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**LĒMUMU PIENĒMŠANA KRIEVIJAS ĀRPOLITIKĀ – UKRAINAS UN
MOLDOVAS GADĪJUMU ANALĪZE
(2004-2018)**

PROMOCIJAS DARBS

zinātniskā doktora grāda zinātnes doktors (*Ph.D.*) politikas zinātnes nozarē iegūšanai

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ABSTRACT

The complexity of foreign policy decision-making and the volatility of the environment within which policy decisions are made have raised a substantial interest in academic circles that attempt to explain the matter through research. There is a significant body of literature on Russian foreign policy; however, the decision-making aspect remains comparatively less explored. Within the product (the decision) – process (of arriving at that decision) – context dynamic, understanding the theory of decision-making is essential for extending knowledge about foreign policy decision-making. To this end, several decision models were explored, and two foundational models were selected, namely the Rational Actor Model and Incrementalism. Russia's decision-making was viewed through the prism of these models; however, their utility was found to be limited. Blended models also did not figure well. Apropos, the ambition of this research developed in two directions; on a practical level, it contributes to knowledge on Russia's foreign policy decision-making and, on a conceptual plane, to scholarship through theory development, underpinning academic research on decision-making in foreign policy.

This qualitative research is informed by Grounded Theory approach and applies case study analysis. The research design is based on an inductive and deductive approach which through literature and secondary analysis shapes the exploratory version of Rational Incrementalism. The inductive loop and case study analysis generated more data that further refined the model. Rational Incrementalism, underpinned by its five principle: primacy of aims and objectives; the balancing role of agency and structure; the relationship between strategy and structure; the overarching impact of capabilities and context, constraining or enabling action; and last but not least, how and strategy adapts to protect a nations core interests.

Through the prism of Rational Incrementalism, this research demonstrates that Russia's foreign policy decision-making is far from a case of 'muddling through,' that it retains a long-term purposefulness and that farsightedness guides Russia's incremental decisions. The simplicity and general applicability of the model potentially suggest its broader utility.

Key Words: decision-making, foreign policy, Incrementalism, Rational Actor Model, Rational Incrementalism, strategy, contextual opportunism.

ANOTĀCIJA

Lēmumu pieņemšana Krievijas ārpolitikā ir salīdzinoši mazāk izprasta literatūrā un praksē. Šajā pētījumā tā tika izpētīta, par pamatu izmantojot divus teorētiskos modeļus, Racionālo aktieru modeli un Inkrementālismu. Tomēr tika konstatēts, ka šo modeļu pielietojamība ir ierobežota. Šis kvalitatīvais pētījums izmantoto Pamatotās teorijas pieeju, lai radītu Racionālā inkrementālisma izpētes modeli, kura pamatā ir pieci galvenie principi. Modelis tiek tālāk pilnveidots, izmantojot gadījumu izpētes analīzi. Skatoties caur Racionālā inkrementālisma prizmu, šis pētījums pierāda, ka Krievijas ārpolitikas lēmumu pieņemšana saglabā ilgtermiņa mērķtiecību, kurā arī inkrementālos lēmumus vada tālredzība kā arī pielāgošanās mainīgajam kontekstam, kas prasa ātros lēmumus, pamatojoties uz riska un atmaksāšanās analīzi (kontekstuālais oportunisms).

Atslēgas vārdi: lēmumu pieņemšana, ārpolitika, Racionālais inkrementālisms, stratēģija, kontekstuālais oportunisms.

ANNOTATION

Decision-making in Russia's foreign policy remains enigmatic in scholarship and practice. To unravel this, Russia's decision-making was viewed through the prism of two foundational models, namely Rational Actor Model and Incrementalism; however, their utility was found to be limited. This qualitative research uses a Grounded Theory approach to generate an exploratory model referred to as Rational Incrementalism. The model, underpinned by five key principles, is further refined using case study analysis. Through the prism of Rational Incrementalism, this research demonstrates that Russia's foreign policy-decision making retains a long-term purposefulness and that Russia's incremental decisions are guided by farsightedness—with allowances for emergent contexts that require quick actions, underpinned by risk and pay-off analysis (contextual opportunism).

Key Words: decision-making, foreign policy, Rational Incrementalism, strategy, contextual opportunism.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS:

Term	Meaning/Explanation
Agency	In philosophy, agency is defined as the capacity of an actor to act in a given environment. In sociology, it is related to the social structures and an ability to act in a personal capacity based on ones values, beliefs, personal judgements, and motivations. ¹
Foundational models	The term foundational model is used here in relation to the Rational Actor Model and Incrementalism to refer to the foundational nature of these models in the context of this research.
Contextual Opportunism	Recognition of the importance of a quick action within emerging and changing contexts as an approach to advance strategic objectives. The environmental factors inform the means to act by way of constraining or enabling certain instruments of national power underpinned by risk and pay-off analysis.
Grounded Theory	Grounded theory (sometimes defined as an approach to generating a theory rather than a theory itself) is a theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analysed through the research process. In this method, data collection, analysis, and eventual theory stand in close relationship with one another. ²
Strategic Communication	The study of how organizations or communicative entities communicate deliberately to reach set goals. ³
Strategy	The determination of the long-run goals and objectives... and the adaptation of courses of actions and the allocation of resources necessary for carrying out these goals. ⁴
Structure	An organisation is a social unit of people that is structured and managed to meet a need or to pursue collective goals. All organisations have structures that determine relationships between the different activities and the members and subdivide and assigns roles, responsibilities, and authority to carry out different tasks. ⁵
Temporal boundary	Defines the period between 2004 and 2018, which is included in the empirical part of this research.

¹ For a debate on structure and agency, see Archer, op. cit. A generic debate is presented in Nicholas Arbercrombie et al., *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*, 5th ed., London, Penguin Books, 2006. Agency combines the role of structural subjectivity, free will and the collective understanding between events happening in the agency or to the agency and taking control of events or doing things. For generic explanations of ACTION, AGENT, DETERMINISM and FREE WILL. See Simon Blackburn (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Oxford, 2008, pp. 4, 9, 97, 141.

² Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, Third Edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008).

³ Derina Holtzhausen, "Strategic Communication", online, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405186407.wbiecs106.pub2>, (11 March 2014), accessed on 13 March 2019.

⁴ See Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of the Industrial Empire*, (The M.I.T Press 1962; 1982 reprint) p.13.

⁵ Richard M. Burton and Borge Obel, "The Science of Organizational Design Fit Between Structure and Coordination", *Organisational Design*, No7, 5 2018, online <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s41469-018-0029-2>, accessed 3 July 2018. The study of government structures must be approached with great caution for political systems having the same kind legal arrangements and using the same type of governmental machinery often function very differently, see also Alan D. Heslop, "Political System", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, online <https://www.britanica.com/topic/political/system>, accessed 3 July 2018.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Abbreviation	Explanation
CEA	Common Economic Area
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
EU	European Union
FSB	Federal Security Service
KGB	Committee for State Security
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
RAM	Rational Actor Model

Decision-Making in Russia's Foreign Policy – Case Studies of Ukraine and Moldova (2004-2018)

1 INTRODUCTION

Observing Russian actions following the German invasion of Poland, Churchill conceded “I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia. It is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma....”⁶ While Russia has continually figured as an ‘outsider’⁷ in western political thought, this impression of this ‘otherness’ in Russian foreign policy decision-making has not only survived but grown.⁸ In reality, the complexity of foreign policy decision-making and the volatility of the environment within which policy decisions are made, have raised a substantial level of interest in academic circles that attempt to explain the matter through research.⁹ The theoretical frameworks that help to clarify intellectual challenges and underpin critical discourse in decision-making continue to evolve. These frameworks are the outcomes of the breadth of empirical research, analyses of events and the changing contexts that contribute to theory development.

Churchill suggested that there is a key to the riddle, and that key is Russia's interests. It can be argued that Russia's foreign policy decision-making represents an example of interest-driven foreign policy that straddles multiple contemporary paradigms in decision-making. Given the breadth of empirical cases ripe for analysis, this research argues that this key can

⁶ Winston Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*. (London: The Houghton Mifflin Company, 1946), p.403. Churchill was appointed 1st Sea Lord of the Admiralty in September 1939. This comment was made in Churchill's first radio broadcast of the war on 1 October 1939 following the German invasion of Poland.

⁷ Peter Rutland & Andrei Kazantsev (2016) “The limits of Russia's ‘soft power’”, *Journal of Political Power*, 9:3, pp.395-413.

