

The Strongman Speaks

The Pattern of Rhetoric in the Kremlin and the State-Owned Media in Regards to the War in Ukraine

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Chapter One: Introduction

Why Putin Says what He Says

On March 18, 2014, two days after the referendum in Crimea that brought it back within Russia's control, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin addressed a crowd of parliament members and regional leaders. In his usual commanding yet sympathetic tone, he spoke of the wrongs in history that had been righted by this display of democracy. "Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia," he said. Nikita Khrushchev acted outside of the purview of the Russian constitution when he gave the peninsula to Ukraine in 1954. Crimean residents wanted to be a part of Russia again. And now, they were.

In this speech, President Putin touched on several narratives that would shape discourse in regards to annexation of Crimea, the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, and the status and future of Russian/Ukrainian relations for the next two years. These descriptions started with this speech, but they would grow to become part of everyday discourse, repeated over and over in Kremlin public statements and the media. Almost overnight, Russians and Ukrainians, once Slavic brothers born from a common history, a common ideology, a common humanity, became mortal enemies both in public sentiment and on the battlefield.¹

¹ Team of the Official Website of the President of Russia, "Address by President of the Russian Federation," *President of Russia*, accessed December 20, 2016, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

This thesis explores those volatile phrases President Putin uses to refer to the Kremlin's policy in Ukraine. I look at how these phrases are repeated in the media and the context of events on the ground in which these phrases are used. In doing so, I strive to understand how the relationship between the government, the media and the public in an authoritarian country, and I pose the question of what forces could have caused changes in rhetoric.

The inspiration from this research comes from a desire to understand the motivations behind President Vladimir Putin's decisions about his policy in the near abroad and a curiosity about the role of media in an authoritarian country. I define foreign policy as an identification of a state's global interests, threats to those interests, and the means to tackle those threats. As Russia tries to establish its great power status beginning in the early 2000s, it continues to evoke policy abroad that is confusing and concerning to its border states and Western leadership. Meanwhile, President Putin maintains high popularity ratings amongst the Russian people and his foreign policy is overwhelmingly supported within Russia. To me, this demonstrates that the way President Putin frames his policy in Ukraine is meant to appeal to the Russian people, not to explain his actions to the international community. Thus, I see a lack of understanding amongst Western policy makers of President Putin's explanations for his foreign policy, namely in regards to Ukraine since 2014. This leads to confrontation between Russia and the West. In pursuit of this question, I delve deeper into the relationship between the government in the media with the goal of understanding whether the media frames the conflict as the Kremlin does. In short, this research aims to study the Kremlin's framing of its foreign policy and potential driving forces for that framing. The goal here is to understand potential reasons why President Putin says what he does in regards to Ukraine.

I approach this goal by asking two specific questions and one overarching one. First, I ask whether the media copies the Kremlin's framing of the conflict. I measure framing by looking at the repetition of specific key phrases over the course of the two-year conflict and in

what contexts those phrases are used. To start, I ask why President Putin and his pundits say what they do and why these terms are meaningful to the Russian people. In this regard, both framing and rhetoric refer to the repetition of the key phrases in the public appearances of Kremlin figures, such as President Putin. This research establishes whether these terms used to frame the conflict become a catch phrase or slogan used by the Kremlin and repeated by the media to justify or explain its policy in Ukraine to its citizenry. The four terms I look at are NATO, *Novorossiya* Russkojazychnyje (Russian speakers) and sootchestvenniki (compatriots). I follow how the same phrases are used in the state-owned media, namely TASS.

Next, I ask how events on the ground coincide with moments of significant change in the number of times a term is used. My goal is to establish whether the media's framework of the conflict responds to actual current events.

The overarching goal of this thesis is to explore the type of relationship between the media and the government. I am curious to illuminate whether the media simply passes on the Kremlin's framing of the conflict or interprets it in its own way.

The overall compilation of the data will indicate two things: whether the Kremlin's rhetoric that is reflected in the state-owned media changes over the course of the conflict and what forces on the ground may be driving that fluctuation.

Why does this research matter?

As stated earlier, I see a fundamental misunderstanding of Russian motivations in their foreign policy from the West. It seems that too many policy makers and political scientists in the United States believe President Putin reacts to the outside world, but is not concerned with public support. Indeed, President Putin regularly enjoys some 80% support², a number that is outlandish

² "Indicators," accessed May 8, 2017, <http://www.levada.ru/en/ratings/>.

and unrealistic to any US president. Add the fact that he's an authoritarian leader, and Americans think this should mean President Putin does not need to be concerned with what the Russian people think. Yet, he is.

This is because of a paranoia that has plagued Russian leaders since the Tsars. To Henry Hale, this paranoia centers around a fear that the public will become disapproving of leadership and revolt and remove the regime from power. Thus, public opinion is “one of the factors capable of causing dynamism in expectations regarding a patron's future powers.”³ That is to say, low public support is one of the things that can get a rule deposed. Public opinion is dictated by more than propaganda and mass displays of the leadership's strength – instead, it is influenced by realistic factors like war, the economic situation, a lack of personal liberties and the like. Thus, despite Putin's “vast coercive apparatus” and propaganda network, the people “are not indefinitely manipulable by the media” and remain “an important independent driver of regime dynamics.” Public support always has the potential to turn unfavorable and revolt is an undeniable possibility.⁴

Today, President Putin fears the color revolutions that took place in Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine and Georgia in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Maidan protests in Ukraine in late 2013 thoroughly rattled him. Thus, he must ensure through every means possible that the Russian people remain in his favor. As a result of this paranoia, I argue, he seeks to control their thinking through his powerful rhetoric.

This aspect of Russian leadership is often ignored in debates over the rationale for President Putin's policy in Ukraine. Political scientists favor a discussion the threat of NATO encroachment or a will to reunite the Soviet Union's territories. Some of these are closer to logically reasoning than others. But without a discussion of public opinion, each lacks the

³ Henry E. Hale, *Patronal Politics: Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014). Page 74.

⁴ Hale, page 74.

domestic consideration that I consider a valid reason for going to war with Ukraine. Russians and Ukrainians considered themselves brothers five years ago. Only twisted public thinking influenced by rhetoric propagated by the Kremlin explains why this is no longer the case.

Trends in Public Opinion

In order to fully understand any shifts in public opinion during the situation in Ukraine, we must look to see what support for President Putin and opinions on Ukraine were before the conflict started to give us something for comparison.

Let's start with President Putin's approval rating.⁵ This statistic serves as a proxy indicator for approval of the job Putin is doing as president, and by extension, his policy. In general, President Putin enjoys a very high level of support and has for most of his presidency. Before the trouble in Ukraine began in early 2014, Putin's approval rating ranged from 61 percent in November 2013 to 88 percent in 2008. The trend for support is overall high – consistently hovering somewhere in the mid-60s to high 80s over the course of his presidency, including his brief stint as prime minister.

However, a downward trend in support starts in 2011 and continues into 2013. This is understandable when looking at the political situation in Russia at the time. The 2011 parliamentary elections were suspected of being fraudulent, which inspired thousands of Russians to take to the streets in protest. This volatile political scene continued after President Putin perhaps unconstitutionally took office for a third time. 2012 and 2013 were filled with multiple protests, including the infamous Bolotnaya Square protests. These protests likely reminded Putin of the color revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia and low levels of support at this

⁵ "Indicators," accessed May 8, 2017, <http://www.levada.ru/en/ratings/>.

time were likely frightening, even to the autocratic leader. Diminished support in the low sixties culminated with Putin's lowest approval rating ever in November 2013 with just 61 percent support. This is followed by a significant spike in public support in the early months of 2014, leading up to and encompassing the annexation of Crimea. Since then, Putin has enjoyed levels of support consistently in the eighties that rival or surpass those in the beginning of his presidency. Overall, these are the three moments of shift that we should pay attention to when it comes to President Putin's approval rating.

This drop in support in November just before the Maidan protests picked up steam and three months before the annexation of Crimea must have worried Putin. Add to this the protests in Ukraine against the pro-Russian leader Yanukovych, and the idea of revolt in Russia is not distant, accounting for Henry Hale's assertions and the plague of paranoia discussed earlier. Thus, Putin's ability to conjure up more public support through powerful rhetoric becomes important.

Why this case study

I ground my research about the role of the media and the relationship between the people and the government in an authoritarian government in the conflict in Ukraine for two reasons. First, it is a recent and ongoing conflict, meaning that polling data, media coverage and information about the situation on the ground is readily available. This may not be the case in regards to the war with Georgia in 2008, for example.

Second, it is a conflict that means a lot to the Russian people because it is in their backyard and against their brothers. As a result, it has received special attention in the media and the Kremlin's public statements to a degree that a conflict further away or against another body may not have. Thus, there is ample evidence of framing in both the media and the Kremlin's rhetoric to examine.

The Significance of Crimea

Crimea has a special place in the hearts of Russians. When the annexation happened, the West tended to characterize the importance of Crimea by the naval bases at Sevastopol or the Black Sea Fleet.⁶ And while these factors are certainly of great strategic importance to Russia, Crimea is more than just a port on the Black Sea. It is a mythical part of Russia's history and identity.

To Russians, Crimea is the site of the birth of Russian orthodoxy. It is the graveyard of thousands of Russians who died “defending their homeland while fighting the Turks and the Germans.”⁷ Here, Stalin “negotiated the shape of post- WWII Europe.”⁸ As Kalb says, “The battles [in Sevastopol and Crimea] had become part of Russian military and political mythology.”⁹ But apart from its military history, it was also the “site of vacations and ‘good life’” for Russians throughout its history.¹⁰

Crimea was taken from Russia in 1954 when Khrushchev gave the peninsula to the Soviet republic of Ukraine. When the Soviet Union fell, Crimea was taken out of Russian control. In his March 18th speech celebrating the return of Crimea to Russia, Putin “stressed the deep wound of separation of Crimea from its Russian ‘homeland.’”¹¹

Thus, Crimea should be considered a different aspect of *Novorossiya* than the Donbas, or perhaps not even a part of *Novorossiya* at all. It's mythic history and symbolism within the

⁶ Richard Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015). Page 102.

⁷ Marvin L. Kalb, *Imperial Gamble: Putin, Ukraine, and the New Cold War* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2015). Page 148.

⁸ Kalb, page 148.

⁹ Kalb, Page 120.

¹⁰ Elizabeth A. Wood et al., *Roots of Russia's War in Ukraine* (Washington, D.C : New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press ; Columbia University Press, 2016).

Page 6.

¹¹ Wood, Page 120.

Russian identity is unparalleled, but understanding this significance is the first step to understanding Putin's powerful rhetoric surrounding its absorption into Russia.

What was the Russian Spring idea?

Under the pretext of the Russian Spring, the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine was supposed to follow Crimea's example. Scholars debate whether Putin supported this plan (Kalb says yes, Sakwa says no). Regardless, the plan was as follows: oblasts and powerful cities in eastern Ukraine would "first organize mass demonstrations. Then they would seize City Hall. And finally they would hold a referendum, a popular display of democratic legitimacy."¹² The desired end result? In short, "an alternative to Maidan style Europeanism."¹³ The Donbas region, ideally more than just Donetsk and Luhansk, would break away from Ukraine to become either an autonomous region or rejoin Russia.

But the Russian Spring failed completely and dramatically. This became clear in the summer of 2014. The Donbas, indeed *Novorossiya* was clearly "not Crimea."¹⁴ This was partly because of a lack of popular support amongst the people living in eastern Ukraine. Demographics in this region are difficult to understand, but "most were happy with their fuzzy identities; many locals spoke both languages; they had mixed marriages."¹⁵ In short, the Russian Spring did not take off, did not receive mass support, and ultimately did not succeed because "most people were either agnostic or indifferent at all."¹⁶

As we will see, the timing of the fall of the idea of the Russian Spring has interesting effects on the framing of the conflict by both TASS and the Kremlin.

¹² Kalb, page 164.

¹³ Sakwa, page 151.

¹⁴ Sakwa, page 151.

¹⁵ Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014). Page 123.

¹⁶ Wilson, page 124.

Chapter Two

Hypotheses and Methodologies Tackling the relationship between government and media rhetoric

Does the media copy the Kremlin's framing of the events in Ukraine since 2014?

Relevant Research

How Rhetoric is Designed and Decided

This research helps to answer my first research question, which involves how the Kremlin's rhetoric serves to frame the conflict in Ukraine. How a government decides to phrase its public statements regarding its policy is almost as important as the policy itself. The audience picks up on the speaker's sentiments, justifications and rationale. The public formulates its perspective towards the policy off this interpretation of the government's, and perhaps subsequently the media's, framing. Basically, effective framing could make the difference as to whether the Russian people support Kremlin justification for efforts in Ukraine or not.

The statements of a public official regarding foreign policy are the result of careful weighing between what the people need to hear and what they will support. According to Newsom, there is a standard four-piece "checklist" of what a politician needs to consider before speaking to the media or the public.¹⁷ In most cases, he states, politicians think about the following criteria in some form while preparing for a public address.

1. *What is the current status governmental knowledge on the foreign policy subject at hand?*

¹⁷ David D. Newsom, *The Public Dimension of Foreign Policy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996). Page 23.

2. *Does the political leadership think they need to say anything at all?*
3. *If the public should be informed, how much does the speaker say?*
4. *What words will best get the point across and gather support?*

Overall, this checklist should produce a competent and clear public statement in regards to any foreign policy issue.¹⁸

While this idea holds water in regards to a democracy, there is one flaw in this theory in its application to Russia's action in Ukraine. The first question assumes that the foreign policy was not the result of a deliberate plan. It applies better to a situation like a terror attack, hostage crisis or an adversary's movement in a war. But the Kremlin's actions in the Ukrainian conflict *were* deliberate. The decision to annex Crimea and catalyze the Russian Spring was a chosen policy path. Thus, the Kremlin's question about how to address the conflict in public statements does not follow Newsom's theory as it does not have to establish how much the government knows before it speaks to the people. Both because of the authoritarian nature of the government in Russia and because of the type of policy in Ukraine, especially at the beginning, the Kremlin had complete knowledge of what was going on, and moreover, planned for it to happen. Thus, in an application of these criteria to this circumstance, we skip the first question all together. The rest of the questions are more applicable. The Kremlin still must decide how much to say and what to say.

