

CHAPTER I:

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Our Earth's history has been riddled with fights and wars. Since the beginning of ancient texts, wars have been conducted for the sake of glory and territorial expansion, nationalism and independence, ideological differences, and possibly many other reasons. Since World War II ended in 1945, nations took it upon themselves to create the United Nations (UN), an organization designed to prevent another war of that scale.¹ 50 countries' representatives gathered in San Francisco, California, to draft and sign the UN Charter, a legally binding document that codifies major principles of international relations into international law.²

Since its creation, the UN has served its purpose to its ability, and we can safely say that we have not experienced another world war as of today. However, smaller scale wars are still present throughout the world, whether it is an internal conflict, or a dispute between countries. The Middle East and North Africa themselves notably still has more than 45 ongoing armed conflicts, such as the Israel-Palestine war, Türkiye's military occupation of Cyprus, and Iraq's internal conflict against the Islamic State group. Other areas such as Africa have more than 35 conflicts, Asia has 21, Europe has seven, and Latin America has six.³

¹ United Nations. *Charter of the United Nations: Preamble*. 24 October 1945 (Accessed 7 March 2025)

² United Nations. History of the United Nations. Available from <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/history-of-the-un>; Internet; Accessed 7 March 2025

³ Geneva Academy. "Today's Armed Conflicts." University of Geneva. Available From <https://geneva-academy.ch/galleries/today-s-armed-conflicts>; Internet; Accessed 7 March 2025

The Russo-Ukraine war is one of the international armed conflicts in the Europe continent that has taken the attention of everyone around the world, and that unfortunately is still unsolved. Although the huge international attention came after the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the dispute between Ukraine and Russia can be traced back to the events of 2014. In February 2014, Russia invaded a Crimea, a Ukrainian autonomous republic. About two months after, Russia also seized Ukraine's Donbas region, supporting pro-Russian separatists in the Donbas war.⁴ In February 2015, Ukraine, Russia, France, and Germany agreed on Minsk II to cease fighting and withdraw weapons, as well as to remove troops from Ukraine. Even though Ukraine released data on Russian troop casualties, Russian officials continue to deny involvement, and Putin even signed a decree to ban the release of classified information during special operations, which includes information on the death of Russian soldiers. It was also alleged in December 2015 that Russian hackers continued cyber-attacks over Ukraine.⁵

In September of 2020, Ukraine had officially labeled Russia as the aggressor in this dispute and revealed its foreign policy plans to join NATO. In late 2021 to 2022, Russia was said to tighten the military watch over its borders with Ukraine, sparking NATO's suspicion of an upcoming invasion. Although Russia denies plans of invasion, their predictions were soon realized on 21 February 2022, when

⁴ Dominique Arel and Jesse Driscoll. *Ukraine's Unnamed War: Before the Russian Invasion of 2022*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2023. pp. i-ii.

⁵ Michael Ray. "Russia-Ukraine War [2022-present]". Britannica. 24 January 2025. Available from <https://www.britannica.com/event/2022-Russian-invasion-of-Ukraine>; Internet; Accessed 9 March 2025.

Putin announced a “special military operation”, and bombs went off in Ukrainian cities.⁶

Since then, millions of Ukrainians had fled seeking refuge, as Russian forces said to indiscriminately attack both soldiers and civilians. Ukraine proudly defended its area, with its capital, Kyiv, still standing despite being Russia’s main target.⁷ Evidence of war crimes done by Russia in the Russo-Ukraine war was abundant, violating international law.^{8,9} While Russia has made headlines for its dispute with Ukraine, Russia has done other internationally unacceptable things throughout its history. An example of this is the 2008 Georgia-Russia conflict, where Russia reportedly attacked fleeing civilians, bombed Georgian cities, militaries participating in looting, arson attacks and abductions also forced civilians to be displaced from their own areas.¹⁰

In another incident, involving Russia in Syria in February 2016, Moscow’s air forces were seen targeting both civilians and aid workers, reported to be “deliberately attacking those attempting to treat the victims”, also including the

⁶ *idem*.

⁷ Temerty Cotemporary Ukraine Program. “Russo-Ukraine War: Background”. *Ukrainian Research Institute, Harvard University*. Available from <https://war.huri.harvard.edu/background/>; Internet; Accessed 9 March 2025

⁸ UN Office of the High Commissioner. UN Commission Concludes that War Crimes have been Committed in Ukraine, Expresses Concern about Suffering of Civilians. 23 September 2022. Available from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/10/un-commission-concludes-war-crimes-have-been-committed-ukraine-expresses>; Internet; Accessed 9 March 2025