⁸ See, for example, John Cody Mosbey, “Churchill was Right about Russia and Still Is.” *Modern Diplomacy*, 3 December 2015. Online: <https://modern diplomacy.eu/2015/12/03/churchill-was-right-about-russia-and-still-is/>, accessed on 20 September 2018. See also Richard Langworth, “Trump, Russia, and Churchill's Wisdom”, Hillsdale College, Churchill Project. Online: <https://richardlangworth.com/trump-russia-churchills-wisdom>, accessed on 20 September 2018.

⁹ See, for example, Jonathan Renshon and Stanley A.Renshon, “The Theory and Practice of Foreign Policy Decision-Making.” *Political Psychology* 29, no. 4 (2008); Harry R. Yarger, *Strategic Theory for the 21st Century* (Virginia: National Defence University Press, 2006); Sten Rynnig, “The false promise of continental concert: Russia, the West and the necessary balance of power”, *International Affairs* 91, no. 3 (2015), pp. 539–552.

be found. Alongside strategic interests, as Churchill posited, the research also argues the importance of the interconnectedness of foreign policy decision-making within the overarching framework of context, often volatile, requiring quick decisions and not leaving enough space for the analysis of alternatives. In this backdrop, the underpinning question that arises is how does Russia's foreign policy decision-making fit in these parameters? Is there a degree of predictability and order within the complexity and ambiguity? The author presents a case for the affirmative, together with more nuanced approaches for analysing foreign policy decision-making.

There is a substantial body of literature on Russian foreign policy;¹⁰ however, the decision-making aspect remains comparatively less explored. Within the product (the decision) – process (of arriving at that decision) – context (the overarching framework with which decisions are made/internal and external environment) dynamic, understanding the theory of decision-making is essential for extending knowledge about foreign policy decision-making. The latter is not just an output but also an input into future decision-making. What we see then is a series of decisions interconnected and influencing future courses of action in different ways. Additional questions that emerge are; is Russia's foreign policy a product of a pragmatic and calculated approach to decision-making, as Russian leaders present it to be?¹¹ is it as unpredictable as it is seen from the outside?¹² or, are these decisions highly contextual, the result of a combination of both, while still serving more strategic and long-term aspirations and interests? Does this third option explain why the first two approaches fall short in clarifying Russian decision-making in a comprehensive manner? It is in this backdrop that the aim and hypothesis for this research have been developed.

¹⁰ See, for example, Adeed Dawisha, "Introduction: Foreign Policy Priorities and Issues: Perspectives and Issues" in Adeed Dawisha and Karen Dawisha (eds.) *The Making of Foreign Policy in Russia and the New State of Eurasia*, vol 4. (London: Armonk, 2015), pp. 3-14; Margot Light, "In search of Identity: Russian Foreign Policy and the End of Ideology," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 19:3 (2003), pp. 42-59; Serena Giusti, Tomislava Penkova, "Russia: just a normal great power?," *ISPI Working Paper* (October 2008), p.34; Rilka Dragneva and Kataryna Wolczuk, "Russia, the Eurasian Customs Union and the EU: Cooperation, Stagnation or Rivalry?" *Chatham House Briefing Paper*, REP BP 2012/01 (August 2012); Ilias Iliopoulos, "Vladimir Putin: an ethical realist", *International Affairs*, Russian edition (17 November 2014).

¹¹ See, for example, President Putin's address at the Security Policy Conference in Munich on 10 February 2007, President of Russia online: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>, accessed on 29 September 2017; Sergey Lavrov in *Mi vezhlivije ljudi! Razmishlenija o vneshnej politike (transl. We are Polite People! Contemplations on foreign policy)* (Moscow: Knizhniy Mir, 2018).

¹² This is expressed in a failure of analysts to predict takeover of the Crimea by Russia in 2014. See, for example, Sten Rynnig, op.cit., p.544.

The ambition of this research is two-fold; on a practical level, it contributes to knowledge on Russia's foreign policy decision-making and, on a conceptual plane, to scholarship by way of theory development, underpinning academic research on decision-making in foreign policy. The empirical part of the research focuses on two selected case studies, namely Ukraine and Moldova during the period 2004 - 2018. The analytical framework for this research is derived from an analysis of two major theoretical models, namely Allison and Zelikow's Rational Actor Model (RAM) and Lindblom's Incremental decision-making model. The empirical analysis is built around a set of functional and contextual indicators derived from the analytical framework developed by the author.¹³

1.1 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this research is to help explain the way Russia approaches decision-making through the prism of its relations with Ukraine and Moldova. This research has two-fold objectives; on an empirical level it aims to contribute to knowledge on Russia's foreign policy decision-making, and on a conceptual plane, to contribute to theoretical development that underpins academic research on decision-making in foreign policy.

1.2 WHY THIS RESEARCH?

While there is a robust body of literature on Russian foreign policy, the decision-making aspect remains comparatively less explored.¹⁴ On the one hand, there is an argument that Russia is impossible to understand and predict; on the other, there is a tendency to over-rationalise its approach. For example, this lack of understanding resulted in the failure of the Western intelligence communities, policymakers and analysts to predict the take-over of the

¹³ In terms of meta-positioning, complexity theory, systems theory and chaos theory could provide valid pathways to progress this research; however, each of these theories is also limiting in the scope of analysis of contemporary models. Structuration offers a far more flexible and nuanced methodology. Structuralism in developmental politics assumes that political decisions in government are driven by institutions and influenced by social structures, see for example Elliott D. Green, "Structuralism" in *The Oxford Handbook of Politics of Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

¹⁴ Adeed Dawisha, op. cit., pp. 3-15; Margot Light, "In search of Identity: Russian foreign policy and the of ideology", *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 19, no. 3 (2003), pp. 42-59; Serena Giusti, Tomislava Penkova, "Russia: just a normal great power?," *ISPI Working Paper*, 34 (October 2008), https://www.ispionline.it/it/documents/WP_34_2008.pdf, accessed on 20 May 2018; Rilka Dragneva and Kataryna Wolczuk (2012), op. cit.; A positive analysis arguing that Putin policies are a glaring example of Political Realism, is offered by Ilias Iliopoulos in "Vladimir Putin: an ethical realist", *International Affairs*, Russian edition, (17 November 2014), <http://en.interaffairs.ru/events/print:page.1.566-vladimir-putin-an-ethical-realist.html>, accessed on 02 January 2018.

Crimea. Rimeg defined this action as a “foreign policy of surprise and intimidation.”¹⁵ With the growing level of Russian international engagements, including military, as demonstrated not only in Ukraine and neighbouring countries but also in Syria, it is timely and topical to examine the influencing factors affecting decision-making at the theoretical level. We can do this by identifying patterns as well as the rationales and motivations behind these decisions and thereby create a degree of predictability; all in all, aiming to provide a framework for analysing the outlook to mitigate the level of surprise for the benefit of future analysis and policymaking in relation to Russia. To this end, the author presents a framework for analysis which is derived from Allison and Lindblom’s models (discussed in Chapter 2) and tested through empirical data drawn from the case studies. Observing shortfalls in the ability of these models to explain the decision-making, the author develops a third theoretical model using a grounded theory approach.

The research will not focus only on decision-making in one particular stream of actions, but rather on several examples over a longer time. It will then be possible, through convergence, to conclude patterns or the absence of such consistencies. This will allow us to test the sustainability of conclusions and their applicability for further analysis and their use in informing policies. To this end, this research focuses on a significant and particularly revealing period in the context of expression of Russian foreign policy, that is, January 2004 onwards. For closure and to allow analysis to be contained, this research is temporally bound between January 2004 and December 2018.

The starting year, 2004, is significant from both an external and an internal point of view. External factors, such as NATO and EU’s eastward expansion, directly affected Russia’s relations with the West and its neighbours. The year 2004 also saw dramatic changes in Russia’s immediate neighbourhood, a region traditionally seen as its zone of influence and zone of interest.¹⁶ NATO and EU enlargements and their desire to develop closer ties with Russia’s neighbours through, for example, the process of the NATO Membership Action Plans and the emergence of the EU Neighbourhood policy, provide an important context for this research considering their impact on how Russia re-formulated its foreign policy. Moldova and Ukraine are excellent cases because both countries became a shared

¹⁵ Sten Rynnig, op.cit., p. 544.

¹⁶ Jeffery Mankoff, “Russian foreign policy: the return of great power politics”, *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*, XXII, Issue 01-02 (2013), pp. 128-131.

neighbourhood between Russia and the EU and NATO and had been developing their own relations with these organisations.