Newsom's third and fourth questions are the most relevant to this case, and indeed, they gett at the heart of this thesis. Let's look at a hypothetical example to make this easier to explain. Say the Kremlin was contemplating how much and what it should tell the Russian people about the presence of Russian troops in Ukraine. The first thing Putin would need to decide what the public actually needs to know. If there is the potential that the public having knowledge of

¹⁸ Newsom, page 23.

Russian forces its formerly friendly ally may have adverse effects on public support for the policy in Ukraine or Putin's popularity, perhaps he will decide that the Russian people are better off not knowing this fact. So he decides not to tell them. Basically, as to Newsom's theory, the Kremlin must decide how much the public should know as its first step in deciding how to frame its policy. To ground this hypothetical example in reality, Putin did not tell the Russian people there were forces in Ukraine, and in fact, denied it outright in a speech on June 4th, 2014; though, of course, it is not verifiable what his motivations for doing so were.

According to Newsom's theory, the next question the Kremlin needs to decide is what to actually say to the Russian people. Moreover, the Kremlin must decide what words to explain the policy have the most potential to garner support. This is the meat of this thesis and the essence of governmental framing of conflict and international policy. Newsom outlines that the government must quite intentionally and with great focus decide what framing to present to the people to make the policy coherent, justified and amenable to it's the citizenry. In short, "words are at the heart of public expressions and carry perils of their own."¹⁹ Newsom considers the words to describe foreign policy to be very carefully chosen. They are meant to appeal to the correct people, at the correct time in history. I am of the same opinion, and I assume that this is the case throughout my research here. In the case of explaining Russian foreign policy in Ukraine, speech is deliberately designed appeal to Russian values, culture and identity. This assumption dictates why I chose to follow phrases that target ideas central to Russia's cultural identity such as, the expansive and important motherland (think: Novorossiia) or the constant fear of being attacked from the outside, particularly from the west (think: NATO expansion). References to NATO, for example, appeals to Russian people in 2014 in a way that the same term might not have done in 2000, before major expansion of membership to the Baltic States in 2004 that put the western

¹⁹ Newsom, page 37.

military alliance on Russia's borders. But now the term alludes to powerful anti-western sentiments, especially when Ukraine and Georgia's potential membership is mentioned. Thus, the Kremlin's reference to NATO in its framing of the conflict in Ukraine, according to Newsom, was a deliberate choice meant to appeal to the Russian people.

Newsom further argues that the audience to which a politician speaks about his foreign policy is important to the words he chooses. Not all audiences react to each piece of rhetoric in the same way.²⁰ For example, Putin's discussion of the past Russian Empire's control over Ukraine does not elicit the same response in Moscow as it does in the United States. Washington sees the Kremlin's rhetoric about its will to protect Russian speakers and its compatriots in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine to be a weak explanation for a breach of international law and a violation of Ukraine's sovereignty. But to Russians, repetition of "Крым Наш- Crimea is ours" and references to *Novorossiia* invoke both rage at Khrushchev for giving the peninsula to Ukraine in 1954, as well as pride, nationalism, and remembrance of the historical strength of the motherland. To Newsom, the audience matters when assessing why specific rhetoric is used. Putin speaks directly to the Russian people. The reasons he gives for the annexation of Crimea and the war in the east of Ukraine are not meant to make sense to Washington or Brussels. Rather, they are meant to pull at the heartstrings and national pride within every Russian.

Methods of rhetoric the Kremlin uses in referring to conflict in Ukraine

The Kremlin's impression of how the Russian people understand the media messages fed to them greatly impacts the methods Putin and his proxies in framing their speech. Micekiewicz finds that "those who control the television agenda and images operate in belief that the audience

²⁰ Newsom, page 37.

assimilates the message precisely as it is transmitted.”²¹ The Kremlin assumes people believe quite literally whatever they are told without questioning its slant or validity. So if TASS says there are no Russian troops in Ukraine, as it did on August 9, 2014, the Kremlin expects the Russian people to believe this to be true.

As Mickeiwicz points out, this is rather irresponsible on the Kremlin’s part because it ignores the heuristics the Russian people developed to understand news and political statements during the repressive years of the Soviet Union, a time in which people needed to read between the lines to uncover any grain of information. Because of this, Russians now “weigh the manipulative intent in messages,” says Mickeiwicz.²² They read or watch the news knowing that the message shown may be an attempt to misdirect or manipulate them. Mostly, Russians judge whether the message is accurate or biased based off which television or news source reports it. Some sources are known to be more tied with the government; some are more prone to their own framing of events.²³ TASS, which this study examines, falls somewhere in between. While it is state-owned and pro-Kremlin, it does not simply pitch the Kremlin line. According to Mickweiwicz, this shifts how much people trust the news they get from TASS.

Back to Mickewicz’s idea that the Kremlin believes the Russian people take the news at face value and fully trust what it says. In her analysis of the Russian television media’s reporting on the AIDS epidemic, she concluded that the result of this assumption is that the Kremlin and the media are often quite clear about the position they wish people to take on the subject discussed. Simply put, they bluntly tell the people what to believe, and while it is hidden behind the guise of news, the way they wish people to interpret the message is obvious.²⁴ If

²¹ Ellen Mickiewicz, *Television, Power, and the Public in Russia* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Page 6.

²² Mickewicz, page 194.

²³ Mickewicz, page 203.

²⁴ Mickewicz, page 6.

Mickewicz's theory is right, we expect the framing of the Ukrainian conflict to be blatant and clearly in line with the Kremlin's in TASS articles explored by this research.

If the Kremlin really does expect people to understand its framing of the Ukrainian conflict as presented in its public addresses and the media, that framing itself becomes quite important. According to Neuman, there are five frames the media and government use to talk about politics. These include economic, conflict, powerlessness, human impact and morality frames. In the context of the conflict in Ukraine, the conflict and human impact frames are most relevant. Neuman defines the latter as the "[description] of individuals and groups who are likely to be affected by an issue."²⁵ In short, this frame puts a human face on the issue. The conflict frame is simple – it focuses on the dichotomy and details of the conflict.

This issue of the pattern of framing is the first question I seek to answer. Hypothetically, the framework chosen will appeal to Russian cultural identity rather than a message ungrounded in "Russianness." In referring to the annexation of Crimea and the war in Ukraine, the Kremlin takes what is very clearly a discussion of conflict, and instead of casting it in the light of Neuman's seemingly fitting conflict frame, it instead utilizes the human impact frame. Of course, it does mention the conflict frame, but what's interesting is it is not the entire conversation. Basically, instead of focusing just on how conflict progresses or the war itself – troop movements, casualties and the like -- the Kremlin also focuses on the people impacted in addition to the details of war. We see this through calls to protect Russian speakers living in the Donbas or Russian compatriots in Crimea. In addition to coverage of Ukrainian troops in Donbas, the Kremlin and the media talk about the lives of Russian speakers in the region, how especially how they are targeted or oppressed by the Ukrainian government. In short, the war is turned into a fight to protect fellow Russians. Neuman argues that the human impact frame is not

²⁵ W. Russell Neuman, Marion R. Just, and Ann N. Crigler, *Common Knowledge: News and the Construction of Political Meaning*, 1 edition (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1992). Page 69.

about generating compassion, but rather focusing on the human toll or human activity in a situation.²⁶ This is not really the case for the conflict in Ukraine, where the Kremlin and the media's goal seems to partly be to stir up sympathy for Russian speakers abroad. In short, by framing the annexation of Crimea or war in the east as a fight to protect, they focus not only on the conflict but also Russian compatriots.

The Media Effects Theory and Propaganda

To fully understand the pattern of interaction between the government, the media and the people, we must develop an isolated understanding of the media and its character. In Russia, this means two things - monopoly of message and propaganda – both of which are a result of the state- owned media environment. I will start with the former.

Current theory suggests that media's message does influence public opinion.²⁷ According to the media dependency theory, the media is the most important source for the public because it offers the most consistent access to information and offers “cues on how to frame and interpret that information.”²⁸ Basically, instead of listening to every one of Putin's speeches to get an idea of what's happening in Ukraine, the public turns to media sources like TASS. Thus, the media wields huge influence, both because it monopolizes the flow of stories and facts, but also because it controls the framing and tells the public what to believe. This means people are “at the mercy of the television puppeteers.”²⁹ And when the media is state-owned instead of an independent player, it means people are at the mercy of the government much more directly. This thesis seeks to establish whether this is the case in Russia.

²⁶ Neuman, page 69.

²⁷ Diana C. Mutz, Richard A. Brody, and Paul M. Sniderman, eds., *Political Persuasion and Attitude Change* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996). Page 20.

²⁸ Neuman, page 11.

²⁹ Neuman, page 8.

This brings us to propaganda, a subject not unfamiliar to studies of Russian media. As Mickeiwicz argues, Russia's state-owned media sources "alter what they know to be true to give a false impression of security" or "smooth over the edges,"³⁰ at least partly because of government pressure. What this means is the Kremlin is able to manipulate what the people think because it can influence how the media frames an issue.

This is the central argument of the media manipulation theory, based on a study of propaganda under pre-WWI authoritarian regimes.³¹ Here, the audience is considered "powerless to resist the persistent, pervasive and emotionally sophisticated persuasions of an interlocking media-political-economic establishment."³² Basically, media and governmental collusion makes the people powerless to resist the frames and messages they are told. Using methods like "agenda-setting, salience cuing, priming effects, issue framing, mainstreaming and ideological cultivation,"³³ the government exerts control using the media as its weapon. Take a hypothetical example from my research to contextualize this dichotomy. If the Russian people are told day in and day out by the president and by the media (who is also controlled by the president) that NATO expansion into Ukraine is a threat to Russia's security or Russians in eastern Ukraine are being demonized and oppressed by the Ukrainian government, most will inevitably believe it. According to Neuman, that message, when coming from both political and media angles, is too powerful to resist, especially when no alternative explanations are offered.

This is rather at odds with Mickeiwicz analysis of how Russia's read the news. Neuman argues that propaganda has an effect, but according to Mickeiwicz, the effects are diminished at least somewhat in regards to Russia because the public understands the potential for propaganda in the media and accounts for it in how they digest information. Granted, this thesis does not

³⁰ Mickeiwicz, page 47.

³¹ Neuman

³² Neuman, page 9.

³³ Neuman, page 9.

attempt to establish whether the Russian public actually does believe the propaganda fed to it by the media and the Kremlin about the war in Ukraine. Rather, I address the role of propaganda more to understand the power that the government holds over the media's framing. Is the message promoted by the media directed by the Kremlin? If so, we should see the media's rhetoric towards the conflict to be similar to Putin's.

Hypothesis

With this question, I establish two things. First, I look at how the Kremlin frames the conflict in Ukraine, specifically in reference to the annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbas. Second, I ask whether the media is an independent agent that comes up with its own framing or a passive figure that simply passes along the Kremlin's message.

To accurately describe the how the Kremlin frames the conflict I look to President Putin's framing, which I define as the repetition of the four key phrases I have identified in the context of speeches on Ukraine in 2014 and 2015 – *Novorossiya*, NATO, *sootchestvenniki* and *russkojazychnyje*. By framing the conflict using these words, the Kremlin is doing exactly what Newsom expects it to do. It is paying significant attention to its audience – in this case, the Russian public rather than the international community -- in determining what to say.

As I touched on earlier, I expect the Kremlin to utilize both the conflict and human impact frames, according to Neuman's explanation of the different types of framing. That said, the Kremlin's role is not to inform the public on day-to-day events of the war – according to Neuman the people look to the media to do this. Thus, I expect there will be less discussion of minute details of the war in Putin's speeches. This is not to say that I do not think Putin will mention the war. Simply, I think Putin's discussion of the conflict framework will likely be broader, focusing on the overall war rather than details the media may cover. For the most part,

though, I expect more of Putin's focus in his public addresses to be on the human impact, with allusions to the plight of Russian speakers in the Donbas or Crimea, for example.

As to the second part of this question, because the media in Russia is heavily controlled by the state, I hypothesize this will stifle its abilities to play an independent role and come up with its own framing. Thus, I expect the media, for the most part, to repeat the messages and copy the framework the Kremlin uses in its reporting on Ukraine. This is likely a product of state-owned media, in which the government decides what major sources are allowed to say and how they must say it. However, I do predict that will differ from Kremlin speeches on the subject for two reasons. First, as I said, the media serves the role of informing readers of the details of the conflict more so than the Kremlin.³⁴ Thus, I expect TASS to cover when there is a siege on a town in the Donbas by the Ukrainian army or a particularly large battle between rebel forces and the Ukrainian anti-terrorist operation that results in significant casualties. The media, I predict, will include the conflict framework. That said, I do think the media will follow the Kremlin's message as well, and since I expect this to be more along the lines of the human interest framework, this will likely significant play a role in TASS's discussion of the war in Ukraine, too. Basically, I hypothesize that the media will do more than the Kremlin to coach the situation in Ukraine in a media context but will also carry Putin's discussion of the human interest angle.

I also hypothesize the media will differ from Kremlin framing of the conflict in a second way in that it will repeat the key phrases measured much more often. In essence, I expect to see the media amplify the message and more extensively promote the Kremlin's framework. I determine whether a word's usage is amplified by the media using two factors. The first is the number of times the term is mentioned in a month period in TASS articles as compared to the number of times it is mentioned in Putin's speeches in that same month. The second is the

³⁴ Neuman, page 11.

frequency of articles mention the specific term as compared to the frequency of the term in Putin's speeches. I measure frequency by dividing the number of articles or speeches mentioning the term by the total number of articles mentioning any one of the terms that month. I predict President Putin will be the first to use a phrase, then the media will repeat it at a much higher rate.

I believe because like Neuman says, the public's attention to the media is higher than its focus on each word the president says. The media is a more effective way of transmitting the Kremlin's framework to the people and swaying the population's perspective on the conflict in Ukraine, and Putin knows this. Thus, I expect that he will establish what is the appropriate framing then let TASS do the heavy lifting in pushing out that message.

