means that states, in many ways, use security to support their autonomy, authority, and sovereignty. Furthermore, it implies that states are the sole deciders of who, or what, is challenging or threatening their autonomy.

What makes securitization so unique in theory is the instances that this security does not just have to come from a military perspective, but rather all aspects of a state could be securitized (Buzan "Rethinking..." 6). This includes everything from the economy to climate change and often varies from state to state (Buzan "Rethinking..." 11-12). In addition, the securitization of these non-military features of states has only increased since the end of the Cold War due to the lack of bipolarity in the world's major players (Buzan "Rethinking..." 8). In other words, after the fall of Soviet Russia, the world returned to a semi-hegemonic power system that allowed states to focus more on non-military aspects of security. Because of the lessened tension between capitalism and communism, states are now focusing more on their non-military efforts.

Additionally, according to CS there are different levels on which securitization can occur and this often predicts how essential and successful a securitization movement will be (Buzan, "Macrosecuritisation..." 255). Micro securitization refers to small groups and individuals who seek to implement security efforts, though they are rarely successful (Buzan, "Macrosecuritisation..." 255). At the other end of the scale there is a movement called "system-level" that argues that all of humanity should be a securitization effort ((Buzan, "Macrosecuritisation..." 254). Between the two sits the middle level which focuses

on individual states and nations, and has proven to be the most successful form of securitization to date (Buzan, "Macrosecuritisation..." 255). Though all three levels of securitization have their place in a dialogue on international studies, the middle level is the most common and the one with the most relevance to this paper.

There are several arguments on why the middle level of securitization has been more successful than the micro and system levels. For one, middle level securitization focuses on a large, targeted group. Since middle level is focused on a specific state or group, that specific group that can come together and warrant protection, giving the security efforts validation (Buzan, "Macrosecuritisation..." 255). As Buzan notes, part of what makes middle level securitization so successful is the notion of "we" being used (Buzan, "Macrosecuritisation..." 255). By using this word it creates a sense of community that gives validation to the security efforts. On the other hand, the micro level is too specific and has a hard time garnering support (Buzan, "Macrosecuritisation..." 255). System level securitization faces a similar problem, but instead is too broad to invoke a sense of community (Buzan, "Macrosecuritisation..." 255).

It is important to remember in all of this that power remains a key issue. As securitization focuses on international security as opposed to national security, power is a large issue at stake (Buzan "Rethinking..." 13). This means that securitization focuses on the nation's role in the international realm as opposed to focusing on events within the nation's boundaries. Since it is about power, it becomes about survival and being able to assert your powers to insure your survival (Buzan "Rethinking..." 13). Thus, in our post-Cold War society, it has become increasingly important to be able to demonstrate your power in as many ways possible as well as be able to protect that power. This is what leads

to the view of expanding security.

One place that it is easy to see this power balance is when two countries have different views on the same topic of securitization. The Cold War is a great example of this as it was a battle of two competing ideologies to see who had the upper hand (Buzan, "Macrosecuritisation..." 258). Both the US and USSR had strong feelings about their governance style (capitalism vs. communism), and because of it there was a battle of power between the two nations. However, there are also occurrences where countries can agree on global issue (Buzan, "Macrosecuritisation..." 258-9).

Overall, securitization is a method of securitizing non-military sectors, while in a rapidly changing post-Cold-war society. While there are proponents for system level securitization to focus on all of humanity, it is far more common for securitization to occur on a state-to-state level. Because of the preponderance of securitization issues varying from state to state it is common for securitization efforts to result in the a power struggle between two different nations

### **Securitization within Putin's Russia**

When looking at Putin's control of Russia, it's not too hard to see how Putin is securitizing the nation that he has ruled for over thirteen years. There have been several changes that have happened under Putin's regime that have affected the nation and particularly its security state. These expand past the expansion and strengthening of the FSB, and can even be seen in the current crisis between Russia and the Ukraine.