From the internal perspective, 2004 is significant as a year of transition as defined by the former Kremlin advisor, Gleb Pavlovsky, with direct reference to the decision-making process in Russia and the consolidation of presidential powers.¹⁷ According to Pavlovsky, it was both the “Orange revolution” in Ukraine¹⁸ and the siege of a school in Beslan (North Ossetia, Russia) in early September 2004.¹⁹ In addition, 2004 also saw a surge of terrorist acts in Russia.²⁰ President Putin regarded the siege as a direct blow to his authority as a leader and attempted to consolidate power, including eliminating the direct election of governors, arguing that the centralization of power was needed to keep the country together.²¹ As such, the period from 2004 onwards saw a significant consolidation of Presidential power, which has a direct impact on the way the decisions are made.

¹⁷ Interview with Gleb Pavlovsky, “The Putin Files: Gleb Pavlovsky”, (13 July 2017), Interview in Russian language, transcript in English, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/interview/gleb-pavlovsky/>, accessed on 18 December 2018.

¹⁸ A series of mass protests that took place in Ukraine from late November 2004 to January 2005, in the immediate aftermath of the November 2004 run-off vote in the Ukrainian presidential election, the outcome of which was highly contested eventually leading to the annulment and declaration of the second run-off in late December 2004. Victor Yushenko was elected as a President of Ukraine. See *Encyclopedia Britannica* <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine/The-Orange-Revolution-and-the-Yushchenko-presidency#ref986649>, accessed on 5 January 2017.

¹⁹ In April 2017 The European Court of Human Rights ruled that Russia failed to protect the hostages of the Beslan School Number One siege on 1-3 September 2004 in which about 330 people, including 186 children died. It was ruled out that the operation by Russia’s Special Forces to end the siege used disproportionate force and that the authorities did not take necessary action to prevent it. One of the numerous conclusions regarding the failure of the operation was that the command structure had suffered from a lack of formal leadership, resulting in serious flaws in decision-making and coordination with other relevant agencies, e.g. medical, rescue and fire-fighters. See “Judgment Tagayeva and Others v. Russia - serious failings in the authorities' response to the Beslan attack.” (final judgment dated 18 September 2017), [https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{"itemid":\["001-172660"\]](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{), accessed on 9 December 2018.

²⁰ Several attacks took place in 2004, for examples 6 February – attack on an underground train in Moscow, over 40 killed and over 250 wounded; February and March – several explosions in the Moscow region attacking gas and electricity infrastructure; 24 August two aeroplanes that departed from Moscow Domodedovo Airport simultaneously exploded in mid-air, ninety people were killed; 31 August suicide bomber killed 10 and wounded about 50 people in front of the entrance to an underground station in Moscow.

²¹ President Putin signed a decree eliminating direct gubernatorial elections on 12 December 2004. Instead, 89 regional leaders could be appointed by the President, subject to confirmation by the regional legislature, albeit tokenistic one considering that the President preserved the right to dissolve the regional legislature if they voted against President’s candidate twice. Jeremy Bransten, “Russia: Putin Signs Bill Eliminating Direct Elections of Governors”, 13 December 2004, available from <https://www.rferl.org/a/1056377.html>, accessed on 20 December 2018. To add that the direct election of governors was partially reinstated in 2012.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESIS

This research will answer the following question:

- How can decision-making in Russia's foreign policy in Ukraine and Moldova be explained?

This research question's definition follows the main steps in qualitative research, starting from the general question to the selection of specific case studies reflected in additional questions that focus on the collection and interpretation of relevant data. This is discussed further in the Methodology section.

The central hypothesis is built on the preamble that Russia's foreign policy decisions represent elements of rational actor behaviour and 'muddling through'²² – the incremental approach. As mentioned earlier, both these models have limitations; arguably, elements that these models selectively exclude also need to be captured. As such, the following hypothesis emerges:

- Russia's foreign policy decision-making in Ukraine and Moldova represents neither Rational Actor Model nor Incremental Model and can be described as Rational Incrementalism, retaining strengths of the two foundational models with significant additional features.

On the face of it each of these classical approaches provides useful but limited answers as the selected case studies demonstrate. Both models are embedded in the notion that government (as a collective) drives policy and strategy, principled on organisational primacy and institutionalised processes, weighing short-term opportunity against long-term aspirations. As such, these are structural models. To test the hypothesis, an analytical framework drawing on the two foundational models of decision-making is used. The two foundational models are the RAM developed by Graham Allison and Phillip Zelikow and Incrementalism developed by David Lindblom. From the analytical framework a set of key indicators are drawn and tested in the empirical part of the research via qualitative analysis of empirical data presented in Chapter 3 (baseline) and Chapters 4 and 5, (case studies of Ukraine and Moldova).

²² David Lindblom's term to imply incrementalism. Charles E. Lindblom, "The Science of Muddling thought." *Public Administration Review*, 19(2), (1959).

Conclusions derived from the systematic application of indicators in the empirical part of the research allow the hypothesis to be tested, verifying or negating it.

1.4 NOVELTY OF THE RESEARCH AND ITS IMPORTANCE

Studying foreign policy from a decision-making perspective is not new.²³ As in any other public policy areas, decisions in foreign policy are made on a daily basis; however, the context in which these decisions are made is complex and fluid. This is due to the diversity of variables that, according to Mintz and de Rouen, include decision environment, psychological factors, international and domestic factors.²⁴ Even more importantly, it is highly determined by the intersections between these factors and how they influence decision-makers. Adaptation on the part of decision-makers, their ability to grasp the diversity of options and chose those that are the most appropriate within given circumstances, is an essential requirement of good decision-making. From the analysis point of view, this represents a major challenge as only limited patterns can be established; hence, there are limitations for the development of theoretical frameworks, given the fluidity in the environment. There is, however, an opportunity for research to contribute through systematic analysis of case studies drawing upon similarities and differences in decisional patterns and behaviours, borrowing from Henry Mintzberg's idea of strategy as emergent and a pattern in a stream of actions.²⁵

Ukraine and Moldova are the two case studies examined in detail. The author initially considered two other cases studies, namely Georgia and Armenia; however, the initial analysis revealed an element of saturation and lack of added value. Additional case studies, in the scope of this research, would have led to a compromise on depth in exchange of breadth. The reason for choosing these two particular case studies is based on shared geography and history. It is also based on political and economic differences between the two, as well as on

²³ See, for example, Richard C. Snyder, Henry W. Bruck, and Burtin Sapin, Valerie Hudson, *Foreign Policy Decision-Making (revised)*, (Palgrave MacMillan, 2004); Alex Mintz and Kalr Jr De Rouen, *Understanding Foreign Policy Decision-Making* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

²⁴ Alex Mintz and Kalr Jr De Rouen, op. cit., p 4.

²⁵ Mintzberg rejects the notion of a realised strategy as the result of deliberate long-term strategy and strategic shocks. He suggests strategy results over time as a result of emergent decisions, what he calls 'emergent strategy.' Henry Mintzberg and James Brian Quinn, *The Strategy Process. Concepts. Contexts, Cases*. Third Edition. (New York: Prentice Hall International, 1996).

different levels of individual strategic importance to Russia and recent history.²⁶ Both countries are part of what is considered to be the natural zone of influence for Russia, which is the single most common factor between the two. And yet, both expressed a desire to integrate into Western economic and political structures and in the case of Ukraine into military structures as well. The differences intertwined with a set of commonalities, making the analysis ever more appealing. It allows us to observe whether or not there is any impact on the patterns of decision-making and whether an overarching conclusion can be made while testing the hypothesis. The conclusions are drawn from these diverse, yet comparable cases allow generalisation, and at the same time acknowledge the nuances of the individual cases.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

Despite the challenges outlined in previous sections, there are also opportunities to develop new theoretical insights through analysing the foreign policy of a given county (A) over a period of time. This analysis could then be narrowed down to a selection of counties (B and C) A interacts with, allowing conclusions to be drawn on whether A follows a certain pattern in foreign policy decisions towards B and C; are these comparable and if not, what factors, external and internal, determine the differences? Is it possible, and to what extent, to generalise the conclusions derived from the case studies to be able to foresee and explain future scenarios? Such analysis will always be restricted by changes in a broader environment that a decision-maker will have to adapt to within a limited number of choices and opportunities that may be presented given the internal and external constraints.