Methodology

I go about answering this question in a very simple way. First, I look at President Putin's speeches, press statements or press conferences from January 2014 to December 2015. I use the speeches published in Russian on the Kremlin website.³⁵ I narrow the focus on every statement that involves a mention or discussion of Ukraine – either the annexation of Crimea or the war in the Donbas. To find speeches that mention Ukraine, I opened every transcript from the beginning of 2014 to the end of 2015 and searched for the word “Ukraine” in any Russian grammatical case. This generated 63 of Putin's statements on the subject of the conflict in Ukraine.

Throughout these speeches, some 60 odd phrases and ideas were repeated. These ranged references to the “unconditional coup” carried out on Maidan Square in Kiev in February of 2014 to an emphasis on historical brotherhood of Russian and Ukrainians. President Putin talks about every aspect of Russia's relations with Ukraine in this time period, but I focus on the way

³⁵ Find the website here: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts>

he talks about his motivations for annexing Crimea and getting involved in Eastern Ukraine.

When repeated phrases are narrowed down to those touching on these two events – reunification of Russia and Crimea and the war in the Donbas- I find four words most relevant as explanations for the Kremlin’s policy in Ukraine post- Maidan. President Putin uses these phrases in 23 of the 63 speeches in which he discusses the conflict in Ukraine. These are the phrases I followed in my research.

1. Sootechestvenniki (*compatriots*)
2. Russkojazychnyje. (*Russian speakers*)
3. *расширение НАТО* (*NATO expansion*)
4. *Новороссия* (*Novorossiia*)

Each of these phrases carries heavy weight and appeals to the Russian mentality. This is what allows them to have a potential impact on how the Russian people read the situation in Ukraine. I am of the opinion that these phrases were deliberately chosen because of this power. In short, the Kremlin uses these phrases to frame the conflict because they are likely to have a beneficial impact.

Granted, these are not the only options for words to follow, nor are they the only possible ways to phrase the framework they pose. For example, NATO can be substituted by any number of things including the “United States,” “Europe,” or “the West.” *Novorossiia* can carry the same message as “the Donbas” or “eastern Ukraine.” But the words I choose serve as proxies for all the ideas expressed by these terms.

Next, I look to see if these phrases are repeated in the media. I look to state-controlled media both because the number of people who get their news and worldview from state media is much larger than the readership of opposition news. I used two criteria in picking which media sources I would follow in my content analysis. First, the channel must be owned by state-controlled companies. I do this because the vast majority of Russians get their news from these

sources, and only a self-selecting, small portion of the population looks to independent sources as their main news outlets. Thus, state-owned media gives the most representative look at the entire Russian population. Second, the source must have a high viewership and high levels of content produced. By ensuring the source reaches as many Russians as possible, it is more likely to be representative of the news that shapes most people's thinking. This is true of the amount of content produced, as well. The more stories published each day, the more the influence the news source has over the way Russians think about events in Ukraine. These criteria led me to ITAR-TASS, which is one of the biggest correspondence organizations in the world and is read by a large portion Russians. I turn to TASS because it is quite representative of the news ingested by the general population. I also value TASS in this research because while it is a state-owned source, it does on occasion offer explanations for events that are different from the Kremlin. So if the media is more of a conveyor belt that simply passes along the Kremlin's ideas, TASS will demonstrate this. But it also has the capacity to show the opposite – that the media sometimes offers a different framing of events.

I draw every TASS article from January 2014 to December 2015 with the mention one of the aforementioned terms. I limit my search to articles where the terms are used in the context of Ukraine in this time period. Next, I conduct content analysis on both Putin's speeches and the media articles gather from TASS, which total 966 from January 2014 to December 2015.

This is where I ran into a big problem. At first, I used Yoshikoder software because it accurately reads Russian, which is important to this research because I did not want to translate the articles and risk losing true meaning in that process. However, it turned out that the software, while working excellently in Chinese and English, has far too many problems in Russian to be useful for this research. Thus, I moved on.

What I need from my content analysis is simple; I just need to be able to count how many times each of the four words is used, understand the context in which each was used in the

articles and how both the number of times used and the context changed month to month. Thus, I turned to reading each of the articles in favor of using another software similar to Yoshikoder.

What factors may influence changes in the frequency of TASS use of these terms?

This question has the least existing literature. While a plethora of authors outline the oppressive atmosphere that results in mostly state-owned media sources and prevalent propaganda, research that says why the media says what it does in Russia beyond government control is sparse. This is why this thesis and expansions on its questions are relevant and necessary. Yes, we know that the government heavily influences what messages the media promotes, both through direct ownership or heavy intimidation of non-state owned media sources. What we don't clearly know is where the media gets its message and framing from *aside* from Kremlin direction. This thesis thus seeks to explore whether events on the ground during a conflict coincide with shifts in media rhetoric in pursuit of understanding what makes the media in Russia say what it does.

Additionally, much is said about what happened at any specific moment in time and why during the conflict in Ukraine. But again, there is limited analysis as to how any one event changed the way the media framed the conflict in its use of any particular term. This thesis takes it upon itself to explore the question of how the media in Russia decides to frame a conflict based on current events.

Hypothesis

Here, I aim to understand whether the media's framing of the situation in Ukraine reflects things that are happening within that conflict. I hypothesize that this is the case, and events on the ground will influence the number of times TASS uses a specific word. That is, if nothing

relevant to the term *Novorossiya* happens, there will be a drop in the number of times it is mentioned. But if something happens that is incredibly relevant to the west and NATO, say more European sanctions or a buildup of NATO troops, TASS will mention that term more often than before.

It is also possible that fluctuations in the use of terms will coincide with times in which Putin's usage also changes. If Baum and Potter

Methodology

The methodology is simple. First, I identify significant moments in change in the number of times a term is mentioned on a month-by-month basis— I call these moments of interest. I consider a month to be a moment of interest if the number of times the term is mentioned increases or decreases by a noticeable and eye-catching amount. Because each of the four terms are used at such different frequencies, there is no precise number. But as a general rule, if it changes by about two times the month before, I consider it worth looking at.

I then refer back to the themes addressed in the articles concerning each word. I read to see in what context each word was mentioned then group those contexts into similar themes. My next step is to find out if anything happened on the ground that could have resonated with those themes. By doing so, I uncover whether the media potentially responds to actual current events in its framing of the conflict.

Once I have these moments of interest, I dig to find out what happened at the time. This search led to me numerous books, articles, and a particularly helpful timeline compiled by the Center for Strategic and International Studies.³⁶ I considered an event relevant to NATO if it had to do with western powers' involvement or commentary on the conflict. Something was

³⁶ "The Ukraine Crisis Timeline," accessed April 17, 2017, <http://ukraine.csis.org>.

important to *Novorossiia* if it dealt with the governmental body or territory of the Donbas.

Finally, an event was important to sootechestvenniki and russkojazychnyje if it dealt with language law, threats against the Russian speaking population or Russia's efforts to protect that group.

What is the role of the media in an authoritarian country? Is the media an independent party that comes up with its own message or does it act as a “conveyor belt” and simply pass down the Kremlin line?

Relevant Literature

Is the relationship between the media, government and public cyclical or linear?

The next relevant thread of theory addresses the overarching question in this research and concerns the relationship between the media, the government and the public in regards to shaping and understanding foreign policy. This is the meat of this thesis. My main goal is to understand the feedback cycle between the government, people and media in Russia in order to establish whether public support for policy in Ukraine was a potential motivating factor.

While not relevant specifically to Russia or authoritarian regimes, Baum and Potter give us a good introductory understanding. As they so unhelpfully but rightly point out, “Media influence public opinion, public opinion influences the media, public opinion influences decision makers, decision makers influence public opinion, decision makers influence the media, foreign policy influences public opinion, decision makers influence events, and the media influence foreign policy.”³⁷ In short, they believe the relationship between the media, the government and the public to be cyclical. It is a long, confusing vicious circle of “which came first, the foreign policy or the public opinion.” Neuman expands on this with the idea of a constructionist model

³⁷ Matthew A. Baum and Philip B. K. Potter, “The Relationships Between Mass Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 11, no. 1 (2008): 39–65, doi:10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.060406.214132., pg 41

of communications. This theory “[emphasizes] that all the key players in the process are engaged in the construction of reality.”³⁸ Both theories, however, assume a free media working not as a government-owned pawn but as an independent force. This may not be the case in Russia, and this thesis strives to understand whether the constructionist or cyclical theory holds true when media is heavily controlled by the government.

Because of this issue, the part of Baum and Potter’s research that is most applicable in the case of Russia is actually the theory with which they disagree. As these authors recognize, much theory of foreign policy and public opinion treats media as a “conveyor belt,” by which is meant that it simply passes on information from the government to the public.³⁹ Baum and Potter give the media a more active role that actually serves to “shape political opinions.”⁴⁰ Their view does not apply to Russia. Here, the vast majority of media is state-owned. The Kremlin’s pundits and proxies have complete control over what is said on most news sites in Russia. Thus, while the media is indeed an important factor in shaping people’s thinking on current events and policy, it is exactly a “conveyor belt.” As this research aims to establish, the state-controlled media repeats the Kremlin’s rhetoric, thereby propagating the important key phrases into public conversation.

However, Baum and Potter’s theory is relevant to Russia in one aspect. They point out that if media is a more passive force, “leaders would have less incentive to respond to changes in the public’s demand for information.”⁴¹ In this thesis, I do not attempt to establish that the public has influence on Kremlin policy; rather, I only aim to show that public support can influence the use of specific rhetoric by the Kremlin. However, it is relevant to note that the media’s lack of agency may be the reason a drop in public support does not see a change in concrete policy. This is fodder for another study.

³⁸ Neuman, page 119.

³⁹ Baum & Potter, page 40.

⁴⁰ Baum & Potter, page 50.

⁴¹ Baum & Potter, page 43.

Hypothesis

The overall goal of this thesis is to be able to answer this question. Because the media is tightly controlled in Russia, I am curious to understand whether it has any freedom to project its own framing of a situation like the conflict in Ukraine or whether it is forced to copy the Kremlin's exactly.

I hypothesize that the media does have some ability to adjust its own framing, but it does not create a new one. By this I mean that the media can use a framework more or less than the Kremlin or perhaps start the framing before or after the Kremlin does, but the media does indeed utilize the Kremlin's framing. Thus, I expect to see a different pattern of frequency and usage for the terms in the media than in the Kremlin's speech. But I do assume I will see these terms repeated in the media nonetheless.

This means my conclusion will likely end up somewhere in the middle. I predict will find that the media is neither an independent player than creates its framework on its own. Nor is it a simple "conveyor belt" that passes on the Kremlin's message exactly as is with no embellishment or changes to the framework. Instead, I hypothesize that the media use the Kremlin's framework as its basis, but changes the frequency and context in which it uses these terms and that framing.

Chapter Three

Renaming the Donbas? Usage of the term *Новоросси́я* (*Novorossiya*)

What does *Novorossiya* mean?

Novorossiya is without a doubt the most symbolic term I study in this research. It has been around since the 18th century⁴² and refers to the southern and eastern part of Catherine the Great's territory, to which the Tsarina gave the name *Novorossiya*.⁴³ But it's more than that. It is the "anticipation for Russia's own transformation."⁴⁴ It symbolizes that "Russia itself should be reborn, become another, cleanse, wake up and come back to Russian, Eurasian identity."⁴⁵ Thus, Putin uses a highly mythical reading of history when he refers to *Novorossiya* because while it technically refers to lands controlled by the Russian empire, its history and boundaries are opaque. Still, it evokes within the Russian spirit this sense of patriotic pride for the old Russian empire and an attachment to the *rodina* motherland it once controlled.

Novorossiya can be interpreted in three different ways, according to Laurelle. First, there is the "red" *Novorossiya* referring to the lands of the Soviet Union. The "white" *Novorossiya* is the embodiment of the Russian orthodox tradition. And the "brown" *Novorossiya* refers to idea of a "Russian 'national revolution'" against regimes in power in Kiev and Moscow.⁴⁶ Each of these characterize *Novorossiya* in a different way and have their own camp of followers. For the purpose of this thesis, we focus on the "red" *Novorossiya* that brings us back to Soviet and tsarist lands.

⁴² Marlene Laruelle, "The Three Colors of Novorossiya, or the Russian Nationalist Mythmaking of the Ukrainian Crisis," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 32, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 55–74, doi:10.1080/1060586X.2015.1023004.

⁴³ Elizabeth A. Wood et al., *Roots of Russia's War in Ukraine* (Washington, D.C : New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press ; Columbia University Press, 2016). Page 5.

⁴⁴ Laurelle, "The Three Colors of Novorossiya."

⁴⁵ Laurelle, "The Three Colors of Novorossiya."

⁴⁶ Laurelle, "The Three Colors of Novorossiya."

In the context of the conflict in Ukraine, *Novorossiia* has adopted a more concrete meaning. Pro-Russian separatists use the term to “describe their entity”⁴⁷ as the territory in Eastern Ukraine encompassing Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts known as the Donbas. This use of a strongly mythical and historical name was part of a “geopolitical project that sought to capture grievances, discontent, and disaffection across Ukraine”⁴⁸ and that “[capitalizes] on the emotional power of the concept.”⁴⁹ The Kremlin’s goal here was to “translate [the sentiments evoked by *Novorossiia*] into a secessionist revolt that the Kremlin could use to exert leverage over the geopolitical future of Ukraine.”⁵⁰ Thus, when I refer to *Novorossiia* throughout the rest of the paper, I talk about this entity of Donetsk and Luhansk pro-Russian separatists, but acknowledge the historical meaning of the term.

Details of Content Analysis for TASS Articles

Once establishing that this as a term I wanted to follow, I first found all TASS articles including the word *Novorossiia* from 2014 to 2015. I then narrowed down the list to only include articles where *Novorossiia* was mentioned as part of the substance of the article. Basically, I did not include any articles that referenced the “Press-Center of *Novorossiia*.” I did so because I considered this to not be a part of the actual content as the article, and rather the same as citing another news source. *Novorossiia* was not mentioned in these articles because it was part of the discussion to use the term but instead because a news source with that title was quoted. I did, however, include articles that referenced statements made by *Novorossiia* leadership because I considered these to be a different beast. This was the actual decision making body making a statement, so it was news and not just citing a source.

⁴⁷ Sakwa, Richard. *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2015. Page 178.