The first of these is the expansion of Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB), a direct descendant of the KGB. Since he was first appointed the head of the FBS in 1999, the power that the institution has gained could be described as exponential. As has been discussed,

under Putin the FSB has become the largest security agent in Russia, and has been granted large amounts of power with little, if any oversight (Soldatov and Borogan 81). They are said to have, "... been granted the role of the new elite, enjoying expanded responsibility and immunity from public oversight or parliamentary control," which as I've noted, is quite different than the policies that the KGB was held to (Soldatov and Borogan 80-1).

This aligns with the CS theories on securitization as Putin has placed a large amount of control in the hands of a non-militarized party. While espionage is indeed part of a securitized state and can be part of militarization, the FSB still transcends that concrete military focus. The fact that the FSB has power isn't the only important aspect, however, and it's important to look at why the FSB has been granted so much power and what they are doing with it.

Richard Sakwa, an expert in post-Soviet Russia, has asserted that Putin is aiming to once again make Russia a great power (210). While Russia is certainly a key player in the global world today, they are not the empire that they were before the Bolsheviks, nor does it hold the power the USSR held either (Sakwa 210). Essentially, Russia is at its least powerful point than it has been in nearly three hundred years. Or at least that is how the world perceives it. Furthermore, according to Sakaw, the Russia that emerged after the fall of the Soviet Union was essentially a new country that had never before existed (210). While Russia may have been at the forefront of the Russian Empire (during imperialist rule) its boundaries stretched far wider than they did today (Sakwa 2010).

This leaves Putin in a delicate place, and it is indeed something that has been reflected in terms of his expansion of powers, particularly in changes within the FSB. When Putin changed the FSB uniforms to the color black it held a significant historical purpose, as

(Soldatov and Borgan 86). During the Russian Civil War the White Army (fighting against the Bolsheviks) created new units that dressed their soldiers in black uniforms similar to the ones that Putin assigned to the FSB (Soldatov and Borgan 86). This is not the only place where the FSB has returned to imperialist Russian customs, however. Since Putin's time in Office, there has been a rekindling of the Kremlin and Orthodox church (Soldatov and Borgan 86). Additionally, they see themselves as the heirs not only to the KRB but also to the secret police that the tsars deployed to battle political terrorism," (Soldatov and Borgan 82).

When looking at this evidence, it's easy to see how Putin is trying to assert Russia's power within the global community. Putin has clearly drawn inspiration from past great eras of Russian history in his attempts to securitize the nation. By changing the uniforms of the FSB and realigning the state with older policies, Putin is attempting to create an image of Russia that mimics its stronger past.

Additionally, Putin also focuses back on this idea of non-traditional threats securitization theory focuses on. It is said that the FSB. It is said that the FSB have been tasked with compiling a list of all potential "extremist" focusing specifically on those within Russia as opposed to those abroad (Soldatov and Borgan 90). Again, while this may seem like a standard effort, in many ways it's really not. It ties in to the idea of power and taking a step back from global threats and looking at state interest. In a world where Putin's Russia is highly politicised, there is a new level of threat, and it is easily arguable that these "extremists" are some of the individual players that take place in securitization. Furthermore, it would also be easy to argue that Putin is also acting as an individual player as opposed to acting on behalf of the nation.



When looking at Sakwa's assessment of Putin's Russia, it also easily ties into the currently conflict between Russia and the Ukraine. Historically, the Ukraine has been a part of Russia since the seventeenth century, and both countries share cultural ties and many citizens speak both languages (Simes 44). Yet, even when ignoring the long history between Russia and the Ukraine and just looking at the current situation it becomes apparent that the current situation is a power play. As the development is so new, it's impossible to find any scholarly research on the topic, but no matter what side you look at, there is tension. Whether or not Putin was asked to intervene by Ukrainian president, Putin is still asserting power, not only in Ukraine, but in the global field.