Russia's foreign policy in Ukraine and Moldova represents such a case. It is an opportunity to validate the existing theoretical frameworks through the analysis of Russia's decision-making approach during a period of transformation for Russia, both internally and in its external outlook. During the temporal scope of this research, both Ukraine and Moldova were themselves undergoing significant changes, which influenced their relationships with Russia. To minimise skew and errors in interpretation, throughout the analysis, to what extent these internal transformations, reinforced by external factors' influence or impacted the patterns of

²⁶ Unlike with Moldova, a big role in Russia's relations with Ukraine plays not only its status as Russia's natural gas consumer but also as a transit state (Russia does not own the pipeline infrastructure crossing Ukrainian territory) for the supply of Russia's gas to its consumers in European countries. Its status was also unique as until the takeover of Crimea it provided Russia's fleet with the only exit to deep waters in the South.

decision-making will also be established. In other words, the extent to which context is an indivisible part of decision-making will also be explored.

The emphasis on qualitative methods for data collection and analysis in this research is justifiable as it has a dual aspect. The first derives from what Alan Bryman referred to as the ‘inductive nature of the relationship between theory and research, whereby the former is generated out of the later.’²⁷ The second, on the contrary, has the deductive nature where the relationship between theory and empirical research is not as definitive and although the empirical part does help the advancement of theory, qualitative research can also be used for generating new theories (in this case from data) and for testing existing theories. Those existing theories could be further advanced and modified based on developed epistemology, rather than the development of new theories *per se*.

This research will be taking both inductive and deductive approaches to test the hypothesis but in order to answer the research question, how can decision-making in Russia’s foreign policy be explained, the generation of new theory may be needed. To this end, a Grounded Theory approach, applied in the absence of theory or in situations where existing theories may not explain a social phenomenon, will be utilised. The analytical framework is based on blending Allison and Lindblom’s models. A set of indicators was developed reflecting these two existing theoretical constructs allowing the author to test the hypothesis in a systematic way and conclude which of the models, if at all, provides the more comprehensive framework for analysis. As such, Etzioni’s mixed approach model (elaborated in Chapter 2) forms the foundation of the author’s conceptual framework. Limitation of theoretical frameworks for conducting a comprehensive analysis of Russia’s foreign policy decision-making drives the need to construct a conceptual framework, drawing on the strengths of both theoretical models to examine whether a blended model suffices in addressing the question or a new model is needed.

²⁷ Albeit Bryman challenges a definitive nature of the inductive relationship between theory and empirical part of the research. This is linked to a general observation that there is no equivocal agreement to what precisely qualitative research is. Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, Fifth Edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 375, 405. Author positions that the nature of the relationship between theory and empirical research is not as definitive and although empirical part does help the advancement of theory, qualitative research can also be used for testing existing theories and through grounded theory test and develop theories from data by testing concepts.

Grounded Theory, as the name suggests, generates theory from data. It is particularly relevant where no theory exists to explain a social phenomenon or existing theories provide scope for data analysis. Because Grounded Theory already utilises data to generate theory, due to the nature of the research approach, the generated theory cannot be verified prior to the interpretation of data and the impact of research on developing a modified theoretical framework as suggested in the hypothesis. As this research endeavours to first ascertain the utility of existing theoretical models and potentially generate new theory from data, there is a dual aspect to the research design, an inductive and a deductive one to assess the validity of theory and second, an abductive one to generate theory from data.

The data used in this research come in the form of texts, documents, political statements.²⁸ As such, the data will be gathered from secondary sources and through triangulation of official documents, such as directives, concept papers, legal documents; speeches as well as other official documents, and previous related research found in academic papers and grey literature sources.²⁹ Media reports, published in Russia, Ukraine, Moldova and Western outlets, and relevant on-line material such as blogs will also be used. Essentially, the available data will be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding

²⁸ A wide variety of materials is defined as documents. Some of these were not created for the purpose of social research. Documents can be classified as personal and official documents. Alan Bryman, *op.cit.*, p. 546. For the purpose of this research, the latter will be used. However, one should also acknowledge the limitation of such sources. Thus, Abraham raises the question of whether the documentary sources are biased at the same time admitting that such documents can be interesting exactly due to biases they reveal. He warns that caution is necessary for trying to treat them as a depiction of reality. John Abraham, "Bias in Science and Medical Knowledge: The Open Controversy," *Sociology*, 28 (1994), pp. 717-736. Atkinson and Coffey echo this view suggesting that documents should be viewed as a distinct level of 'reality' in their own right. Authors refer to documents as 'social facts' (or constructions), with a distinct ontological reality, 'documentary reality'; however, they should not be taken to be 'transparent representations' of an underlying organisational or social reality that can be used as evidence of the social world. Analysis should never be confined to the inspection of the document itself but should also incorporate a clear understanding of how it is produced, circulated, read, stored and used for a variety of purposes. Therefore, documents should be examined in terms of the context in which they were produced (also bearing in mind the temporal dimension built into them), the [cultural] value attached to them and their implied readership. In other words, it is not possible to 'learn through written records alone how an organisation actually operates day by day... we cannot treat records – however 'official' – as firm evidence of what they report. In the context of this research, it is also important to bear in mind another Atkinson and Coffey's remark that documents are often used to create a certain kind of predictability and uniformity out of the great variety of event and social arrangements. Documents do not exist in isolation and documentary reality depends on systematic relationships (that includes sequence and hierarchy) between documents (intertextuality of texts) that can exist in a semi-autonomous domain of documentary reality (rather reflecting social reality), in which documents reflect and refer to other documents. Paul Atkinson and Amanda Coffey, 'Analysing Documentary Realities', in Silverman (ed.), *Qualitative Research: Issues of Theory, Method and Practice*. 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2011), pp. 56-75.

²⁹ The latter two will be approached with caution as cannot be regarded as data as such but rather their description and interpretation. Therefore, some critical analysis is required when using these sources in research to avoid being potentially entrenched in others' subjectivity.

and develop empirical knowledge in the nature of decision-making as relevant to this research.³⁰ The data in the shape of the vast majority of Russian official documents, including speeches, will be in Russian and those issued in Ukraine and Moldova translated into English or Russian languages. Academic and grey literature as well as where appropriate media reports will come from a combination of sources originated in the countries concerned as well as those published elsewhere in the world. In the process of developing a theory through data, discourse analysis and case study methods form the analytical pillars for this research. Within each individual case study, the research process will draw on methods associated with language-based approaches to the collection of qualitative data and their analysis.³¹

The use of secondary quantitative data is essential to help build a contextual understanding of Russia's foreign policy changes in Moldova and Ukraine and the structural dynamics of the relationships between Russia and these two countries. This quantitative analysis will predominantly be limited to economic data.

It was an initial aspiration to gather primary data from respondents in, or erstwhile in, official positions in Ukraine, Moldova and Russia. Access issues and the likelihood of official stance towed by this category of respondents negated any potential value added by the data gathered. While no primary data collection was carried out, the array of literature and existing data represent a wealth of information to allow for a comprehensive epistemological position to be developed based as much as possible on *a posteriori* knowledge³². This is not

³⁰ Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, Third Edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008).

³¹ Here the author is particularly focusing only on one focal point of language-based analysis namely discourse analysis (discourse here is understood in its traditional meaning related to the analysis of language as outlined below rather than a broader definition of discourse as sometimes used in research) and will be mostly applied while analysing texts such as newspaper articles as well as speeches and documents. Discourse, as understood by Michel Foucault, is much more than a language; it is constitutive of the social world that is a focus of interest and concern of the research. Language plays a central role in discourse analysis, not as a tool or means of understanding the social world but a constructor or producer of it. Critical discourse analysis, drawing from Foucault's approaches, takes the meaning of language even further emphasising the role of language as a power resource that is related to ideology and socio-cultural change. Discourse does not just provide an account of what goes on in society; it is also a process whereby meaning is created. Power is central as it helps to explain why some discourses are privileged over others. Not only the discourse itself but context in which it arises is also considered too important in any comprehensive analysis. See Alan Bryman, *op. cit.*, pp. 531-543.