⁴⁸ Toal, Gerard. *Near Abroad: Putin, the West, and the Contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017. Page 239.

⁴⁹ Sakwa, page 180.

⁵⁰ Toal, page 239.

When carrying out the content analysis, I accounted for changes in case endings for the term *Novorossiia*. I counted the term as it was used in any case.

Putin's use of the term

Putin first refers explicitly to *Novorossiia* in April 2014. This is incredibly surprising, considering his infamous speech to the Federal Assembly on March 18th in which he praises the annexation of Crimea as a history lesson that dances around the idea of *Novorossiia* but simply does not refer to it using this term or title.⁵¹ Laruelle thinks this is because Crimea is different than *Novorossiia*, an entity with its own legacy.⁵² Thus, we can assume it is not out of the ordinary that TASS uses the term for the first time in March, a month before Putin does so, because he so clearly alludes to the term in his Crimea Speech. But he does start using the term itself in April and continues to do so throughout 2014 and sporadically in 2015.

Overall, *Novorossiia* is mentioned by name in six of Putin's speeches on Ukraine in 2014 and 2015. Of the 19 times Putin references *Novorossiia* using the exact name, 14 of these times are in 2014. He uses the term only five times in 2015, twice in January and April and once in December. Usage is not continuous in either year- that is to say, Putin does not use the term every month.

Patterns of usage of the term *Novorossiia* in TASS

There are four distinct times when *Novorossiia* is used drastically more or less frequently in TASS articles. The first is in March 2014 when the media bureau starts to refer to the term. Next, we see the first big spike in May 2014. There is a major increase in usage in August 2014, and while this drops a little, but the term is still heavily referred to for the remainder of 2014.

⁵¹ While I came across this in the course of my own content analysis, Laruelle's article also has this finding. Laruelle, "Three Colors of Novorossiia."

⁵² Laruelle, "Three Colors of Novorossiia"

Our last moment of change is in January of 2015 when the term is almost entirely phased out of TASS rhetoric.

Initial Usage: March 2014

TASS began to refer to *novorossiia* in the first few days of March 2014, but the frequency of usage is still quite low. It is only referred to three times in .025% of articles that month. Additionally, all of these articles are from the second or the third day of the month; the term is not used continuously throughout March despite relevant current events. Overall, *Novorossiia* is used minimally and much less than a term like NATO at this point, showing that *Novorossiia* is still a rather insignificant part of the framing of the conflict in Ukraine.

In March 2014, TASS refers to *Novorossiia* in a predictable way. In all three articles where *Novorossiia* is used, TASS uses the term as if it is the name of a territory. For example, on March 3, the article describes that “all of *Novorossiia*... is restless,”⁵³ referring to places in the eastern and southern sections of Ukraine. TASS also uses the term *Novorossiia* in context of public displays for the annexation of Crimea in Russia. In another article from March 3rd, TASS describes rallies in support of the annexation of Crimea in front of the Ukrainian embassy in St. Petersburg. According to the article, one of the signs read, “Give independence to *Novorossiia*.”⁵⁴ In this case, the term was used both in reference to *Novorossiia* as a concrete, identifiable territory and also to demonstrate that the Russian population’s support for the idea of *Novorossiia* and the Crimean annexation. Thus, TASS mostly uses Laruelle’s “red” *Novorossiia* in its framing, thereby referring to the territory rather than orthodoxy or the Russian Spring.⁵⁵

⁵³ “Леонид РЕШЕТНИКОВ: Отвести Угрозу Гражданской Войны На Украине Может Только Решительная Позиция, Занятая Путиным,” *ТАСС*, accessed May 9, 2017, <http://tass.ru/opinions/interviews/1599529>.

⁵⁴ “Пикет В Поддержку Жителей Севастополя Прошел У Генконсульства Украины В Петербурге,” *ТАСС*, accessed May 9, 2017, <http://tass.ru/spb-news/1018200>.

⁵⁵ Laurelle, “The Three Colors of *Novorossiia*.”

This is a logical use for the term for two reasons. First, the annexation of Crimea occurred in mid- March. Thus, by using the term *Novorossiya* in these articles earlier in the month, TASS was able to prime readers to be in support of the policy and frame the annexation as in pursuit of this *Novorossiya* goal. TASS started using the term four days before the Crimean referendum took place on March 16th.

But events that make sense to explain why *Novorossiya* came up in TASS rhetoric started before the annexation itself. Pavel Gubarev ascended to the People's Mayor of the Donetsk Oblast, although this action "did not have the desired effect of some kind of popular uprising"⁵⁶ as was desired in pursuit of the Russian Spring. No matter; the process continued. Crimea declared its plan to hold the referendum on the 6th. Russian leadership spoke in support of the referendum, and three days later on the 10th, the new Prime Minister Sergey Aksyonov spoke publicly, congratulating his people and announcing conversations with the Kremlin to start the process of formally joining Russia. The next day Crimea officially declared independence, and the rest of the population voted in the referendum on the 16th. After only five days, the Russian parliament ratified the treaty that absorbed Crimea into the Russian Federation.⁵⁷ In this month, Leonid Slutsky, head of the Duma Committee for CIS Affairs, declared that the Duma would consider a bill that simplified the process for absorbing other territories in the former Soviet Union back into Russia.

All of this supports the idea that the eastern and southern territories of Ukraine and Crimea – *Novorossiya* -- should be part of Russia, and thus the term has great importance during this time. Again, we are reminded of Laruelle's "red" *Novorossiya* and the idea that those

⁵⁶ Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014). Page 128.

⁵⁷ "The Ukraine Crisis Timeline," accessed April 17, 2017, <http://ukraine.csis.org>.

historically significant lands should be returned to their rightful place in the Russian Federation.⁵⁸

The question brought up by these events surrounding the annexation is not why TASS started using the phrase when it did. Rather it's why they did not use it more often or consistently throughout the month. Because the story of the annexation of Crimea did not just end with the referendum, *Novorossiya* as a concrete region remained a relevant idea through the end of March. It wasn't until the 17th that the final tally from the referendum came out with 97 percent voting to join Russia, and President Putin gave his infamous Crimea speech to the federal assembly on the 18th.⁵⁹ TASS does not refer to *Novorossiya* at all during any of these events later in the month; in fact, it only utilizes the term days before the referendum even took place. So why didn't TASS continue to use the term *novorossiya* to refer the region as it did in the beginning of the month? It is hard to know and is a potential path for further study.

The second potential reason *Novorossiya* was discussed in the context of the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine has to do with the public support for the annexation of Crimea. Levada started asking questions about the annexation of Crimea right away in March 2014. In this month, support was exceedingly high. When asked the question "Do you support the annexation of Crimea?" some 88 percent of people responded positively. 57 percent marked "definitely yes" and 31 percent said "probably yes" as an answer to this question. The idea of bringing Crimea back under Russian control was quite a popular one at this point. Thus the public was already in support of the *Novorossiya* project.

⁵⁸ Laruelle, "Three Colors of Novorossiya."

⁵⁹ "The Ukraine Crisis Timeline," accessed April 17, 2017, <http://ukraine.csis.org>.

First big spike: May 2014

Up until now, *Novorossiya* had been a relatively minor term for both the Kremlin and TASS. Even though Putin did not refer to it at all, in May, it became a more common word in coverage of the conflict for TASS.

In April 2014, TASS only mentioned *novorossiya* three times in one of 75 articles it published that month. But in May, the number of times it was mentioned rose to 22 in 24 percent of that month's Ukraine related articles. It was a significant jump for *novorossiya*.

In the month of May, TASS refers to *Novorossiya* mostly in respect to either a government or political party representing the region of eastern Ukraine or to the region itself. As opposed to the next few months, it does not mention *Novorossiya* in the context of military action or protests in the Donbas, but rather focuses on the formation of *Novorossiya* as a territory and a decision-making body. Both lines of thought continue throughout the month as *Novorossiya* the idea of becomes more defined. An article from May 12th quotes the Deputy Security General Council of United Russia Sergei Zheleznyak in stating that the goal should be a “[restoration of] peace and security in the troubled land of *Novorossiya*,”⁶⁰ calling attention to the fact that *Novorossiya* is its own territorial entity. TASS also talks about *Novorossiya* as a political force. An article from May 13th mentions the creation of the political party of *Novorossiya* by the People's Governor of the Donbass Pavel Gubarev. At this point, the news agency adds the political layer to its definition of the word. In short, these territorial and political definitions combine as TASS begins to refer to *Novorossiya* as a union of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts into a single state with leadership independent from the Ukrainian central government in a May 24th article. This is the same day that Donetsk and Luhansk Republics came together to

⁶⁰ “Неверов: Референдумы На Юго-Востоке Украины - Это ‘ответ Киевской Хунте,’” *TACC*, accessed May 9, 2017, <http://tass.ru/politika/1179497>.

form the *Novorossiya* Republic.⁶¹ *Novorossiya* is treated as its own entity, not necessarily autonomous as of yet, but clearly defined within a territory and with an identifiable structure of leadership.

This framing of the term *novorossiya* is to be expected since the Russian Spring was at height. At this time, the Kremlin and pro-Russian separatists in the east hoped protests and referendums in the east would allow for Russian speaking majorities to branch off from Ukraine and rejoin Russia. Thus, it is logical that the media treats *Novorossiya* as this concrete territory with able to make political decisions for itself. In a way, this is less of Laruelle's "red" *Novorossiya* and leaning towards the "brown" *Novorossiya* because the emphasis is less on the territory itself, its boundaries and its historical significance, but more on its leadership and independent decision making ability. This is then more in line with the "brown" *Novorossiya* idea which refers more to the desire and planning for revolt in those regions, implying, as in this case, leadership and autonomy in decision making.⁶²

In its treatment of the term *Novorossiya* in May 2014, TASS adjusts its definition to reflect current events. At first, it refers to a loose collection of like-minded regions in the east of Ukraine. On May 11th, the territory in question became more concretely defined as Donetsk and Luhansk voted on their own referendum similar to that in Crimea⁶³ and declared their independence from Ukraine.⁶⁴ During that voting process, the Ukrainian National guard killed a citizen of the east in the city of Krasnoarmeisk. The following day, the separatist regions, now consistently referred to as *Novorossiya* by TASS, asked to join Russia. By May 24th, Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics had "decided to unite as a new 'Union of *Novorossiya*.'"⁶⁵

⁶¹ Richard Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015). Page 150.

⁶² Laruelle, "Three Colors of Novorossiya"

⁶³ Wilson, page 131.

⁶⁴ Sakwa, page 154.

⁶⁵ Laruelle, "Three Colors of Novorossiya"

As I pointed to earlier, the political party of *Novorossiya* was also formed around this time by the governor of the Donbas. In short, May is all about the creation of the territory and political body known as *Novorossiya*, and TASS copies this in its framing of the term.

Major increase in usage: August 2014

In August 2014, *Novorossiya* is referred to 71 times – this is drastically more than any other month in the entirety of the conflict from 2014 to 2015. 53 percent of TASS articles mention the term, despite the fact that Putin does not do so in a public address in this month. This is a jump up from July, where *Novorossiya* was mentioned 32 times in 39.5 percent of articles, and it is also greater than the 48 times mentioned in 44 percent of articles in September. Thus, August has the greatest incidence of *Novorossiya* in TASS articles by far.

TASS mentions *Novorossiya* in two main contexts throughout the month of August. The first has to do with military, and this chunk of news articles mainly consists of reports of artillery strikes or military movements by either the militia of LNR and DNR or the Ukrainian army. The second context in which TASS refers to *Novorossiya* is in an institutional way, quoting *Novorossiya* leadership or referring to the governmental body itself.

Novorossiya in a military context

Most of the times TASS mentions *Novorossiya* in the month of August 2014, it is in this military context. Sometimes this is a discussion of casualties, like in an article from August 22nd that states that 1,000 civilians had died in the Donbas region in the past two months of the conflict.⁶⁶ The number of people killed in one attack or another comes up over and over in these articles, reminding TASS readers that the war is bloody and people are suffering.

⁶⁶ “Депутаты Новороссии: За Два Месяца В Донбассе Погибли Более 1 Тыс. Мирных Граждан,” *TACC*, accessed May 9, 2017, <http://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/1394014>.

However, the more common way TASS uses the term *Novorossiya* is in articles about military actions, movements or successes. An article from August 28th that talks about the recent recapture of the city of Novoazovsk by the separatist army is an example of this.⁶⁷ In these types of articles, TASS attributes the militia forces in the Donbas not just to Donetsk or Luhansk but to this entity known as *Novorossiya*. Basically, TASS calls separatist forces the military or army of *Novorossiya*. This usage of the term in a military context is the most common way TASS talks about the term in the month of August. Again, this is more of Laruelle's "brown" *Novorossiya* than anything else, as this field refers to the "popular uprising" aspect of *Novorossiya*'s goals.⁶⁸

It makes sense why *Novorossiya* is overwhelmingly referred to in this way. Despite the fact that the *Novorossiya* militia controlled "15,000 personnel with a general staff deploying brigades and battalions,"⁶⁹ "it looked as though the Ukrainian military offensive was close to victory."⁷⁰ Even so, a substantial amount of military action took place in August 2014 in the Donbas region.⁷¹ This was the month of the battle of Ilovaisk, a particularly bloody clash in which Ukrainian forces tried to take the city only to be surrounded by rebels and forced to retreat. Also notably, the Ukrainian army carried out a siege on August 3rd on the cities of Luhansk and Donetsk. Both cities were surrounded by the 7th and on the 9th, separatists asked for a ceasefire in the area.⁷² Despite comments of confidence on the part of the Ukrainian Defense Minister Valeriy Heletey, the siege was not successful in the long term, but it was an important military setback for the separatists.⁷³ It is important to note that TASS does not refer to the event using the term *Novorossiya* like it did in coverage of, for example, recent fighting in Mariupol in

⁶⁷ "СНБО Украины: Новоазовск и ряд окрестных районов перешел под контроль ополченцев," TACC, accessed May 9, 2017, <http://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/1405495>.

⁶⁸ Laruelle "Three Colors of Novorossiya"

⁶⁹ Richard Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015). Page 124.

⁷⁰ Sakwa, page 123.

⁷¹ Kalb, page 174.