⁹ Amnesty International. *Ukraine/Russia: Justice for Ukraine means Accountability for all crimes committed by Russia since 2014*. 22 February 2024. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/02/with-russias-full-scale-invasion-two-years-ago-an-act-of-aggression-that-is-a-crime-under-international-law-the-tragically-familiar-human-rights-catastrophe-extended-across/>; Internet; Accessed 9 March 2025

¹⁰ “Georgia: International Groups Should Send Missions”. Human Rights Watch News Release. 18 August 2008. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2008/08/18/georgia-international-groups-should-send-missions>; Internet; Accessed 10 March 2025.

suspected destruction of a Syrian hospital.¹¹ Following this, a report on the Atarib market bombing in 2017 was said to have also been caused by Russian military, noted as “indiscriminate attacks in a civilian populated area.”¹²

. According to Freedom House –an American-based journalistic body dedicated to monitoring freedom– Russia scored a 12/100 in their Global Freedom Score 2024, putting them with categories that are “not free.” This score is a direct reflection of the civic and political liberties of the Russian citizens, which is admittedly very poor.¹³ Andrei Kolesnikov (commentator from Carnegie Politika) described Russian society to have “assumed fetal position”, as they choose to remain silent in face of the unsavoriness brought by the government, in fear of the consequences. This caused the current administration to run rampant doing whatever they pleased.¹⁴

Despite proclaiming itself as a democratic federative law-governed state in its constitution,¹⁵ Russia scored a 1 out of 100 in Freedom House’s democracy status, putting them within the category of a “consolidated authoritarian regime”.

¹¹ Peter Yeung. “Russia Committing War Crimes by Deliberately Bombing Civilians and Aid Workers, Says Amnesty International”. Independent UK. 21 February 2016. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/russia-civilians-war-crimes-amnesty-international-a6887096.html>; Internet; Accessed 10 March 2025

¹² Human Rights Council. “Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic”. United Nations. 2 February 2017. <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/34/64>; Internet; Accessed 10 March 2025

¹³ Freedom House. “Freedom in the World 2025: Russia”. Freedom House. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/russia/freedom-world/2025>; Internet; Accessed 11 March 2025.

¹⁴ Andrei Kolesnikov. “As War Rages, Russian Society Has Assumed the Fetal Position”. Carnegie Politika. 20 February 2023. <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia- Eurasia/politika/2023/01/as-war-rages-russian-society-has-assumed-the-fetal-position?lang=en>; Internet; Accessed 11 March 2025

¹⁵ “Russian Federation 1993 (rev. 2014)”. *Constitute Project*. Available in https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Russia_2014; Accessed 11 March 2025

The government itself did not fully execute the democracy it claims to be, lacking in many areas from its system to the people governing it.¹⁶

For example, the conduct of elections, said to be one of the most important exercises of democracy, and the international community has implemented free and fair elections in internationally recognized documents such as the UDHR.^{17 18} However, Russia's elections was one dubbed to be failing in this criterion. Freedom House gave a score of 1.00/7.00 (lowest points) for Russia's electoral process, as both its regional and presidential elections were littered with controversy throughout the history of the country, such as falsified or suspicious votes, the use of coercion in voting, or restraining opposition to become candidates.¹⁹

Another example that took the world by storm a couple of years ago was a change to the Russian Constitution in 2020. Amongst the 1/3 of the of the change, the most important one was a suggestion from United Russia's deputy Valentina Tereshkova, saying that Vladimir Putin's previous presidencies would not count to the two-term (per lifetime) limit set for the president, which in effect, allows Putin to become president for an additional two more terms, as well as giving former

¹⁶ Freedom House. "Nations in Transit 2024: Russia".

<https://freedomhouse.org/country/russia/nations-transit/2024>. (Accessed 11 March 2025)

¹⁷ United Nations. "Universal Declaration of Human Rights". *United Nations*.

<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights#:~:text=Article%201,public%20service%20in%20his%20country>. (Accessed 14 March 2025)

¹⁸ Thum Ping Tjin. "Principles of Democracy: Free, Fair, Regular, and Representative Elections". *New Naratif*. (nd). <https://newnaratif.com/principles-of-democracy-free-fair-regular-and-representative-elections/>. (Accessed 14 March 2025)

¹⁹ Freedom House. "Nations in Transit 2024: Russia". <https://freedomhouse.org/country/russia/nations-transit/2024>. (Accessed 11 March 2025)

presidents lifelong immunity and a seat in the Federation Council, allowing Putin to maintain power for longer.²⁰

Thirdly, there are also cases of Vladimir Putin lacking genuine opposition in Russia, with name such as Alexei Navalny, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Boris Nemtsov, and many others. People who were open critics of Putin were visibly oppressed, jailed, or even assassinated as reported by various resources.^{21, 22, 23} With all these observations, this thesis is written with the title: **Analyzing How Putin's Domestic Actions Impact Russian Foreign Policy Approach Towards Russo-Ukraine Conflict (2014-2025)**