³² As explained in Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (version used was translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge University Press, 1998), *a-posteriori knowledge* obtained through experience and empirical evidence as opposed to *a-priori knowledge* that is independent of experience, e.g. knowledge of mathematics. The author acknowledges that empirical evidence in this type of analysis is subjected to a degree of interpretation, thus representing a certain degree of limitations for research. However, one can argue that this limitation is a component of any research process (and even more so based on a qualitative approach). As Kant noted, knowledge is not something that exists in the outside world and is then

intended to abduct a viewpoint; instead, to allow the attribution of ideas to facilitate an evidenced understanding of motives, reasons and actions.³³ The epistemological position taken by the author is, therefore, founded in interpretivism with the emphasis on an understanding of the social world through examination and interpretation of that world by its participants. This is linked to the ontological position described as constructivism which implies that social properties are outcomes of the interactions between individuals and separate from those involved in its construction. A constructivist nature of qualitative research is particularly profound in the discourse analysis method being used in this research. It is linked to the recognition that there are limitations to the definitive portrayal of the social world; instead the emphasis is placed on versions of reality, a selection from many viable alternatives that results in a particular version of the reality to be built up.³⁴

Foreign policy decisions can be studied by focusing on a single country. Adding a temporal domain, namely comparing across time, or comparing decision-making of a number of countries through comparative analysis could be particularly useful where research aims to advance theory.³⁵ Hence, another method used in this research is Comparative analysis.³⁶ This is applied to analyse Russia's foreign policy towards both countries, identifying both similarities and diversities and helping identify the link between the general trends in foreign policy decision-making within these specific cases and the baseline data presented in Chapter 3. While focusing on a single country, (Russia) with a temporal dimension added (period 2004-2018), the analysis will include decision-making in relation to two different counties (Ukraine and Moldova) through both single case and comparative analysis.

The research will cover a diversity of decisions:³⁷

introduced in an open mind. It is rather something created by the mind out of the experience. Hence, unlike pure rationalism, there is no claim of knowing everything but rather acceptance the importance of experience in producing knowledge. Arguably there will always be a degree of subjectivity in this approach, something that could be attempted to be mitigated through the diversity of sources and triangulation of methods used in research.

³³ Howard S. Becker, *The Epistemology of Qualitative Research*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 53-71.

³⁴ Alan Bryman, op. cit., p. 531.

³⁵ Alex Mintz and Kalr Jr De Rouen, op. cit., p. 9.

³⁶ As Charles Lindblom noted, a comparative analysis is sometimes a systematic alternative to the theory when analysing the incremental approach that is not built on a theoretical framework. Charles Lindblom (1959), op. cit., p. 87.

³⁷ The notions of one-short, interactive and sequential decisions that follow are adapted from Mintz and de Rouen, op. cit., p. 16.

- one-shot (single) decisions;
- interactive decisions—that is decisions involving at least two players;
- one-shot interactive decisions—one could expect to see more of those considering the variables in question in this analysis;
- sequential decisions—that is to say, a series of inter-related decisions, including sequential-interactive decisions that could be compared with a game of chess.

It is not necessary to grasp the breadth of all decisions taken within the covered period, which would neither be possible nor add value. Instead, the author focuses on critical areas of importance in Russia's foreign policy as drawn from significant developments and analysis of foreign policy aims and objectives (Chapter 3). The author will then identify examples of decisions within the parameters of these aims and objectives and their applicability to the individual cases studies (Chapter 4 and 5).

1.6 RESEARCH CONSTRAINTS AND RISKS

There are a number of constraints to be considered for this research with access to primary data, as already discussed earlier, being at the top of the list. The author's unconscious bias as well as the inherent bias of secondary sources (being admitted as data) also present methodological challenges. The quality of the data directly relates to the authenticity and reliability of sources and how they convey social and political reality. While official documents and political rhetoric represent an important, and often, the only available source of information, these sources can be detached from facts, presenting aspirational rather than existential reality in which decisions are made. These documents, nonetheless, remain a viable resource with due consideration for the aspirational nature of the content. In analysing official documents, often it is not 'what is said,' but rather 'what is not said,' that represents a higher level of importance and contribution to the policy and decisional discourse. In interpreting what is not said, an element of constructivism on the part of the author cannot be avoided. To mitigate this, context and the benefit of hindsight allows us to build a better awareness of the wider environment, allowing detailed examination of policies, on the ground activities, and the fallout. We can therefore conclude if there were any disparities between the normative and *de facto* approaches. Indeed, triangulation of the content of official materials and the context within which they were brought to life and their impact,

can, to a large extent, help to also mitigate the risk of potentially limiting value of these sources.³⁸

The ability to capture all relevant information and contexts is another significant challenge. This becomes particularly important when considering the substantial period of time covered in this research. This risk is mitigated through the systematic collection and grouping of relevant data and capturing all relevant documentation. However, it needs to be acknowledged that even the most diligent approach does not prevent some data, for example, classified information, being left outside the scope of the research and hence this factor is recognised at this stage as one of the possible constraints.

Another important aspect of decision-making is the relationship between structure and agency and the accurate interpretation of the level to which one or the other influenced a particular decision. Publicly available statements, interviews, testimonies of those involved in the decision-making process can help to address this challenge to a large extent. It is important to note the role of interpretation in such forms of analysis. Rather than speculating whether or not such reports have any credibility, in many cases, it is possible to arrive at conclusions about events through the analysis of open-source data that emerge over time.

Analysis of polar views expressed by opposing parties in a politically charged context; with each claiming to possess the monopoly on truth is another aspect requiring consideration. Sustaining impartiality in such research involves an awareness of the aforementioned realities in social discourses and resulting criticism by all parties whose position is being reinterpreted. Media reports, official documents, interviews and analytical papers present facts but also perspectives; in the process exaggerating or downplaying realities. For example, propaganda, conspiracy theories and pure rhetoric such as Gleb Pavlovsky's claim that the plan to 'takeover'³⁹ Crimea started to be developed in 2007⁴⁰ or President Poroshenko's claim that President Putin's aide, Vladislav Surkov, directed foreign snipers

³⁸ Kevin C. Dunn and Iver B. Neumann, *Undertaking Discourse Analysis for Social Research* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016).

³⁹ The author adopted the term 'takeover' used by SIPRI, as being more neutral and factual to describe the change of control over the Crimean peninsula following the referendum on 16 March 2014. The term 'takeover' was used in SIPRI background paper by Alexandra Kuimova and Semeon Wezeman, "Russia and Black Sea Security", (December 2018), https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-12/bp_1812_black_sea_russia_0.pdf, accessed on 5 January 2018.

⁴⁰ Interview with Gleb Pavlovsky, op.cit.

during the Maidan protest in late 2013 – early 2014 or a policy paper published by Novaya Gazeta claiming that the plan to takeover Crimea, as part of plan to disintegrate Ukrainian State, existed before Yanukovich lost power⁴¹ will be omitted from the analysis. There is a risk to get into a territory of allegations that are not uncommon when it concerns Russia’s foreign policy and its perception, particularly in a highly contested field such as Russia’s relations with Ukraine and Moldova. For example, allegations following the leak of Surkov’s emails in 2016 unrevealing plans to politically destabilise Ukraine,⁴² and encourage early parliamentary elections there. The author is conscious of the risk and hence has taken steps to avoid getting into discussions on these allegations. At a substantive level, excluding these data does not impact the analysis because of the use of the comparative method that enables to handle the “spatially uneven nature of major processes of political and economic transformation.”⁴³

Reliability and replication are essential considerations. LeCompte and Goetz argue that it is impossible to ‘freeze’ a social setting and the circumstances of an initial study to make it replicable; they describe this as external reliability.⁴⁴ The author has deliberately chosen a longer period of time to mitigate against oversimplification when an attempt to generalise derives from a single case analysis. There is also an argument that in many cases qualitative researchers can in fact produce what Williams calls *moderatum* generalisations – one in which aspects of the focus of research “can be seen to be instances of a broader set of recognisable features.”⁴⁵ Following this argument, the author remains cautiously positive about the generalisation of findings and their applicability for future research.

⁴¹ The article has been referred to by various media outlets, but the author could not find the primary source of such publication, i.e. Novaya Gazeta (partly owned by Kremlin critic Alexander Lebedev), instead, the text has been, for example, published by Ukrainian outlets, see, for instance, <https://www.unian.info/politics/1048525-novaya-gazetas-kremlin-papers-article-full-text-in-english.html>, accessed on 6 February 2018. This reference is only used to demonstrate what kind of information is not used in this work, because it is not feasible to verify their authenticity without having access to a primary source (in this case a policy paper).

⁴² See, for example, Reid Standish, “Hacked: Putin Aide’s Emails Details Alleged Plot to Destabilise Ukraine”, *Foreign Policy*, (25 October 2016), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/10/25/hacked-putin-aides-emails-detail-alleged-plot-to-destabilize-kyiv-surkov-ukraine-leaks/>, accessed on 5 December 2018 or Andrew E. Kramer “Ukrainian Hackers Release Emails Tying Top Russian Official to Uprising”, *The New York Times*, (27 October 2016), available from <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/28/world/europe/ukraine-russia-emails.html?smid=tw-nytimesworld&smtyp=cur>, accessed on 6 December 2018.

⁴³ R.Snyder, “Scaling Down: The Subnational Comparative Method”, *St Comp Int Dev* 36, 93–110 (2001).