Ultimately, that's what Putin's securitization of Russia is about: power. Bacon and his colleagues used the powerful quote that "the key issue is not democracy *per se* but control," and indeed this is very accurate of the climate we have seen in Russia since Putin's first term as president (18). Yet this does not make Putin's Russia an authoritarian regime, but rather it ties back into Sakwa's idea of trying to prove the strength of Russia (Bacon et al 6, 8).

For Putin, the key issue is not whether or not to have a democracy or an authoritarian regime, but rather it's about asserting Russia and showing the global community the power that Russia still holds (Bacon et al 6). While the nineties showed a newly liberated state that was flush with democracy, Putin has brought that state back to a level in which it is developing as its own independent state with its own interests and security issues (Bacon et al, 1-4). In other words, Russia is still very much developing as a state, and because of this, Putin is less concerned with what kind of state is than how strong of a state it is.

## US-Russian Relationship

Since Putin has come to power there has been a tremendous change in the relationship between Russia and the United States (Simes). After several years of impending collapse, the Soviet Union formally disbanded on December 26, 1991. Initially, the end of the Cold War was painted as a win for both sides of the conflict; after all, both countries had come together to overthrow communism (Simes 37). But as time progressed, so did the negative relationship between the two countries. Both Presidents Clinton and George W. Bush have come under fire for mistreating Russia in a time of healing, Bush for not coming to economic aid and Clinton for exploiting Russia's weakness and particularly abusing alcohol in negotiations (Simes 39-40).

In the 1990s after the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia faced an economic crisis (Tikhomirov 207, 210). While Russia originally wanted to undergo a reform to increase economic stability, it ended up in a large economic crash that threatened the nation (Tikhomirov 210). While there are many different theories on what caused the crash, there is no doubt that the turn of events had an extreme effect on Russia and its population. Between 1990 and 1998 unemployment in the country increased by 19% while the GDP decreased by 57% (Tikhomirov 210). While both of these numbers are large, the decrease in the GDP should generally correlate to the rise in unemployment; in other words, it should not be nearly three times as much (Tikhomirov 210). This economic crash put the already delicate country in an even more precarious place.

Because of this, the United States thought that it could secure Russia as an ally without much work (Simes 37). Both the Clinton and Bush administrations wanted to secure Russia as a diplomatic partner, yet neither administrations wanted to, nor expected

to, put much work or effort into making that a reality (Simes 37). While Clinton and his administration wanted to work closely with Yeltsin and the newly free Russia, they abused the situation to make the relationship they wanted, and not the relationship that was best for both countries involved (Simes 40). This era was marked with the Clinton administration “feeding policies” to the Russian administration despite resentment from Russian officials (Simes 40).

Putin, however, marked a change in the trend of US abuse of Russia. While serving as Prime Minister, Putin suggested that Russia and the US team together to fight the war on terror, as both countries were struggling with al Qaeda and the Taliban (Simes 42). However, Clinton and his administration denied the invitation believe that Russia was not in a position to undertake a challenge like that (Simes 42-3). Additionally, they accused Russia of trying to impose “neoimperialism” and trying to take state back under their wing, while at the same time the US was imposing a sphere of influence over as many former-soviet states as they could (Simes 43). When the Bush administration took office, they decided that Russia was no longer a priority of the US and distanced itself from the nation (Simes 43). Though the terrorist attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> helped increase cooperation between the US and Russia, tensions were still high.

All of this has helped contribute to the delicate position that Russia and the United States stand on today. While Russia once needed the United States support, they have grown past that under the leadership of Putin and therefore Putin does not have to tread on the thin waters that his predecessors had to (Simes 46). Rather, Putin is free to be skeptical of the US and to function outside of US critique (Simes 47). Ultimately the US failed to take Putin seriously, yet also lost economic control, and thus lost any remaining

support Russia would have needed from the US.