⁷² "The Ukraine Crisis Timeline," accessed April 17, 2017, <http://ukraine.csis.org>.

⁷³ "Ukraine Crisis: Timeline," *BBC News*, November 13, 2014, sec. Europe, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26248275>.

articles from August 25th or August 29th. So even though August was a heavy military month, not every occurrence warranted a reference to *novorossiia*, but a substantial number did.⁷⁴

Military action in the region became important again on the day after the rebel commander of Donetsk, Alexander Zakharchenko, announced that Russian support was on its way. On the 17th of August, Ukraine's Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) had significant successes, including the capture of the Zhovtnevy neighborhood in the city of Luhansk and the town of Yasynuvata in Donetsk. It is also understandable why TASS discusses *novorossiia* in the context of casualties because the war in the Donbas was particularly bloody at this time. On the 20th, 43 people were killed in fighting during the siege on Luhansk and Donetsk in 24 hours. It's also important to note that Alexandr Proselkov, deputy foreign minister of the Donetsk Republic and important advocate for the idea of *Novorossiia* had been killed just before August on July 31st.⁷⁵

Despite the fact that TASS does not use *Novorossiia* to discuss every event, the news source does frame the term in an overwhelmingly military context throughout the month of August. Considering the amount of very important military actions that took place both on the separatist and Ukrainian side during that month, this is logical. In short, because TASS uses *Novorossiia* mostly in a military context during this month, the upsurge in the use of the term in August may have been a response to a period of particularly heavy fighting in important strongholds for the separatists.

Another potential reason TASS may have referred to the term in a military context to such a large extent may have been the fact that public support amongst Russians for a full-blown military conflict was low at the time. This potential war involving Russian, Ukrainian and separatist troops was looking like a more concrete possibility in the summer of 2014. But when asked whether Russians would support the Kremlin's decision to go to war in this case, public

⁷⁴ "The Ukraine Crisis Timeline," accessed April 17, 2017, <http://ukraine.csis.org>.

⁷⁵ "The Ukraine Crisis Timeline," accessed April 17, 2017, <http://ukraine.csis.org>.

opinion had turned sour against the idea. The question was last asked in May 2014, and by August, the “definitely yes” group sustained a very significant 17 percent drop from 30 to 13 percent. The “probably yes” group also suffered a significant decrease in support from 39 percent in May to 28 percent in August. Naturally, the negative responses – the “probably no” and “definitely no” increased by August. “Probably no” went from 11 percent to 23 percent, and “definitely no” increased by 15 percent to 20 percent in August.⁷⁶

Novorossiia in regional context

In using *Novorossiia* in reference to the command of the separatist militia forces, it’s as if TASS is saying *Novorossiia* is an entity like a republic or government, just as it had done earlier in the year. It continues this attitude towards *Novorossiia* in a number of different ways throughout its articles. The effect is that it appears that TASS treats *Novorossiia* as if it is a governmental body and a union between the separatist regions of eastern Ukraine, continuing the pattern from March and May. In doing so, TASS continues to expand the idea of the “red” *Novorossiia*⁷⁷ by referring to the term as more than just the territory, as Laruelle describes it in the “red” context.

TASS establishes this perspective in two ways. First, it often quotes members of the separatist leadership, calling these figures Head of the Socioeconomic Quarters of *Novorossiia* or co-Chairman of the People’s Front of *Novorossiia*. Second, on numerous accounts, it refers to the parliament of *Novorossiia*, the decision-making board of the separatists, with authority as if were an official governmental body. In doing so, TASS confirms that it considers *Novorossiia* a leadership body for the separatist movement in the east of Ukraine.

⁷⁶ “Aug 2015 Ukraine,” accessed December 21, 2016, <http://www.levada.ru/eng/ukraine-3>.

⁷⁷ Laruelle, “Three Colors of Novorossiia”

Using *Novorossiya* in this context makes less sense than the military one, considering actions on the ground. For starters, the *Novorossiya* project during the “Russian Spring” was clearly a failure at this point.⁷⁸ The idea had been to start protests in the east of Ukraine, hold referendums and bring the Donbas region back under Russian control. But the *Novorossiya* project “was not a cause catching fire locally,”⁷⁹ and this effort failed everywhere apart from Luhansk and Donetsk. Thus, idea of the *Novorossiya* state so to speak had was far less of a focus in the Kremlin perspective. Yet TASS continues to refer to *Novorossiya* as if it is a unified territory with hopes for autonomy. True, the separatist movement is still strong in Luhansk and Donetsk, but it is surprising that TASS continues to treat decision-making bodies in the Donbas as if they are a group seeking to reinvigorate the *Novorossiya* project.

It is even more surprising when we consider that nothing particularly important to the idea of independence or autonomy of the Donbas happened in August 2014 except that Alexander Zakharchenko became the new prime minister of the Donetsk People’s Republic.⁸⁰ Most of the events on the ground were military, fighting over whether this city or that was controlled by separatists or the Ukrainian military. It would be more understandable that TASS was referring to *Novorossiya* as a governmental body if there had been some peace negotiation the separatists had not been invited to attend or a vote in the region for a new policy or leader. But none of this occurred during this month. Thus, from the perspective of current events, *Novorossiya* was not a relevant term to describe the leadership of the separatist movement and it is rather perplexing as to why TASS still refers to it under the name *Novorossiya* in August.

It is possible that the pattern of public opinion towards the annexation of Crimea at the time could have illuminated a reason TASS still used the term *Novorossiya* to mean the separatist movement even though the Kremlin had abandoned that idea. However, Levada did

⁷⁸ Wilson 124

⁷⁹ Toal, page 266.

⁸⁰ Laruelle, “Three Colors of Novorossiya”

not ask the question about whether Russians supported the annexation of Crimea during August 2014, and thus we can't assume that some drop in support for that policy was a compelling factor in framing the term *Novorossiya* in this way. That said, results changed very little for this question from May to October, the only times the question was asked in the summer of 2014. The only significant change of more than five percent was a drop in the "probably yes" group to 31 percent. So while we have no data from August 2014 on the question, because at no point is there a huge change in any answer to this question, it is safe to assume support is similar to the results of May and October. These results do not indicate particularly low support for the annexation of Crimea as compared to the results right after the event, and thus, it is reasonable to say that a change in public opinion was likely not a major factor in the use of *novorossiya* to refer to the decision-making body of the separatists in this month.⁸¹

The term *Novorossiya* disappears: January 2015

After August 2014, the use of *Novorossiya* took a slight decrease to hover somewhere between 30 and 48 times used each month throughout the rest of the year. Frequency also stayed pretty high, ranging from a maximum of 45 percent of articles in November to a minimum of 29 percent in December. In short, up until the new year, *Novorossiya* was still very much a part of the TASS framework of the conflict.

In January 2015, *Novorossiya* is suddenly almost eradicated from TASS vocabulary. There is a serious drop in both overall usage and frequency. *Novorossiya* is only referred to three times in the entire month of January and in three of 18 articles, or at a frequency of 16 percent. This trend of very low usage continues throughout most of 2015 with minor spikes in February and April 2015 that last for only a month. In June, July and October, TASS does not use

⁸¹ "Aug 2015 Ukraine," accessed December 21, 2016, <http://www.levada.ru/eng/ukraine-3>.

Novorossiia once. What was once an integral part of the framing of the war in Ukraine is now almost irrelevant.

Despite the fact that *Novorossiia* is very infrequently mentioned in January 2015, TASS uses the term in much the same way it did throughout 2014. There are two contexts in which *Novorossiia* comes up in this month. The first is military. Of the three articles that mention *Novorossiia*, two of them place the word in this military context. In fact the two articles from January 28th and 29th use the same quote from Eduard Basurin from the Donetsk Ministry of Defense in which he describes a Ukrainian reconnaissance mission where soldiers wore the uniforms of the *Novorossiia* militia.⁸²⁸³ The second way the term is mentioned is in relation to protests in Russia in support of *Novorossiia* and eastern Ukraine in an article from January 29th.⁸⁴ We see this same use in May 2014 when TASS uses the word to refer to protests in favor of the annexation of Crimea.

The biggest reason *Novorossiia* was used less by TASS was probably because, at this point, the Ukrainian crisis was simply being covered less in the media. The conflict was now in its second year without much change or progress towards an agreement that would end it. Thus, the sudden drop in the use of *Novorossiia* likely, at least in part, reflects this decrease in media attention to the situation overall.

That said, plenty was happening on the ground in eastern Ukraine, mostly in a military context. 11 were killed in continued fighting in Donetsk on the 13th. Two days later, fighting picked back up at the Donetsk airport; this would continue throughout the month and would occupy the military discussion.⁸⁵ Yet TASS does not refer to *Novorossiia* in the context of the

⁸² “Минобороны ДНР: Украинские Спецслужбы Готовят Акции Террора В Донецкой Народной Республике,” *TACC*, accessed May 9, 2017, <http://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/1729533>.

⁸³ “Минобороны ДНР: За Сутки Из-За Обстрелов Киевскими Силовиками Погибли 11 Мирных Жителей,” *TACC*, accessed May 9, 2017, <http://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/1730380>.

⁸⁴ “В Петербурге Очередная акция ‘Стратегии-31’ станет Последней,” *TACC*, accessed May 9, 2017, <http://tass.ru/spb-news/1732275>.

⁸⁵ “The Ukraine Crisis Timeline,” accessed April 17, 2017, <http://ukraine.csis.org>.

battle for the airport in Donetsk, perhaps because while it is a war in the east, it has more to do with military strategy than the region or idea of *Novorossiya*.

What's surprising about this month is that TASS does not refer to *Novorossiya* in the context of the region governed by a self-deciding government as it did so heavily in May 2014, for example. Perhaps this is because the project of Donbas independence was nearly dead from the Russian perspective. But still, a number of events occur in the month that make a discussion of *Novorossiya* as a territory and governmental body relevant. First, the Ukrainian army announced on January 21st that it would strengthen forces along the contact line that separated pro-Russian and Ukrainian forces as per the last ceasefire. This contact line was defined by previous ceasefires and the Minsk treaty but its existence also implies there is a concrete boundary to the separatist controlled territory of *Novorossiya*. Next, on the 23rd, the leader of the Donetsk People's Republic Alexander Zakharchenko announced he would no longer participate in peace talks with the Ukrainians and urged his forces to keep fighting along the Donetsk border. Again, this implies some decision-making capability of the separatist movement. Finally, on the 26th, a state of emergency was declared in Donetsk and Luhansk, again establishing the concrete boundaries to the territory of *Novorossiya*.⁸⁶ But TASS does not use the term in its reporting on any of these events. In fact, it moves entirely away from addressing Laruelle's "red"⁸⁷ idea of *Novorossiya* as a region in this month, despite the fact that much of the events on the ground put the term in that context and clearly define *Novorossiya* as that region and government. Thus, events on the ground are not a likely reason for the use, or more noticeably the absence, of the term in this month.

Support for the annexation of Crimea amongst Russians, for the most part, had not changed. Only the "definitely yes" group dropped by a significant amount, seven percent since

⁸⁶ "The Ukraine Crisis Timeline," accessed April 17, 2017, <http://ukraine.csis.org>.

⁸⁷ Laruelle, "Three Colors of Novorossiya"

the conflict began in 2014. Because one of the ways TASS uses *Novorossiia* in this month is in discussion of protests in support of separatists in the Novorossiia region of eastern Ukraine. Thus, this framing of the term may be a reaction to a drop in support for the annexation of Ukrainian territory.

In terms of levels of support in the case of military conflict, Levada collected no new data for January 2015, but February showed no significant changes since August 2014. But since support for military conflict is still low, perhaps TASS referred to *novorossiia* in this military context still in January 2015.

Conclusion

To a degree, the pattern of the use of the term *Novorossiia* by the Kremlin and by TASS proves that the media is at least expanding on Kremlin framing of the conflict in Ukraine in this way. The idea behind the term, however, is tried out first by Putin during his March 18th Crimea Speech. So, in referring to *Novorossiia* by name before Putin does, TASS is not so much creating the framework as naming it more clearly. Often throughout the course of the conflict, TASS frames the use of the term in some variation of Laruelle's "red" or "brown" concepts of *Novorossiia*.⁸⁸ Granted, TASS is not perfectly copying her description of the term in either. Rather, it is adapting the "red" *Novorossiia* to refer to the governmental body as well as the territory, and the "brown" *Novorossiia* is less violent against the regime in Moscow as against the Ukrainians in TASS's descriptions. Overall, however, TASS utilizes these frameworks, to a degree, to explain the military and regional events of *Novorossiia*.

⁸⁸ Laruelle, "Three Colors of Novorossiia"

Chapter Four

Russia vs. the West. Usage of the term *NATO*

What does NATO refer to?

NATO is a proxy for the policy as a reaction against western aggression that has characterized part of Russia's foreign policy for decades. Even during the Cold War, Russia considered NATO's very existence to be against Russian interests of security and influence.⁸⁹ The problem grew more serious with each round of the alliance's eastern expansion until Latvia and Estonia, both bordering Russia in the northwest, joined in 2004. As Georgia and Ukraine were considered for possible membership, "the Kremlin bristled."⁹⁰ This would put a western military alliance directly on Russia's border – a terrifying prospect. Not to mention NATO expansion threatened Russian influence in the post-Soviet space. Thus, part of the reason the Kremlin spoke to the idea of *Novorossiia* was a response to Ukraine's potential move westward.⁹¹

I use NATO as a proxy to explain to what degree the conflict in Ukraine is referred to a conflict with the West. Of course, there are other ways both Putin and the media talk about the West. Sometimes it is a direct reference to Europe or the United States; sometimes it is simply "the West" or "our brothers or partners to the West." In short, NATO is not the only way Putin talks about his problems with Europe and the US. But I refer to this term specifically because it is such a large part of Russia's foreign policy and has a more concrete meaning and series of reasons why it troubles Russia.

⁸⁹ Kalb, page 5.

⁹⁰ Kalb, page 7.

⁹¹ Toal, page 246.