⁴⁴ Alan Bryman, op. cit. p. 383.

⁴⁵ M. Williams (2000) in A. Bryman, op.cit. p. 399.

1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Structurally the thesis consists of two main parts – the theoretical and the empirical - comprised in six main chapters each linked to certain stages of the research design. Some of these stages will span across the chapters. The structure is directly linked to the methodological underpinning of the research described above. The author follows the main steps of qualitative research as identified by Bryman⁴⁶ and adopts these to meet the bespoke requirements of this research. The structure is visually presented in figure 1.

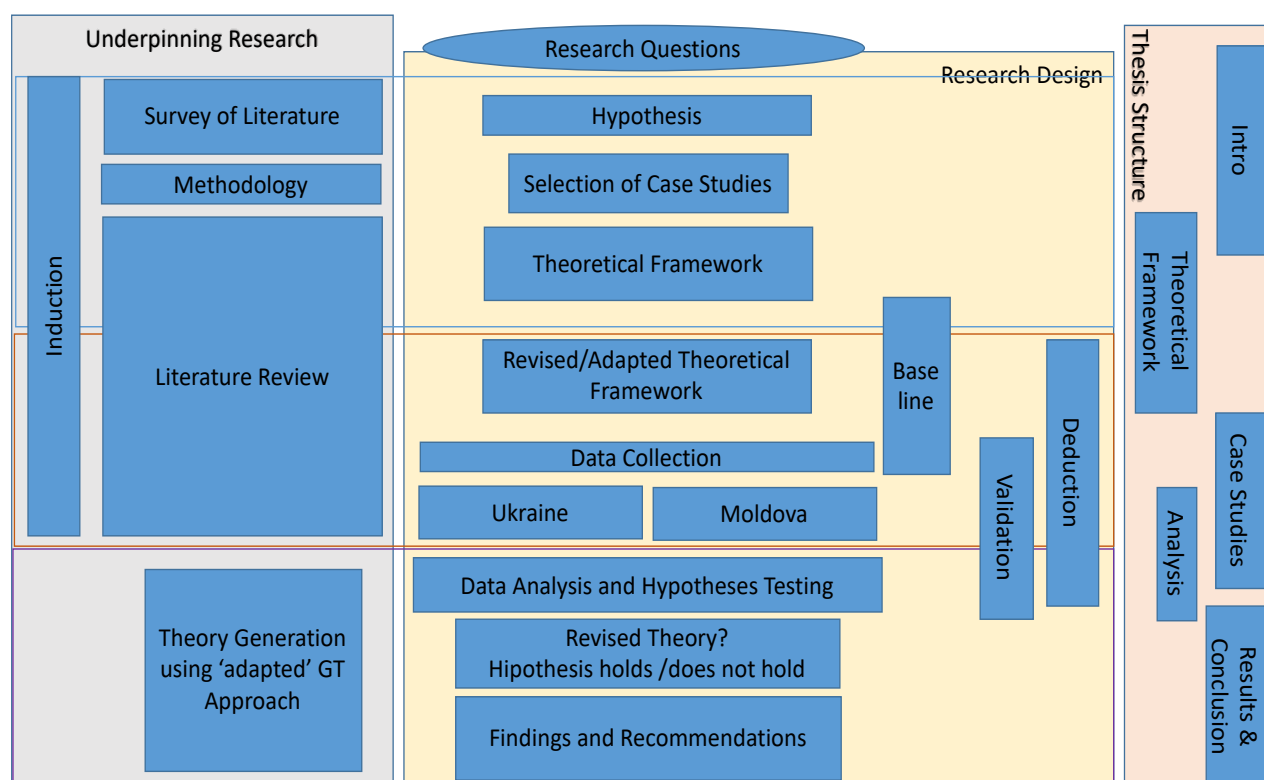


Figure 1: Structure of the thesis

1.8 RESEARCH APPROBATION

This research, its methodological and empirical underpinnings, as well as emerging findings, have been tested through a variety of means during most of the temporal boundaries. This included international conferences, round table discussions, publications and teaching. At the initial stages (inputs into research) the above activities helped identify the research problem and narrow down the focus to the decision-making as a less explored aspect of foreign policy

⁴⁶ A.Bryman, op. cit. p. 379.

processes in Russia. At later stages (outputs of research) it turned towards testing the early findings that will continue to be pursued through already scheduled further conferences, conference proceedings and publications.

International conferences and rounds table discussions

13th International Conference on Interdisciplinary Social Sciences, University of Granada, Spain, 25-27 July 2018, presented paper “Russia – Dealing with its Imperial Legacy: Examples of Ukraine and Moldova.”

Opening remarks (the role of sciences/research diplomacy in fostering bilateral collaboration) at the second UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council/Russian Foundation of Basic Research conference “British and Russian Identities and Cultures in a Comparative and Cross-cultural Perspective c.1800-2000”, 24-26 October 2019, London, UK.

The 12th Asian Conference on the Social Science, Tokyo, 24-26 May 2021, online, paper presentation on 26 May 2021: "Rational Incrementalism: Making Sense of Russia's Foreign Policy" (conference proceedings included).

Publications

“Russia’s Foreign Policy Decision-Making. Case studies of Ukraine and Moldova”, International Journal of Social Science Studies, article accepted for publication in November 2021, Vol. 9, No. 6.

"Russia’s Foreign Policy in Ukraine and Moldova – Challenge to European Neighbourhood Policy” (in Latvian), *Latvijas intereses Eiropas Savienībā*, 2021/1, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Latvia’s Association of Political Scientists, Riga 49-59

"Approaches to Decision Making in Foreign Policy", Journal of Political Science and International Relations, May 2021, 4(2): 48-55 DOI:10.11648/j.jpsir.20210402.14

“UK countries and regions in the context of Brexit vote” (in Latvian), in *Latvia’s interests in the European Union*, 2018/1, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Latvia’s Association of Political Scientists, Riga, 9-15.

“Latvia’s Security Perspective: An Analysis of Official Sources”, in *Rethinking Security*, Žaneta Ozoliņa (ed.), Zinātne, Riga 2010, 306-325.

“Strategic Planning in Public Sector Organisations”, in *Good Governance in 21st Century in Europe*, (Apgads ‘Zinātne’, Riga, 2009), 100-124.

“Latvia’s Image in Russia: Legacy of the 1990s” in *Manufacturing Enemy Images? Russian Media Portrayal of Latvia*, Nils Muižnieks (ed.), (Academic Press of the University of Latvia, Riga, 2008).

“Latvia’s Culture in Russia’s Media” in *Manufacturing Enemy Images: Russian Media Portrayal of Latvia*, Nils Muižnieks (ed.). (Academic Press of the University of Latvia, Riga, 2008).

“Challenges to Latvia’s Security. The Case of Environmental Security”, *Latvia-2020. Future Challenges to the Society and the State*, (University of Latvia, Riga, 2008), 189-202.

“Russia’s close neighbourhood policy”, *Latvia-Russia-X*, Commission for Strategic Analysis under the auspices of President of the Republic of Latvia, (Riga, 1 (12) 2007), 187-222.

“The Role of France and Germany in the Process of European Integration”, *Issues in Political Science*, Collection of Academic Papers, (University of Latvia, Riga 2002), 37-66.

Courses taught

Russia’s Policy in CIS and Baltic Countries, delivered to the MSc in Political Science students at the University of Latvia, Department of Social Sciences, Autumn term 2007/2008, together with Dr Nils Muižnieks.

Guest lectures on International terrorism to Political Science students, University of Latvia and cadets at the Defence Academy, 2006, 2007 and 2008.

2 DECISION-MAKING IN FOREIGN POLICY – THEORETICAL MODELS

*There will always be the dark and tangled stretches in the decision-making process – mysterious even to those who may be most intimately involved.*⁴⁷

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Foreign policy decisions are typically characterised by high stakes, enormous uncertainty, and substantial risk.⁴⁸ Decisions occur in an environment that Barber describes as volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous.⁴⁹ More often than not, the decisions themselves are complex and appear puzzling not only for the outsiders but also for insiders. The monopoly of government, or rather a small group within the government, in decision-making is also expressed in its highest degree (perhaps only comparable with defence policy). Renshon and Renshon take the argument on monopolisation further, emphasizing the role of individual leaders arguing that no crises or war can be understood “without direct reference to the decision-making of individual leaders.”⁵⁰ Lunenberg echoes this argument saying that while decision-making is an important administrative process, it is fundamentally a people process.⁵¹ The emphasis on agency is evident in relatively recent literature.