Again this ties into the power that is important to securitization. While Putin attempted to create connections with the United States and its government he was ultimately denied, and thus he has not strived to better them now. Rather, he is showing that Russia is a power, despite what the US might think. This is something that, again, is present in the current surge of current struggles that Russia is facing. While there has been no lack of pressure from the United States government to back off, Putin sticks to his plan as opposed to giving in to the pressure.

We can also look at Putin's *New York Times* op-ed from September of 2013 in which he sends a plea directly to the citizens of the United States. In his piece, Putin urges citizens of the US to pressure Obama to halt intervention in Syria. Putin draws upon the war on terror with which he was wanted to fight with the US before. His closing paragraph goes as follows:

*"My working and personal relationship with President Obama is marked by growing trust. I appreciate this. I carefully studied his address to the nation on Tuesday. And I would rather disagree with a case he made on American exceptionalism, stating that the United States' policy is "what makes America different. It's what makes us exceptional." It is extremely dangerous to encourage people to see themselves as exceptional, whatever the motivation. There are big countries and small countries, rich and poor, those with long democratic traditions and those still finding their way to democracy. Their policies differ, too. We are all different, but when we ask for the Lord's blessings, we must not forget*

*that God created us equal.”*

This paragraph is interesting as it makes us question Putin’s intent. While the first part of his op-ed talks about al Qaeda, the war on terror, Syria, and what it might mean for the UN, by the time we get to this paragraph it seems to be less about a global threat, but once again a threat between two countries.

By including this rhetoric, Putin creates a dichotomy that stretches beyond conflicting views on the crisis of Syria. What it does do is increase the tension that has been lingering since the first few months after the end of the Cold War. It pins nation against nation. Furthermore, it once again asserts Putin’s power, and specifically, his power over Obama. Instead of continuing to reach out to the president, Putin went direct to the source - the citizens.

### **Putin and authoritarianism**

The question remains on if Putin’s Russia is an authoritarian regime. The Oxford English Dictionary defines authoritarian as the following: “Favourable to the principle of authority as opposed to that of individual freedom.” While it’s easy to see where there are authoritarian principles in Putin’s, these events and factors can also be explained in other ways. Thus it is important to fully analyze the events that have occurred.

The most common argument used for Putin’s supposed return to an authoritarian regime is his use of former security personnel within governmental positions that go beyond security. Yet, as we looked at earlier, this was not a precedent that Putin started. Additionally, it’s important to think about if their placement there is what makes it authoritarian or if it is the actions that come from their placement in the government. While these former security agents may be serving in Putin’s advisor and cabinet, they are only

making up a quarter of that group. This means that the other three quarters does not come from the same background and thus it is logical and probable that Putin is getting advice from several different perspectives as opposed to just from a state security standpoint. Furthermore, Putin has the ultimate control of Russia - not those in his cabinets. Going back to the idea of the "super president" that White and McAlister talk about - Putin has an exuberant amount of control over the country.

### **Where this leaves Russia**

Ultimately, disagreeing with Russian policies, it's hard to pin-point if Russia is actually an authoritative state or not. However, there are many signs that point to the securitization of Russia, and it is important to note that securitization is ultimately different from being an authoritarian regime, even if power is being evoked (Bacon et al, 1). While there is certainly a power struggle at play, it is aimed at showing the rest of the international community that Russia is indeed a strong world power and player.

Many of the actions that are labeled as authoritarian are actually Putin aiming to securitize Russia. When the Cold War ended, security changed on a global level and Russia was left in a weakened position. Since ascending into office Putin has been responding to the perceived threats. However, these threats are occurring in non-traditional forms and because of this - it appears that Putin is attempting to create an authoritarian regime.

However, it is far more likely that Putin is trying to rebuild a strong nation. By responding to any and all perceived threats - traditional or not - Putin is helping to rebuild Russia's perceived power. The more power Russia is perceived to have, the greater of a nation it becomes. Furthermore, the greater the nation becomes the more perceived threats go away.