On Carrying Out the Content Analysis

In a similar process to *Novorossiya*, I found all TASS articles using the word “NATO” from 2014 to 2015 in the context of Ukraine. I then narrowed down the types of articles I used for content analysis by a few different factors. For NATO, this was relatively simple. I did not include any articles that were a list of major events in Eastern Ukraine that TASS produces monthly, even when they mentioned NATO. The reason for this was such articles gave no context and insight into how the term was used to frame the conflict; they merely stated what had happened that month. I also discarded articles that were merely summaries of what NATO Secretary General Rasmussen said at any given time. If his comments were related to Ukraine, Russia or the conflict, I kept them. If they were simply about expansion or some unrelated policy, I did not.

I did include articles that mentioned the potential membership of states other than Ukraine, even those not in the region like Sweden. My logic here was that if NATO decided to go forward with another expansionist push, no matter which countries were involved, Russia could reasonably react with fear that one of its border states would be next. This is especially logical because a substantial portion of the states left in Europe without membership either border Russia as in the case of Ukraine, Georgia Belarus or have ties to Russia like Moldova. Russia sees NATO’s expansion as a threat, so I included all discussion of this.

When carrying out the actual content analysis, I references to NATO included in the title and I also counted the adjective form, so as to get a full picture.

Putin’s use of the term

NATO becomes a part of Putin’s speeches on Ukraine in March 2014, whereas TASS adopted the framework in January. This is not, however, an indication that TASS has made up this framework and is using the term of its own according, lending the media a more powerful

and independent place in the cycle of information from the government to the people. It is possible that TASS is still copying Kremlin rhetoric when it refers to the conflict in Ukraine because, unlike a term like Novorossiia, NATO has been a part of Kremlin framing of foreign policy for years. The alliance is not a new enemy, nor is it a new factor in how Putin explains the events in Ukraine, like protests on Maidan. Thus, the fact that Putin refers to NATO for the first time in a speech in 2014 on Ukraine after TASS uses the term in this context does not indicate that TASS is framing the conflict independent of the Kremlin, but rather that it is simply carrying over the explanation from previous Kremlin rhetoric on foreign policy and events in Ukraine in late 2013.

Overall, Putin refers to NATO in his speeches in Ukraine 64 times over the course of 2014 and 2015. The term is much more frequently used in 2014, though this is possibly due to the fact that Putin simply gives more speeches about the conflict in Ukraine in that year than the next. Of the 11 speeches that reference the term, seven are in 2014 and four in 2015. In short, NATO is by far the most commonly used term out of those studied in Kremlin speeches.

Patterns of usage of the term *NATO* or *NATO expansion* in TASS

NATO is referenced, either as part of the term “NATO expansion” or on its own, quite often in TASS articles about the conflict in Ukraine. In fact, it is mentioned with the highest frequency of any of the terms measured from 2014 to 2015. In any given month, it is the most common, sometimes by two or three times the number of mentions, than the other terms. That said, it is not as consistently used as the other terms. One month may see a very high usage, the next a sizable drop maintained for two or so months and then a rise back to the original level. Look to July 2015 through November 2015 on the graph for an example of this.

The term is used so inconsistently, and while this an interesting finding on its own, this paper explores the six most dramatic moments in changes in the number of mentions solely for

simplicity. It is, of course, possible that there are periods of change not examined in-depth that may also indicate interesting facets of the relationship between current events on the ground and changes in rhetoric, but this paper focuses on the most drastic changes to establish the extremeness of these potential effects.

It is also important to note that NATO expansion is only one way in which the term is used during this time period, and while there are lows and highs for that exact phrase, they do not necessarily coincide with times of high usage for NATO alone. That is to say a month like March 2014 with an average number of mentions for NATO alone refers to NATO expansion only eight times, whereas September 2014 mentions NATO 258 times but NATO expansion only 16 times. Thus, for the sake of simplicity and clarity, I focus on simply “NATO,” though this is an avenue for future research, as “NATO expansion” may illuminate interesting patterns as well.

I focus on six main periods of change in the number of times NATO is referenced. As I said in the chapter on *Novorossiia*, I consider a month to be a significant change in usage by two standards. The first and most prominent is the raw number of times TASS mentions the word throughout the course of the month. The second is the percentage of articles using this particular term of all the articles from that month using any of the four terms I studied – this I call the frequency.

The first moment of interest is in March 2014. Most other terms are used for the first time in this month or in the month before, but NATO has been part of TASS discussions on Ukraine since the beginning of the year and likely before that. In March, however, NATO is referenced almost twice as much as in February. The second moment of interest is August 2014. A slight drop in usage in the months preceding lead up to a big spike in this month. Next, we look at January 2015. Like all three other terms, references NATO declined significantly in the start of 2015. However, as is not the case with the other phrases, this is an unstained low for NATO and it is quickly jumps up to six times the number of mentions the next month. We then turn the

focus to June 2015, which has the highest usage of NATO in TASS articles in the entire conflict from 2014 to 2015. By July 2015, however, there is the most sizable drop. Finally, in December 2015, there is an uptick in the number of times mentioned, even though the conflict is much less in the media's focus and all other terms have very low rates of usage.

First significant but not initial usage: March 2014

As stated earlier, March 2014 is not the first time that NATO is mentioned; it comes up 33 times in January and 61 times in February. This is to be expected for two reasons. First, Russia is historically has been vehemently opposed to the expansion of NATO to its borders. This rhetoric of NATO as the enemy is not new. Second, Ukraine planned to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union in 2013, an action that the Kremlin sees as a step towards the West and away from Russia. Then Ukrainian President Yanukovich ultimately abandoned this Association Agreement after a meeting with Putin, sparking protests in Kiev in late 2013.⁹² The Kremlin had been aware of this and carefully watching protests since late 2013. Thus, it's not surprising that NATO was mentioned months before any of the other terms this paper studies.

That said, there is an increase in usage in this month. NATO is mentioned 108 times in 16 percent of that month's articles. This is not a record yet, but it is more than any of the other terms at this point. There are three different contexts in which TASS refers to NATO throughout March, including expansion, NATO's participation in the conflict in Ukraine and Russian-NATO tensions. It is not uncommon for one article to reference NATO in more than one of these contexts.

⁹² Anne Applebaum, "Chicken Kiev," *Slate*, November 28, 2013, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/foreigners/2013/11/viktor_yanukovich_backed_away_from_the_e_u_and_toward_vladimir_putin.html.

NATO expansion angle

There are two ways TASS talks about NATO expansion during this month. One is specific regard to the possibility of Ukraine becoming a member state. The other is more general—a simple discussion of the eastward expansion of the alliance, perhaps with reference to other potential member states like Moldova.

When Ukraine is specifically mentioned, usually TASS admits that NATO does not want Ukraine to become a member state. This serves to weaken the argument that the Kremlin goes to war in Ukraine in order to weaken the country or cause a frozen conflict that would inhibit Ukraine's path to NATO membership. This is the most common way NATO is discussed in this month, more so than a less specific mention of expansion. For example, in an article from March 8th, TASS quotes the Ukrainian Prime Minister saying that Ukrainian membership in NATO is “not on the agenda.” Hypothetically, this should alleviate some Russian concerns about having a western military alliance on its borders.

NATO's participation in the conflict

The next way NATO is discussed in TASS articles this month is its involvement in the Ukrainian conflict. This ranges from meetings amongst NATO leaders on what to do about Russia's aggressions to a promise not to add more troops in the east, as is referenced in a March 24th article.⁹³ So far, NATO isn't a very active player, mostly playing a diplomatic role and making statements in favor of security in Eastern Europe.⁹⁴ The theme is not robust yet, but it will continue throughout the conflict.

⁹³ “ФРГ: НАТО Не Планирует Увеличивать Численность Военнослужащих В Восточной Европе,” *TACC*, accessed May 9, 2017, <http://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/1070716>.

⁹⁴ “Obama Says NATO Needs to Boost Presence in Eastern Europe,” *Reuters*, March 26, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-eu-summit-nato-idUSBREA2P1XJ20140326>.

Russia-NATO relations

At this point, discussion of the Russian NATO relationship is quite limited, but it will become a major theme throughout the course of the conflict. In this month, it is only mentioned in two articles. One from March 3rd states that Russia does not agree with NATO that it has violated international law with the annexation of Crimea. The other from March 23rd quotes the Commander of NATO Combined Forces as saying Russia acts like an enemy. It is a minimal framework for now.⁹⁵

Events on the Ground: March 2014

Much of what happened this month was western powers attempting to respond to the annexation of Crimea in early March and subsequent start to the conflict in the east of Ukraine. Because NATO is a proxy for western powers, this possibly impacted the sudden rise in NATO references in TASS articles. Leadership in the US in particular made statements condemning Russia for its breach in international law. President Obama went so far as to say that Russia is a “regional power” acting out of weakness.⁹⁶ That had to bruise Putin’s ego.

Then there were a series of meetings, too, between Heads of State in the west and Russian and Ukrainian leadership. President Obama met with Ukrainian Prime Minister Yatsenyuk on the 12th and Secretary of State John Kerry talked with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov two days later.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ “МИД РФ: В Москве Категорически Не Согласны С Заявлением Совета НАТО,” *TACC*, accessed May 9, 2017, <http://tass.ru/politika/1018259>.

⁹⁶ “Obama Dismisses Russia as ‘regional Power’ Acting out of Weakness,” *Washington Post*, accessed May 9, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/obama-dismisses-russia-as-regional-power-acting-out-of-weakness/2014/03/25/1e5a678e-b439-11e3-b899-20667de76985_story.html.

⁹⁷ “The Ukraine Crisis Timeline,” accessed April 17, 2017, <http://ukraine.csis.org>.

Finally, the entire community of western countries came together to start sanctions on Russian officials on the 17th and the European Union and US added more on the 20th. To add salt to the wound, the UN declared the Crimean referendum “invalid” by the 27th.⁹⁸

Overall, Russia had plenty of reason to rail on the west through this NATO proxy as it suffered from staggering anger coming from that part of the global community.

Slight Drop Leads to Big Spike: August 2014

In one of the bloodiest months of the conflict in the Donbas, NATO sees a huge spike. July saw a minor drop to only 86 mentions, but that bounced quickly back in this month where TASS referred to NATO 228 times in 35 percent of the articles mentioning one of the four words studied here. This is one of the moments of highest usage over the course of the conflict.

NATO is mentioned during this period partly in the same way as before, but with the addition of a few more narratives. We continue to see the focus on expansion of membership and the alliance’s participation in the conflict. But now we also have a discussion of Russia’s involvement in Ukraine and some emphasis on Russia-NATO relations.

NATO membership expansion is still a substantial part of TASS’s use of NATO. Like before, sometimes the topic is merely expansion in the abstract or in regards to a seemingly random country like Sweden in an article from August 10th. But quite often it is in the context of potential Ukrainian membership in the alliance. Still, NATO and Ukraine both seem to be staying clear of that potential path. Nothing much on this front has changed since March, but it is still a relevant piece of the conversation involving the term.

Again, this frame of NATO involvement in the conflict is continued from March. Like before, the emphasis is on NATO countries coming together to meet and discuss possible actions against Russia to prevent further aggression in the east. There is, however, some discussion on

⁹⁸ “The Ukraine Crisis Timeline,” accessed April 17, 2017, <http://ukraine.csis.org>.

whether NATO troops will be involved, either in Ukraine or in the alliance's most eastern member states. This seems like a slim possibility, however, according to TASS.

Also, because the Association Agreement with the European Union, to Russia, symbolizes that Ukraine may become a NATO member state, it is important to remember that the next month, in September, that agreement would be ratified.

For the first time, we see NATO used in the context of the part Russia currently plays in the conflict, but it is a minimal part, to be sure. In many cases, the TASS article involves Russia's efforts to refute a claim made by NATO in regards to Kremlin actions in Ukraine. For example, in an article from August 9th, TASS offers the Kremlin's response to NATO's claim that there are Russian troops in the Donbas – there are none.

As was the case in March, Russia- NATO relations are still a minimal part of the dialogue on TASS articles using the term NATO. Only two articles mention tensions between the alliance and the Kremlin. Even though there is not much coverage, it does demonstrate that Russia's fear of a conflict with NATO are not entirely unjustified.

Events on the Ground: August 2014

Much of what is going on in eastern Ukraine at this point is military. It is the bloodiest month of the entire conflict, and Russia is starting to get heavily involved. Four events are of the most relevance to the use of NATO. The first is an international humanitarian mission sent to Luhansk on the 11th, demonstrating that the international community is concerned over the status of civilians in the region, not just interested in punishing Russia for violations of sovereignty. That said, western powers do threaten more sanctions at the end of the month, mostly in response to Russia's blatant military assistance to separatist rebels. While Russia continues to deny that its military forces are in Ukraine, this is now widely known to be false. Despite this, Presidents

Putin and Poroshenko met this month in preparation for Minsk peace talks to take place in September.⁹⁹

Finally and most importantly, Ukraine leadership announces on the 29th that it will seek NATO membership. Even though NATO continues to state that this will not happen, it feeds Russia's fears that Ukraine will turn to the west and Russia will have to contend with a western military alliance on its borders.¹⁰⁰ TASS picks up on this renewed fear by publishing more articles referring to NATO this month on this subject and others.

Unsustained Low: January 2015

What makes NATO different from the other terms I explored in this research is it continues to be hugely relevant in TASS and Kremlin framing of the conflict into 2015. Granted, in January, there is a dip, but it recovers strongly in the next few months. In the start of the year, TASS mentions NATO only 29 times. But because the other terms are being phased out of framing more quickly, this makes up 56 percent of the articles containing any of the terms that month.

NATO talks about TASS in a different way this month. It does away with all the discussion on the conflict itself and focuses almost entirely on NATO expansion with some discussion of NATO-Russian relations.

Though the NATO expansion framework has been a factor for months, it's been alongside discussions of NATO's participation in the conflict. That framework is noticeably lacking here. Part of the reason that is a bit strange is because most of what is happening this month is diplomatic, and NATO, or at least NATO member states, are a large force on those negotiations. Additionally, there is barely any desire to offer Ukraine membership in NATO at

⁹⁹ "Ukraine Crisis: Poroshenko Vows 'Roadmap' for Peace," *BBC News*, August 27, 2014, sec. Europe, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28940095>.