Allison and Zelikow, as part of their discussion on the RAM, note that decision-making is a centralised process that presupposes the role of people involved in it but emphasises structure over agency; arguing that decision is a structured choice among alternatives with reference to a clearly defined goal. They also make a useful link to policy which they defined as the realization in a number of particular instances of some objectives.⁵² This link between

⁴⁷ In ‘Preface’ to Theodor Sorensen *Decision-Making in the White House: The Olive Branch and the Arrows* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963).

⁴⁸ Jonathan Renshon and Stanley A. Renshon, *The Theory and Practice of Foreign Policy Decision-Making*, in *Political Psychology*, Volume 29, Issue 4 (2008), p. 509.

⁴⁹ Herbert F. Barber. “Developing Strategic Leadership: The US Army War College Experience”, *Journal of Management Development*, 11(6) (1992), pp. 4-12. See also Harry R. Yarger, *Strategic Theory for the 21st Century* (Virginia: National Defence University Press, 2006).

⁵⁰ Jonathan Renshon and Stanley A. Renshon, *op.cit.*, p. 511.

⁵¹ Fred C. Lunenberg, “The Decision-Making Process”, *National Forum of Educational Administration and Supervision Journal*, Volume 27, Number 4 (2010).

⁵² Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow *Essence of Decision. Explaining the Cuban Missile Crises*, (Second Edition, Longman, 1999,), p. 33.

decision-making in foreign policy and policy itself and the utility of this notion in this research requires further explanation. Policy and decision-making are closely related, different yet inseparable. Yarger, drawing on Clausewitz's discussion on policy, argues that policy, in its most refined form articulates objectives and decisions on how instruments of national power used to attain these.⁵³ Despite the role of agency and the complexity and volatility of foreign policy decision-making, the above considerations can be deducted into the four major structural categories that can help guide the analysis. In simple terms these can be described through key questions: what has been decided (decision), why (aims and objectives); by whom (actors); where and when (context). The analysis can then reveal the mutual impact of these categories and the level of consistency of this impact.

While policy represents a particular set of choices arrived at through a specific political prism, it, in turn, produces a framework within which future decisions are contained—at the level of policy—while defining boundaries for decisions at subordinate levels. In this backdrop, the author takes the position that foreign policy is input into and a product of decision-making and in itself represents a decision or continuous series of decisions. In this research, the process of policy formulation and the resulting decision framework is consistent with the mutual dependency between input and product and should be seen as deliberate rather than as an accidental confusion of the two notions - foreign policy and decision-making. Approaching foreign policy from a decision-making point of view provides a useful vehicle for its understanding.

The interpretation of decisions and the process underpinning these (decision-making) can be explained through setting out major categories for the analysis, the inter-dependencies of which can help clarify decision-making as a process and as an output. This approach is also evident in Allison and Zelikow's model, who argued that most analysis could explain the behaviour of national governments and international relations in terms of one base conceptual model.⁵⁴ The RAM is one of the key models used in explaining decision-making and will be used in this research as one of the two basic models for analysis, alongside Lindblom's Incremental Model. This model takes a different approach within the structural categories

⁵³ Harry R. Yarger, *op. cit.*

⁵⁴ Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow (1999), *op. cit.* pp. 21, 42.

(such as aims, objectives and actors) and provides a useful theoretical framework of its own, and in synthesis with the more rigid RAM. This will be discussed further in this Chapter.

2.2 FOUNDATIONAL DECISION-MAKING MODELS

2.2.1 *Rational Actor Model*

The salient feature of the RAM, commonly used in analysing international events,⁵⁵ is the explanation of international events by recounting the aims and the calculations of national governments.⁵⁶ Despite its limitations, the model offers a useful foundation and theoretical framework for analysis.⁵⁷

The model assumes that human behaviour is a goal-directed activity that becomes rational through consistency in both goals and objectives relative to a particular action and application of principles in order to select an optimal alternative;⁵⁸ and emphasising structure over agency. In other words, to choose rationally is to select the option that maximises the output for a given input. The decision-maker selects the alternative in terms of utility and foreseeable consequences in order of preference.⁵⁹

RAM premises on purposefulness in everyday decisions, whether these relate to an individual, larger groups, the national or international levels. Rationality imposes a consistent, value-maximizing choice within specified constraints. In other words, the model assumes a somewhat rigid methodology of decision-making that requires pre-set steps to be

⁵⁵ For example Morgentau's analysis of reasons behind the WWI (Hans Morgentau, *Politics among Nations*, 4th ed., New York: Knopf, 1970) or Freedman and Kerch's analysis of Iraq-Kuwait war (Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict 1990-1991: Diplomacy and War in the New World Order*, London, 1993).

⁵⁶ Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow (1999), *Ibid*, p. 30.

⁵⁷ At this point it is also worth explaining as to why the author chose this particular model. In contrast, the other two decision-making models offered by Allison and Zelikow remained relatively ignored. Organisational process and governmental politics models both look at government as a body embracing multiple actors with corresponding or conflicting goals. In comparison, the RAM looks at the nation as a single actor represented at decision-making level by a government as a mere single actor embodiment. Based on this simple classification (and without challenging it yet at this point in writing), one can conclude that this model is more suitable for analysis of political systems rely on strong executive power controlled by one person, most commonly directly elected and relying on overwhelming support from their led government and legislative. This is clearly the case of the kind of power possessed by Russia's President both legally (constitutionally) and legitimately (by virtue of strong public support and the way his party controls the legislative branch). A more detailed discussion about presidential powers and influence in foreign policy will be discussed in later chapters of the thesis.

⁵⁸ Graham Alison and Philip Zelikow (1999), *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 34.

taken to arrive at a rational choice. Allison and Zelikow summarized the rational decision-making process in four major ‘concepts’:⁶⁰

1. Goals and objectives: The interests and values of a decision-maker are translated into a ‘payoff’ or ‘utility’ or ‘preference’ function, representing the desirability or utility of alternative sets of consequences. From the outset of the decision problem, the decision-maker has a payoff function, which ranks all possible sets of implications in terms of her or his values and objectives. He/she is expected to rank consequences that might result from a particular action in order of impact.
2. Alternatives: the rational actor chooses among a set of other options displayed before them in a particular situation. These courses of action provide distinct advantages and disadvantages, each indicating alternative policy choices with multiple layers of calculations translating interests into operational objectives.
3. Consequence: To each alternative is attached a set of consequences or outcomes should that choice become policy. Consideration of potential consequences includes an assumption about how accurately the decision-maker estimates the chain of events that follow from each potential course of action.
4. Choice: Rational choice simply consists of selecting the alternative whose consequences rank highest in the decision maker’s payoff function.⁶¹

The model could be visualized in the following way:

⁶⁰ Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow (1999), op. cit., pp. 34-36. The term ‘concept’ is used by the authors.

⁶¹ Robinson and Snyder offered a slightly different grouping of factors, namely 1. Identifying the decision problem; 2 Searching for alternatives; 3. Choosing an alternative; and 4. Executing the alternative. J.Robinson and R.Snyder, “Decision-Making in International Politics” in *International Behaviour*, ed. H.Kelman, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), p. 437. While Derek Beach divided the four concepts into two distinct phases: the collection and processing of information about the choice situation (identification of a problem, defining goals, information gathering, identifying all possible courses of action) and the decision-taking stage (assessment of all possible alternatives, choosing between those and making a decision, routine assessment of the decision). Derek Beach, *Analysing Foreign Policy*, (Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), pp. 97-99.