Ultimately it comes down to Sakwa's theory of Russia being the weakest it's been in three centuries and securitization. By highly securitizing the country, Putin is able to respond to more threats and help build Russia into the empire that it once was. It is not about power over the country, but rather about becoming and proving a sense of global power.

This can easily be seen in regards to the current conflict between Russia and the Ukraine. If Russia is not the power it once was, what better way to regain a sense of power than by intervening in another country's potential civil war. This not only asserts power over the Ukraine, but it also reminds other nations of the power that Russia has. This is particularly noticeable in the interactions between Putin and high-ranking officials of the United States government. There has been no lack of criticism from the United States government, yet Putin fails to step down. This, again, creates a power-dynamic between two major world players and helps solidify the potential power of Russia.

The situation gets a little trickier when looking at the annexation of Crimea, and the possible annexation of Eastern Ukraine. While it may seem like a calculate move by Russia to gain more territory, the fact that Putin was so quick to annex Crimea, a section historically Russian, but remains silent on the rest of Eastern Ukraine is important. In many ways, it supports the accusations of this paper; it shows that Putin is trying to strengthen the power of Russia, it shows a response to perceived threats, and

This means that Putin's actions are a departure from the policies of the former Soviet Union as opposed to a continuation of them. While some of the actions may be reminiscent of Soviet practices, it is important to look at why Putin is doing what he is doing. Where the Soviet Union was seeking to hold power over their citizens, Putin is

looking to assert the power of Russia in the global community.

## **Conclusion**

While the Cold War may have ended, the conflicts between the United States and Russia are far from over. Though there was a period of joy between the two nations when the war first ended, the period was quickly distinguished by past US presidents failing to give Russia the recognition it deserved. Because of this, there has been a struggle within Russia to prove that it is indeed a powerful player

These feelings are heightened when looking at the last several centuries of Russian history. For the first time in hundreds of years, Russia has become a country that is confined to its own borders. Before it was what we currently know as Russia - it was the Soviet Union, a set of states. Before it was the Soviet Union - there was several centuries of the Russian Empire - again, a series of states under rule of the Russian Tsar. Ultimately, Russia is it's own state for the first time ever in modern history.

Due to this newly formed state and the struggle for recognition from the United States, there has been a push to prove Russia's power by Putin, and this push to prove Russia's power is where we come to the effects of securitization. By trying to prove Russia's power, Putin has securitized the Russian state to better respond to all possible threats. It is no longer about just the military; it is about protect Russia and asserting Russian power in any way possible.

Yet, it is still dangerous for us to claim that this makes Putin an authoritarian leader. Rather, we must analyze the reason why he's asserting power. It is not for personal gain, not to prove that he has power; but rather it is to prove that Russia has power, that Russia is a powerful nation without a league of other states behind it. Putin is seeking to



strengthen the national image and the international image of Russia.