¹⁰⁰ "The Ukraine Crisis Timeline," accessed April 17, 2017, <http://ukraine.csis.org>.

this point. In fact, this possibility is only mentioned in one article from January 14th. Most of the articles from this month talk about the possibility of membership for states like Moldova.

Only two articles mention Russia's relations with NATO. This is typical of the trend in 2014, as well. It is not a main focus of the framework of NATO's position in the conflict in Ukraine, but it is almost always mentioned. The actual content of the articles, however, is promising. An article from January 8th states that NATO is committed to positive relations with Russia. This makes sense because most of what is happening this month factors into a decrease in diplomatic tensions between Russia, Ukraine and western powers.

Events on the ground

In a way, it makes sense that NATO is mentioned less this month because tensions between Russia and the west are starting to decrease. Even though the Minsk protocol was clearly ineffective at this point,¹⁰¹ talks in search of a peaceful end to the conflict continues this month. This included a meeting between the Foreign Ministers of relevant parties on the 12th, and while there is no significant progress on this front, there is an interest in peace and dialogue. That said, Minsk talks at scheduled for the 30th were cancelled, but scheduled for a later date. The possibility of negotiation is promising now.¹⁰²

Additionally, several western leaders, including Germany's Angela Merkel and France's Hollande advocate either for sanctions to be lifted if progress is made or for no more sanctions to be imposed.¹⁰³

In short, the international community is responding to Russia's willingness to talk and this decrease in tensions could explain why TASS refers to NATO less this month.

¹⁰¹ Steven Rosefielde, *The Kremlin Strikes Back: Russia and the West after Crimea's Annexation* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017). Page 93.

¹⁰² "The Ukraine Crisis Timeline," accessed April 17, 2017, <http://ukraine.csis.org>.

¹⁰³ "The Ukraine Crisis Timeline," accessed April 17, 2017, <http://ukraine.csis.org>.

Highest Usage in the Course of the Conflict: June 2015

NATO is used in the context of Ukraine more in June 2015 than in any other month in the course of the conflict at 329 mentions in 80% of the articles. But why? Every other term studied in this research has been pretty much phased entirely out of framing of the conflict, both by TASS and the Kremlin. So why is NATO still relevant?

Framing and use of the term NATO are now mostly focused on NATO-Russian relations, with some focus on NATO expansion.

Up until now, Russia – NATO relations have been a minor part of the discussion. Even though the subject has come up in almost every month, it is only mentioned in two or so articles. Now we see a sudden spike in references to NATO in this framework. For example, an article from June 17th quotes the head of the Russian Federation Council Committee on International Affairs as saying that NATO is using its fight against so-called Russian aggression to make the alliance relevant again. This sort of discussion, putting NATO and Russia at odds, continues throughout the month.

Most importantly, TASS refers to Russia's discomfort at having NATO on its border. For example, an article from the 17th quotes a Kremlin spokesperson as saying that NATO's presence so close to Russian borders is an attempt to shift the strategic balance. It is also important to note that a year ago this month President Poroshenko of Ukraine signed an Association Agreement with the EU.¹⁰⁴ This was bound to be on Kremlin officials' minds too.

Instead of just a discussion of membership in NATO, now we see the alliance threatening to build up its military presence in eastern member states. This is a new facet of the conversation

¹⁰⁴ Kalb, page 171.

on NATO expansion, though conversation of the possibility of Ukrainian membership does continue in TASS articles, though to a lesser extent. More importantly, the framing of NATO's expansion and involvement in the conflict this month is more focused on an expansion of its military forces. A number of articles make references to NATO military exercises in the region and quite a few talk about a build up of NATO troops close to Russia's borders. Expansion of NATO no longer refers only to long-term membership of new states close to Russia in TASS articles; it also has an element of military expansion.

On the Ground

Why this particular discussion of NATO on Russia's borders comes up now is a bit confusing. In fact, on the 23rd, TASS published an article saying NATO had made statements saying it would scale down its military expansion in Eastern Europe. Putin also said he wouldn't attack a NATO state or NATO troops earlier in the month. True, NATO's "high readiness Spearhead Force" had its first exercise in Poland on the 18th, which likely made Russia uncomfortable.¹⁰⁵ So why is a discussion of NATO military actions such a focus this month?

Current events and TASS usage make a bit more sense when we consider the Russia-NATO relations framework. Putin does indeed announce that he will not attack NATO on the 6th, but western sanctions on Russia are extended again on the 17th.¹⁰⁶ The relationship is still far from steady.

This is the first month where events on the ground have not clearly explained why TASS uses the term NATO to the extent that it does. Why NATO is so heavily used in a month with little change in relations between the alliance and Russia and no significant military action is unclear.

¹⁰⁵ NATO, "NATO Secretary General in Poland for Key 'Spearhead Force' Exercise," *NATO*, accessed May 9, 2017, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_120716.htm.

¹⁰⁶ "The Ukraine Crisis Timeline," accessed April 17, 2017, <http://ukraine.csis.org>.

July 2015

It would actually make a lot more sense for this focus on Russia NATO relations to have happened this month, but it didn't. Instead, TASS only used NATO 22 times. But because all other terms were almost out of use by this point in the conflict, this was 100% of the articles. All articles this month focus on NATO expansion, as typical.

NATO expansion is now the main focus on TASS's articles on NATO. Gone is the discussion on NATO's military involvement in the region. Gone is the context of NATO-Russian relations at this point. Instead we focus solely on the expansion of membership to states in Europe. Only one article even mentions Ukraine's possible membership options. In short, while NATO remains relevant on the ground, it is not a big part of TASS's framing of the conflict this month.

On the ground

Looking at NATO actions this month, it would be more explainable if TASS referred to NATO at a high volume this month instead of in June. This is true for a few reasons. First, US General Dunford calls Russia the greatest threat to American national security on the 9th.¹⁰⁷ Second, the Pentagon awaits approval to send long range radar technology to Ukraine to help in the war against Russia. Finally and most importantly, NATO carries out massive military exercises in Ukraine on the 20th. The alliance, including forces from the US, UK, Georgia, Poland and 18 other countries, carried out huge military exercises this month in Lyiv in Western

¹⁰⁷ Dan Lamothe Washington Post July 10 and 2015, "Russia Greatest Threat to U.S., Says Joint Chiefs Chairman Nominee Gen. Joseph Dunford - The Boston Globe," *BostonGlobe.com*, accessed May 9, 2017, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/nation/2015/07/09/russia-greatest-threat-says-joint-chiefs-chairman-nominee-gen-joseph-dunford/jGbMsvjyRnLWG44f17iKiI/story.html>.

Ukraine as part of the annual Guardian/Rapid Trident exercises.¹⁰⁸ It is an annual event, but it had to have worried the Kremlin all the same.

This begs the question. Why wasn't NATO a bigger part of TASS framing of the conflict this month? And why wasn't there more discussion about NATO military forces in Eastern Europe? Unfortunately, I don't have a good answer for this yet.

A Big Rise, but Why: December 2015

The last period of NATO use in TASS is the most perplexing to me. Not only did nothing much happen on the ground that would explain it, but it was a big jump up for this point in the conflict. TASS mentions of NATO spike from 64 in November to 213 in December. Because most of the other terms are almost all phased out by this point, NATO is mentioned in 83% of articles.

But again we ask why was this case? Putin didn't mention Ukraine at all in his state of the nation speech on the 3rd. While he did mention NATO three times, because it was not in the context of Ukraine, NATO was not a way of framing the conflict, but rather used in reference to some other aspect of the NATO-Russia relationship. Simply put, NATO is no longer a relevant framework to explain the conflict to the Kremlin because Ukraine is no longer a relevant event.

In TASS articles, NATO is used in the same way we have seen it discussed throughout the conflict. We have talk on NATO expansion, including a reference to NATO as a threat to Russian security in an article on December 11th. TASS also refers to NATO's increasing military presence and meetings to discuss the Ukrainian conflict, again referring to NATO's involvement in the conflict, as we saw in early 2014. Finally, TASS also talks about NATO-Russian relations in much the same way it did before.

Events on the ground

¹⁰⁸ "Saber Guardian/Rapid Trident Complete Multinational Training in Ukraine," *Www.army.mil*, accessed May 9, 2017, <http://www.army.mil/article/153161>.

The question is again why. At this point, the conflict had shifted from most people's direct concern and not much substantial happened to explain why NATO was still a relevant framework. Peace talks in Brussels on the 1st came to no conclusion. Vice President Biden went to Kiev to talk to President Poroshenko on the 7th.¹⁰⁹ But this is the extent of major events that could have explained this sudden spike in TASS's use of the term NATO. Again we're left without an answer.

Conclusion

TASS use of the term NATO shows clearly that the media is feeding off Kremlin rhetoric and copying its framing of the conflict in Ukraine. It's framing of the term is rather steady throughout, with emphasis placed on NATO expansion in particular. However, oftentimes, the frequency of TASS usage in a particular month does not reflect the amount of NATO –related events on the ground. Thus, TASS' references this term fails in some instances to explain how current events happening on the ground impact how the media uses the term in its framing.

¹⁰⁹ "The Ukraine Crisis Timeline," accessed April 17, 2017, <http://ukraine.csis.org>.

Chapter Five

Protecting our People. Usage of the Terms Sootechestvenniki (compatriots) and Russkojazychnyje (Russian speakers)

What do these terms mean in this context?

Sootechestvenniki and russkojazychnyje refer, in general, to the same idea -- they refer to what Laruelle calls “Russinness,”¹¹⁰ or more specifically, Russians and Russian speakers living abroad. Richard Sakwa illuminates the fuzzy definitions of these terms by drawing attention to the references to “ethnic Russians, Russian speakers, and Russian citizens” that “[reflect] the confused identity questions that have haunted Russia since independence.”¹¹¹ At their core, the terms refer to Russian speakers and kin, but they carry quite a bit of symbolic meaning with them because it “hits an emotive register because it plays on an essentially ethnic and/or linguistic nationalism.”¹¹²

Relevant to this conversation on Russian compatriots is the complexity of language laws in Ukraine. “If there was a bond common to all Ukrainians, it was, without a doubt, their language. Most spoke Ukrainian, and many spoke Russian, and almost all spoke a mix of the two languages,” says Marvin Kalb.¹¹³ But the Ukrainian parliament has, in the past, has tried to make Ukrainian the only official national language. Russia and those in the east of Ukraine where most people speak more Russian than Ukrainian see any focus on Ukrainian language to be discrimination against Russian speakers. This has been a source of tension throughout the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

¹¹⁰ Marlene Laruelle, “Russia as a ‘Divided Nation,’ from Compatriots to Crimea: A Contribution to the Discussion on Nationalism and Foreign Policy,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 62, no. 2 (March 4, 2015): 88–97, doi:10.1080/10758216.2015.1010902.

¹¹¹ Sakwa, page 106.

¹¹² Laruelle, “Russia as a Divided Nation”

¹¹³ Kalb, page 117.

Part of the reason this is a necessary line of thought to follow in framing of the conflict is because this is one the Kremlin's main justifications for getting involved in Ukraine and Crimea. The story was that "ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking people, concentrated particularly in the southeast, sought protection from the fascist junta now ensconced in Kiev."¹¹⁴ By annexing Crimea and supporting the separatists in the Donbas, Russia was supposedly protecting Russian speakers and compatriots from discrimination and threats posed to their rights by the Ukrainian government.

Carrying Out the Content Analysis of TASS articles

Round three of the same basic methodology. I found all TASS articles involving using one of these words in the time span of interest. I narrowed the pool of articles by considering only articles related to the conflict in Ukraine. As such, I did not include articles about the Olympics or other current events. I also excluded articles where the only mention of the word *sootechestvenniki* was in the title of the Government Program for Resettlement of Compatriots or the Duma's Department of Compatriot Affairs. Naturally, when counting how many times each word is used, I account for any changes in case endings.

Putin's use of the term

The idea of Ukraine as a "fraternal people and a fraternal country," as Putin called them throughout late 2013 and early 2014¹¹⁵ is carried through the rest of the conflict in the use of these two terms. On March 3rd, the Russian Foreign Minister told the Human Rights Council that

¹¹⁴ Toal, page 238.

¹¹⁵ Elizabeth A. Wood et al., *Roots of Russia's War in Ukraine* (Washington, D.C : New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press ; Columbia University Press, 2016). Page 111.

actions in Ukraine were “about protection of our citizens and compatriots.”¹¹⁶ In this same month, Putin refers to both terms *sootchestvenniki* and *russojazychnyje* for the first time in the context of the conflict in Ukraine. Oddly, this is after TASS begins to do so. Richard Sakwa calls Putin’s newfound focus on the “defense of ‘Russian speaking Crimea’ [and] ‘compatriots’ concentrated in neighboring countries” the “ethnicization of Russian foreign policy.”¹¹⁷ This theme of protecting ones own became a symbol in Putin’s rhetoric about the war in Ukraine.

Sootchestvenniki is used at much at a bit higher volume – 22 times over the course of 2014, while *russojazychnyje* is used only 14 times. By the end of 2014, Putin is done with both terms.

Patterns of usage of the terms *sootchestvenniki* and *russojazychnyje* in TASS

As I alluded to earlier, TASS starts to use the two words in February 2014 in reference to the conflict in Ukraine; this is before Putin includes them in his framing of the conflict. Overall, *russojazychnyje* comes up 311 times over the course of 2014 and 2015 in 181 articles. *Sootchestvenniki* is used ever so slightly less during this period at 301 times in 117 articles. Both are commonplace in TASS’s framing, mentioned almost every month in 2014, but in 2015, the number of times each is mentioned starts to wane and several months in 2015 do not include the term at all.

Overall, there are two months where both terms change significantly – February and March 2014. In months when both terms see significant change, TASS still uses them in different contexts, and thus we will examine the framing of each. Then changes in the number of times used diverges for each term and we begin to address them separately. For

¹¹⁶ Thomas D. Grant, *Aggression against Ukraine: Territory, Responsibility, and International Law*, First edition, American Foreign Policy in the 21st Century (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). Page 50.

¹¹⁷ Sakwa, page 106.

sootechestvenniki, we focus on June 2014, whereas russkojazychnyje is most interesting in April and May 2014. Both terms are used only minimally in 2015.