1.2 Research Question

This thesis will place emphasis on the similarities between Russia's domestic area as well as their foreign policy. Research will center around the 2024 presidential elections on the domestic side, emphasizing on the Russian constitution and laws surrounding said elections, as well as the actual implementation of those

²⁰ Martin Russell. "Constitutional Change in Russia: More Putin, or Preparing for Post-Putin?" *European Parliamentary Research Service*. May 2020. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/651935/EPRS_BRI\(2020\)651935_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/651935/EPRS_BRI(2020)651935_EN.pdf). (Accessed 14 March 2025)

²¹ "Alexei Navalny, Russia's Most Outspoken Putin Critic". BBC News. 16 February 2024. Available in <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-16057045>; Internet; Accessed 14 March 2025

²² Cécile Ducourtieux. "Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Russian Opponent: 'The Europeans Haven't Understood Trump and Putin'". *Le Monde*. 8 March 2025. Available in https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/03/08/mikhail-khodorkovsky-russian-opponent-the-europeans-haven-t-understood-trump-and-putin_6738936_4.html; Internet; Accessed 14 March 2025

²³ "Boris Nemtsov: Murdered Putin Rival 'Tailed' by Agent Linked to FSB Hit Squad". *BBC News*. 28 March 2022. Available in <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60878663>; Internet; Accessed 14 March 2025

laws through various reports of the Russian elections. On the international side, this research will focus on the various Foreign Policy implemented by Russia with an international effect within 2018 to 2024 (during Putin's latest incumbency), focusing on actions that are relevant with international peace and harmony, as well as comparing them to relevant international law to see its compatibility.

Therefore, this research aims to answer the following questions:

1. Is Vladimir Putin's actions in the last decade justified by the Russian Law?
2. How has Vladimir Putin's domestic actions bled into Russia's Foreign Policy?

1.3 Research Objectives

This research aims to reach the following objectives:

1. Determining whether it is true that Vladimir Putin, as the president of Russia, holds more dominance than the Russian Law (both constitution and federal law), by comparing and evaluating possible contradictions between the policies he approved over the last decade and what the domestic law deems.
2. Compare and evaluate Vladimir Putin's actions and attitude in the domestic sphere to the possible and existing Foreign Policy done under Vladimir Putin, to see whether he holds the same attitude towards the international community as he does to Russia's domestic community.

1.4 Research Significance

This thesis aims to capture a comprehensive application of individual level analysis to an issue or event that is currently relevant in the International Relations and Political Science scene, shining light on the reasoning behind Russia's internationally unacceptable actions by comparing Russia's foreign policy to its domestic policy. I want to see how Vladimir Putin's actions are different from those before him, and examining how individual personalities can impact his/her nation and the international community.

With the discussed question regarding the comparison between law and implementation, I hope to illuminate the implications of how contradictions between the two can not only impact the country, but also the international community. I hope this paper may serve its purpose in supplying future research with relevant information, as well as inspire more people to study how singular individuals can shape a country and that country's perception in the international stage.

1.5 Structure of Thesis

This thesis is made up of a total of five chapters. The first of these is the introduction. It will explain the background of the issue that will be further discussed, as well as the significance of this writing in regard to the general scope of international relations. One of the most important parts of this chapter is the research question and objective, which will guide further discussions within the next chapters.

The second chapter of this thesis is the theoretical framework. This chapter first includes the literature review that will show a deeper insight into the specific terms and issues discussed within this thesis. The literature review exists in four parts: 1) About War Crimes, 2) About Russian Foreign Policy, 3) About the Russo-Ukraine Conflict, and 4) About Vladimir Putin's Power. The second part of this chapter includes the international relations theories and concepts that will be used as a part of this research. This theory and concept section is divided into four parts: 1) Neoclassical Realism Theory, 2) Balance of Power, 3) Individual Level Analysis, and 4) About Foreign Policy. The third chapter of this theses encompasses the research method. It details the method to which this research is done, including how the data is collected and analyzed.

Chapter four is the analysis part of this research. It is split into three parts. The first is the analysis of three separate acts that happened during Putin's rule as well as the comparison of those events with Russia's domestic law. Second is the analysis of three other acts that Russia did during the Russo-Ukraine war, and the relevant international laws that contradict with these acts. Part three will put it all together and connect the motivations behind these acts with the act of power balancing. More importantly, it will also include the connection to Vladimir Putin as the leader of said country.

Chapter five will conclude the thesis. It is split into two parts. First of those is the conclusion, where it will conclude the context and analysis that was written in the previous chapters. Second is the recommendation. It will include not only academic recommendations for future researchers of this topic, but also point out

various criticisms that surfaced after the analysis towards the Russian government.

All in all, that is the entirety of the thesis.