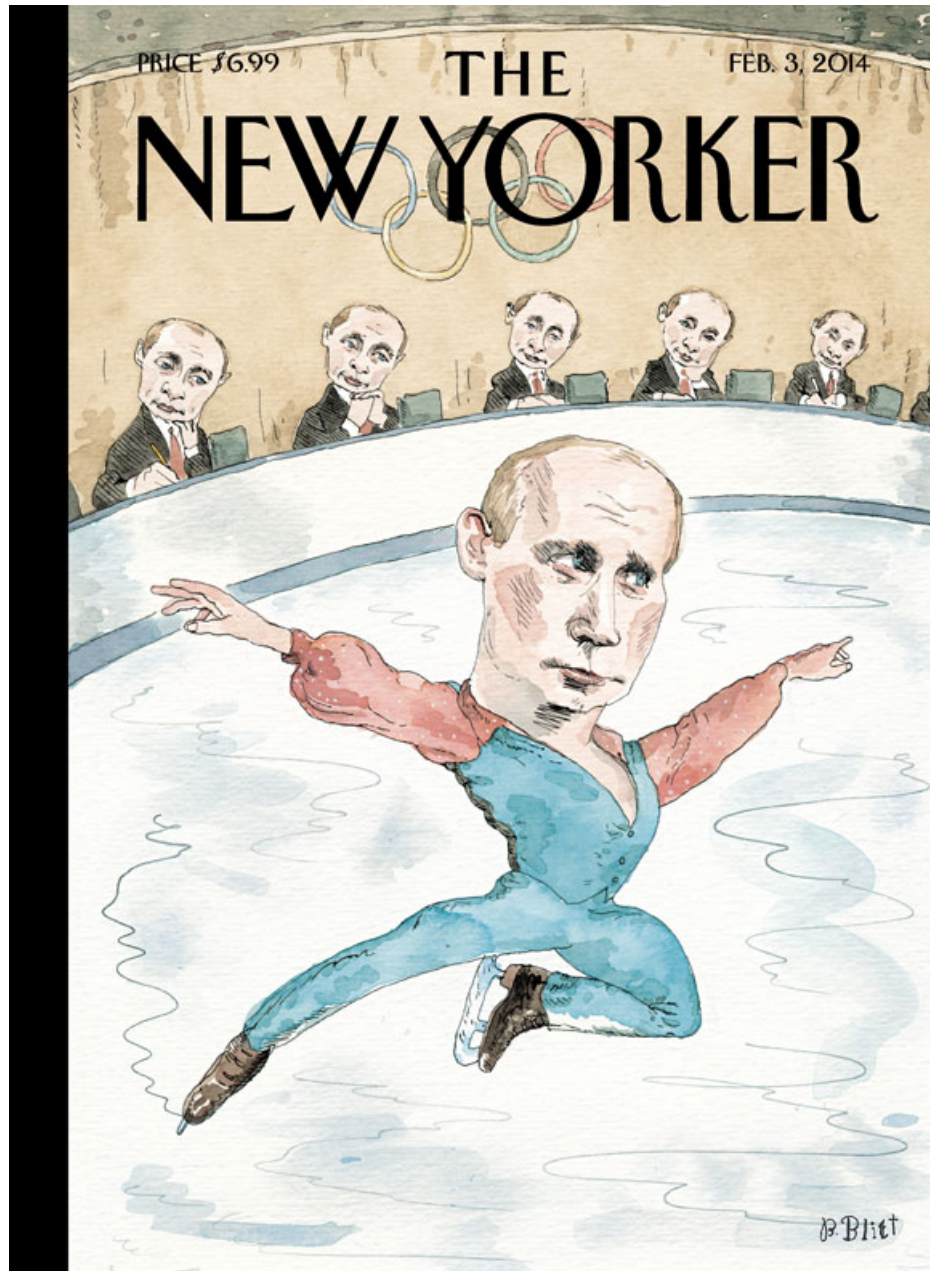
Overall, it's important to look at the whole picture before assuming an authoritative state. While Putin has increased the number of past security personnel within governmental rankings, he was certainly not the first one. Additionally, there is a strong and troubled background between Russia and the United States that affects feelings and interpretations on both sides. However, when it comes down to it, it is clear that Putin has been acting on a securitizing the state of Russia in order to prove that it is still a powerful state.

Appendix



Cover of *The Economist*. Edited photograph Feb. 1, 2014. "Putin On Ice." *The Economist*.

Web. Feb. 7, 2014.



Blitt, Berry. Cover of *The New Yorker*. Painting Feb. 3, 2014. "Cover Story: Barry Blitt's "Jury of His Peers". *The New Yorker*. Web. Feb. 7, 2014.



The Sun

Cover of *The Sun*. Photograph March 3, 2014. "The Sun Features Topless Vladimir Putin on Front Page Amid Ukraine Crisis." *Huffington Post: United Kingdom*. Web. March 7, 2014.

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