Both terms start appearing: February 2014

Novorossiya still is not part of TASS vernacular, but both of the terms that refer to Russians abroad are picking up even before the annexation of Crimea. The term russkojazychnyje is mentioned 23 times for 45 percent of the articles and sootechestvenniki is mentioned 18 times in 29 percent of articles from the month.

There's three ways compatriots is mentioned in this month. TASS talks about Russians abroad and how the state will protect Russian compatriots. For example, an article from February 25th mentions how Russia will not abandon its compatriots abroad, but instead seeks to be united with these groups. In this month, TASS also refers to the protection of peaceful citizens and Duma committees on the subject of compatriots.

The term russkojazychnyje comes up in similar but more specific ways. In terms of how Russia will look after Russians speakers, TASS talks about Russia's efforts to streamline the citizenship and visa process for russkojazychnyje living in the post-Soviet space. It also talks directly about Russian speakers in Crimea, including their forceful takeover of the local government that occurred this month. Finally, in this context, we see a critique of Ukraine's relations with its Russian speaking population, mainly through articles on the language policy and treatment of those citizens.

Basically, at this point, russkojazychnyje refers to the concrete struggles of Russian speakers in Ukraine and the Kremlin's efforts to alleviate them, whereas sootechestvenniki speaks in broader terms about the treatment of Russians abroad.

Events on the Ground February 2014

We expect these terms to be especially heavily used during this month because of events on the ground, and that's true. Most of what happens this month is focused either in Kiev and Crimea. Mostly, the Maidan protests reach a peak from the 18th to the 20th and Russian speakers take control of government buildings in Crimea.¹¹⁸ Thus, Russia tries to gather support amongst its people for their compatriots during this conflict, perhaps to avoid the anti-government sentiments from spreading to Russia.

Both terms have a spike: March 2014

During this month, usage for both terms goes up. Sootechestvenniki is mentioned 79 times, and russkojazychnyje 82 times. It's the highest mention for both of these terms in the entire course of the conflict. There are a few major themes in how these terms are addressed in TASS articles, but again there are a few differences between the framing for each term. First, both terms talk about the violations of Russian speakers rights and the threats they face in Ukraine. This is more of a focus for russkojazychnyje - in fact, its most of the conversation. Articles including both terms also indicate the high level of solidarity and support from those in Russia. This includes talk of rallies and protests in support of Russian speakers and compatriots in Ukraine.

But the focus does differ a bit between the terms. For sootechestvenniki, the spotlight is more on Russian speakers or compatriots moving from Ukraine to Russia, including articles on Duma efforts to simplify the citizenship process and cities enacting programs to help refugees from eastern Ukraine. On the other hand, russkojazychnyje elicits articles more focused on Russia's efforts to protect those from the threats they face in Ukraine.

¹¹⁸ "Ukraine Crisis: Timeline," *BBC News*, November 13, 2014, sec. Europe, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26248275>.

Events on the Ground

It makes sense why these terms are used so heavily now mostly because this is the month of the Crimean referendum, and one of the main justifications for this policy coming from the Kremlin was the need to protect Russian speakers on the peninsula. Russia works hard during this month to defend its actions in Ukraine. First off, Putin defends the referendum in a meeting on the 9th with Germany's Angela Merkel and France's Hollande. Russia then vetoes a UN referendum condemning the annexation on the 15th.¹¹⁹ Finally, Putin gives his Crimea speech on the 18th in which he speaks highly of the annexation as a correction of history. In all cases, Russia quotes the need to protect compatriots as the reason that this policy of absorption of the peninsula is necessary.

To the Kremlin, events this month prove that there is discrimination against Russian speakers in Ukraine. For example, the Ukrainian government cut access to Russian language TV on March 11th though the separatist forces later restored it.¹²⁰ Thus, when TASS refers to the discrimination against Russian speakers in eastern Ukraine, that framing does have some events to back up that argument during this month.

Finally, Russia emphasizes its claim that it will protect compatriots abroad. President Putin's office makes a statement on March 1st that reads "in the case of any further spread of violence to eastern Ukraine and Crimea, Russia retains the right to protect its interest and the Russian speaking population in those areas."¹²¹ If anything, this month proves Russia is not backing down from its duty to protect its compatriots abroad, and the way TASS articles use the terms *sootechestvenniki* and *russkojazychnyje* reflects this.

¹¹⁹ "The Ukraine Crisis Timeline," accessed April 17, 2017, <http://ukraine.csis.org>.

¹²⁰ Sakwa, page 150.

¹²¹ Kalb, page 159.

Russkojazychnyje drops by almost half: April 2014

In this month, we focus on Russian speakers only because it drops suddenly almost by half. It's still the second highest number of mentions for this term in the course of the conflict, but it's now only 48 times in 52 percent of the articles.

There are two major themes as to now TASS mentions the term in this month, and they are similar framing of the idea as the last two months, but amplified. One is discrimination of Russian speakers that takes place in Eastern Ukraine, including the language law and violation of other rights. The other is Russia's efforts to protect those people and offer them a speedier course to citizenship. It's pretty much the same conversation from March carried through to this month.

Events on the ground

From events on the ground, it looks as though the war in the Donbas is ramping up with clashes between pro-Russian separatists and Ukrainian anti-terrorism forces continuing throughout the month. The decentralization process starts on the 2nd, giving more power to the regions and individual oblasts including *Novorossiya*. The Ukrainian central government offered amnesty for pro-Russian separatist protesters on the 10th. Towards the end of the month on the 20th photo evidence proves the existence of Russian troops in eastern Ukraine.¹²² All of this demonstrates that while Russia continues to become more heavily involved and fight to protect its compatriots, Ukraine is offering concessions to pro-Russian separatists.

Russkojazychnyje continues to drop: May 2014

Russkojazychnyje use during this month continues to drop quite significantly. Now TASS uses the term only 13 times in 24 percent of the articles. The reason for the drop may be related to the fact that the idea of the Russian Spring – the hope that the Donbas would follow

¹²² "The Ukraine Crisis Timeline," accessed April 17, 2017, <http://ukraine.csis.org>.

the referendum and annexation process laid out by Crimea – was starting to lose momentum. Thus it was not as necessary to raise support for Russian speakers abroad. But this is just speculation.

In every article this month, TASS talks about the threats against Russian speakers in eastern Ukraine. This includes threats they face, the demonization of Russian speakers, etc. It's much the same as before, but it's amplified this month and it is the focus of all articles. One article from May 6th goes so far as to quote State Duma Deputy Mikhail Markelov who says the "genocide" of Russian speakers continued.

Events on the ground

May is a pretty violent month. There are clashes across the Donbas between separatists and Ukrainians, including a sizable one on the 5th in Slovyansk. The Kremlin even calls Ukraine's fight in the east a "punitive operation" against Russian speakers on May 3rd.¹²³ The separatist regions of Donetsk and Luhansk also aim to get more autonomy this month, and despite President Putin's requests that they postpone the vote, the regions hold referenda on independence on May 11th. Finally, the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics are not represented in peace talks on the 17th, giving ammo to this idea that the Ukrainian central government doesn't care about their interests.¹²⁴

sootechestvenniki

Use of sootechestvenniki has fallen: June 2014

Now we revisit the term sootechestvenniki because while it has followed a similar pattern to russkojazychnyje in the past few months, it takes a real dive this month while russkojazychnyje is not used at all. Sootechestvenniki is mentioned only eight times in 13 percent of the articles in June. Use of the term is almost entirely focused on people leaving the Donbas region and relocating to Russia, with discussion again on obtaining Russian citizenship and communities welcoming refugees from eastern Ukraine. Only one article talks about protecting the

¹²³ "Kremlin Says Kiev Will Be Held Responsible for 'Punitive Operation' | Reuters," accessed May 9, 2017, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-kremlin-responsibility-idUKBREA4109G20140502>.

¹²⁴ "The Ukraine Crisis Timeline," accessed April 17, 2017, <http://ukraine.csis.org>.

compatriots as we have seen in previous months.

Events on the ground

It is hard to pinpoint why this month is a significant drop and why TASS write about the term in the way it does because plenty of events take place that open the door for different themes as well. Multiple ceasefires come and go, Obama says that the “days of the sphere of influence are over” in a meeting in Warsaw.¹²⁵ This opens the door for discussion about how Russia will stand by its right to protect its compatriots. Humanitarian corridors are created to provide aid to those in the east, an event which lends itself to discussion about efforts to help Russian compatriots in dire need. A Russian journalist is killed, again bringing up the idea that Russian speakers and compatriots face threats to their lives and rights in Ukraine. There is a buildup of Russian military forces on the border at the end of the month, indicating that Russia still takes its responsibility to protect compatriots seriously.¹²⁶ It is a heavy month, and lots of the events are quite relevant to the term *sootechestvenniki*. And yet, TASS does not focus on any of the possible themes in its reporting on events this month, instead opting for a simplistic focus on compatriots moving away from Ukraine. TASS has moved away almost entirely from the “protecting compatriots” framing of the conflict.

Conclusion

First, it is important to remember that TASS uses these terms in its framing of the conflict before Putin does, raising questions about the cycle of information and role of the media in an authoritarian country that will be addressed in the conclusion.

Overall, these two terms – *sootechestvenniki* and *russkojazychnyje* – refer to much the

¹²⁵ “Remarks by President Obama at at 25th Anniversary of Freedom Day -- Warsaw, Poland,” *Whitehouse.gov*, June 4, 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/04/remarks-president-obama-25th-anniversary-freedom-day-warsaw-poland>.

¹²⁶ “The Ukraine Crisis Timeline,” accessed April 17, 2017, <http://ukraine.csis.org>.

same idea and are addressed by TASS in similar but not identical ways. Neither proves definitely or even indicates strongly that events on the ground heavily influence the way the terms are used in TASS articles. Instead, the themes in TASS articles seem to be almost independent from events at the time.

Chapter Six

Conclusion. The media and the government.

Does the media amplify the Kremlin's framing of the conflict?

As I said in the very beginning, I expected the media to refer to a term more times than the Kremlin did because it produces more content. Such a result would be in line with Neuman's assumption that the public turns to the media for its information, and thus it is the most effective channel for what he calls propaganda and what I call the Kremlin's message or framing.¹²⁷ I considered the message amplified by the media using two factors. First, the term's overall usage needed to be much higher in TASS articles than Putin's speeches. Second, the frequency of articles (calculated by dividing the number of articles or speeches using the term in question by the number of articles or speeches using any of the terms studied) also needed to be higher for TASS than Putin.

Overall, my hypothesis is correct for some terms and not for other, depending on the criteria used to measure amplification. The case is similar for both NATO and *Novorossiia*. With both terms, the frequency is higher in Putin's speeches than in TASS articles, but only by a few percentage points. The total number of times used, however, is far greater for TASS articles. Thus, that's all we can conclude – the term is used a greater number of times but at a lesser frequency in the media.

For the other two terms, however, it is much easier. TASS has a higher frequency and count of number of times used for both *sootechnestvenniki* and *russkojazychnyje*. Thus, the message is amplified by the media in regards to these two terms.

¹²⁷ Neuman, page 11.

Table One: Frequency of terms by Putin compared to TASS

	NATO	<i>Novorossiya</i>	Sootechnestvenniki	Russkojazychnyje
Putin	Frequency= 48% Total = 64	Frequency= 26% Total= 19	Frequency= 17% Total= 14	Frequency= .09% Total= 22
TASS	Frequency = 46% Total = 2955	Frequency= 23% Total= 373	Frequency = 19% Total= 360	Frequency= 12% Total= 311

What does it mean that TASS mentions a word first?

TASS uses the term before the Kremlin does in every case of the words studied by this research. NATO, *Novorossiya*, sootechnestvenniki and russkojazychnyje all come up first in TASS rhetoric, then in the Kremlin's. So what does this mean? Is it an indication that TASS is creating its own framing of the conflict in Ukraine that the Kremlin later adopts? Or is it that the Kremlin drops hints about its framing of the conflict that TASS picks up on but TASS puts them in clearer terms first? It's hard to know, and there is little literature to explain it.

On the one hand, it could be TASS naming the idea more concretely before Putin does, but referring to an idea he has already mentioned in abstract terms, like *Novorossiya*. In this case, the framing was clear after Putin's March 18th Crimea speech, but he does not refer to *Novorossiya* by name. TASS does this first, even though the idea and message was first produced in that speech. So perhaps it is a matter of TASS understanding the Kremlin's framework and more clearly and succinctly articulating it.

But then again, it could be TASS mentioning the term first outright, which would indicate that it does not directly follow the Kremlin line.

Does TASS show any signs that its framing of the conflict and use of these terms reflects events on the ground?

The answer to this question depends on the term. For *Novorossiya*, events related to the term do coincide with months with high usage. The same cannot be said for *sootchestvenniki* and *russkojazychnyje*. Instead, months with high usage are not easily explained by events on the ground in these two cases. Thus, we can conclude that current events are a possible factor, but not the entire reason why terms experience significant changes in usage.

What we learn about the role of the media in an authoritarian country

TASS does use both Neuman's conflict and human interests frames throughout in a similar way to Putin, but more than that is hard to say. We learn that, in some cases, the media has the potential to at least modify the framework the Kremlin provides, simplifying complex history into a mythical and symbolic term like *Novorossiya*, for example. But ultimately, the media and Kremlin's framing of the war in Ukraine are similar. Both use the same language to refer to the conflict, and thus the question is more along the lines of who came up with the framework first. This is difficult to prove because, on occasion, the media mentions a term first. Thus, this study does not succeed in definitely concluding that the media either follows the Kremlin framework exactly or creates its own. We merely can speculate that the media interprets the Kremlin's messages and simplifies it into a few digestible words that the Kremlin then also utilizes.

Avenues for future research

Adding in the dimension of public opinion

This thesis originally sought to answer the question of the pattern of the relationship between public opinion and governmental rhetoric. I wanted to know whether the government

changes its rhetoric based off changes in public opinion or, on the flipside, if public opinion changes due to changes in governmental rhetoric. The problem here is causality. We cannot definitely know that the government or the public is reacting to changes in the other and not other confounding factors. This made it a difficult question to study in the scope of this thesis.

However, it is prudent to understand the role public opinion plays in the creation of the government and media's framing of a conflict. I am still curious to answer this question.

Graphs