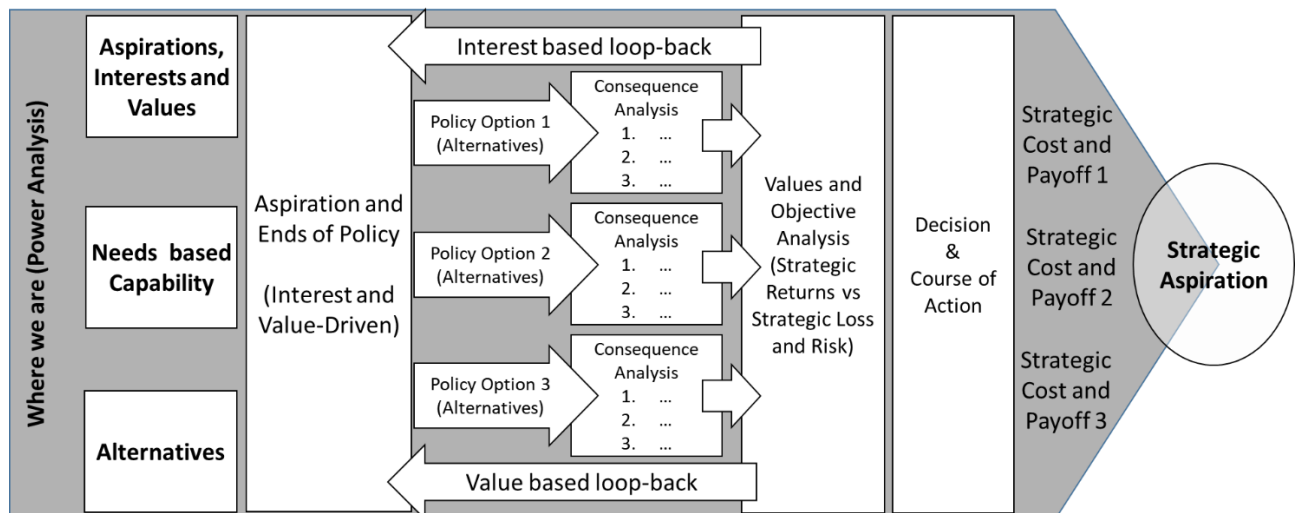


Figure 2: Rational Actor Model

Author's own diagram based on model described above

Equipped with this model, one can assume that analysis of a decision-maker's actions could be a straight forward and relatively linear affair. Acting rationally requires ranking final outcomes, assigning utility numbers to them if necessary, determining the expected utility of actions by weighing the utility of outcome by action probability, and then selecting the action that has the highest expected pay-off.

2.2.2 Critique of the Rational Actor Model

On the positive side, the model is simple, albeit simplicity also attracted some criticism,⁶² with a clear set of indicators that land themselves to quantitative analysis for scaling the outcomes. The model allows deep and deliberate analysis of factors weighing their impact and producing decisions that are consistent with long-term objectives. However, the model's simplicity also attracted some criticism.

Situations where all possible alternatives and their consequences can be thoroughly considered are virtually impossible, not least due to time constraints but also decision-makers' ability to grasp and process the volume of information presented. This is further

⁶² Bendor and Hammond argued that [all three Allison's models] require substantial reformulation not least because their logical structure began to show their age. RAM, in particular, was criticised by the authors for its simplicity, while recognising their analytical value and significant contribution to the study of bureaucracy and foreign policy. Part of the critique also relies on their assumption that the model has not been fully developed due to Allison's own biases towards his second and third models. Jonathan Bendor and Thomas Hammond, "Rethinking Allison's Models", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 86, No. 2, June (1992), pp. 301-322.

exacerbated in the fluid nature of international relations. The emphasis on consistently ranking all alternatives and consequences remains a major criticism of the model.⁶³ There is rigidity in the model which prevents it from dealing with uncertainties, arguably making this model impossible to implement.⁶⁴

The model diminishes the role of agency and human behaviour by narrowing the analysis to a focus on end-goals of the decision-maker which presuppose symmetry of priorities, cultural context, and interpretation of ongoing events on the part of the opposing side. In this regard, the author disagrees with Anthony Dawn's conclusion that if the theorist knows the end goal of a decision-maker, they can predict what actions will be taken to achieve them using 'the traditional [economic] methods of analysis: first calculating the most reasonable way for the decision-maker to reach their goal and then assuming that this particular way will be actually chosen because "the decision-maker is rational".⁶⁵ In other words, their behaviour can be explained in terms of the goal they are trying to achieve.⁶⁶ The role of agency, particularly when within a given cultural context, individuals in a position of authority lay different emphasis on contributing factors, is critical to the subsequent decision, whereas it is undervalued in the RAM. Decision-makers invariably attach a personal spin to decisions. Notwithstanding the strengths of the RAM, it offers a limited framework for analysis due to its simplification and broad assumptions as well as overreliance on value-maximising behaviour towards a goal.⁶⁷

Does having a goal make a decision maker rational regardless of what means they employ to achieve their goal as long they are moving forward towards achieving their goals? Turning this question upside down would imply that not having an end-goal suggests the irrational nature of a decision-maker? Not necessarily. Herbert Simon, being a *rationalist* himself,

⁶³ For example, Etzioni argues that RAM is utopian as in actual practice the rationalistic assumption that values and facts, means and ends can be distinguished is inapplicable. Amitai Etzioni, "Mixed Scanning: Third Approach to Decision-Making", *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 27, No. 5 (December 1967). D. Braybrooke and E. Lindblom refer to the RAM as unrealistic and undesirable. According to them, it is neither a description of actual procedures nor an ideal. David Braybrooke and Charles E. Lindblom, *A Strategy of Decision*, (New York Press, 1963).

⁶⁴ C. John Tarter and Wayne K. Hoy, "Toward a contingency theory of decision-making", *Journal of Education Administration*, Vol. 36 Issue 3, (1998), pp. 212-222.

⁶⁵ Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), p. 4

⁶⁶ John Harsanyi, "Some Social Science Implications of a New Approach to Game Theory", *Strategic Interaction and Conflict*, in Kathleen Archibald (ed.), *Strategic Interactions and Conflict: Original Papers and Discussion*, (Berkley Institutions of International Studies, University of California, 1966) pp. 1-18.

⁶⁷ It should, therefore, not come as a surprise that creators and followers of this model were the economists.

argued that what we refer to when talking about rationality, implies bounded rationality – that is rationality that is bounded by human nature, the boundaries of which are impossible to define *a priori*.⁶⁸ Bounded rationality (as opposed to Allison’s original model) specifies the core concepts of objectives, alternatives, consequences and choices by assumptions or empirical evidence about the specific actor; in other words, bringing to fore the role of agency. It moves away from the notion of comprehensive rationality towards recognizing the unavoidable limitations of knowledge and human ability and dissonance, hence accepting the values, beliefs and stereotypes of the decision-maker regardless of what these are.⁶⁹ It is important to note that Allison and Zelikow later concurred with Simon’s analysis and conclusions.⁷⁰

Janice Stern argues that ‘rational’ processes of information management are often subsumed by the superficial intuitive processes and deep cognitive biases that political leaders use to interpret evidence.⁷¹ As such, their rationality is limited as people are ‘predictably irrational’. The term is widely used after the cognitive revolution in psychology about half a century ago.⁷² Political psychologist Robert Jervis takes the argument further, drawing on Simon’s notion of bounded rationality. Jervis argues that agents have limits to their cognitive capacities.⁷³ Understanding the role of agency becomes more important for the analysis of decision-making; which is undervalued in the RAM.

⁶⁸ Herbert Simon, “Human Nature in Politics: The Dialogue of Psychology with Political Science”, *American Political Science Review* 79, (1985), pp. 294-304. Also, Herbert Simon, *Models of Bounded Rationality*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982).

⁶⁹ Herbert Simon (1985), op. cit., p. 297.

⁷⁰ Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow (1999), op. cit., p. 37.

⁷¹ Janice Gross Stein, “Foreign policy decision-making”, *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*, Smith, S., Hadfield A, Dunne A. (eds.), (Oxford University Press, 2012). On biases in decision-making see also Morton Halperin, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, (Washington DC: Brookings, 1974); Morton Halperin and Arnold Kanter (ed), *Readings in American Foreign Policy. (A Bureaucratic Perspective*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973).

⁷² Cognitive psychology tells us that human beings have a preference for simplicity; they prefer consistency; they misunderstand the essence of probability and hence are poor estimators; they have risk profiles and hence are more averse to loss. Altogether, Stein argues, these factors “compromise the capacity for rational choice and affect the decision-making abilities of leaders who are responsible for foreign policy”. Cognitive biases can lead to profound errors in attribution, which can confound policy-making. People exaggerate the likelihood that others’ actions result from their own prior behaviour and overestimate the extent to which they are the target of those actions – the “egocentric bias”. In terms of analysis of others’ behaviour, the fundamental attribution error can also provide further insight. It occurs where people exaggerate the importance of dispositional over situational factors – explaining the disliked others’ behaviour as a result of their disposition, while explaining their own behaviour based on the situational constraints they face. Janice Gross Stein, op. cit., p. 140.

⁷³ Robert Jervis, *Perceptions and Misperceptions in International Politics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

Shelsle and Bonchek discuss the concept of instrumental rationality that implies acting in accord with one's preferences and one's beliefs. A rational individual is one who combines their beliefs about the external environment and preferences about things in that environment in a consistent manner. They go into great detail in explaining the logic of preference and choice but conclude in simple terms that individuals are characterised in a very abbreviated form, namely in terms of their preferences and beliefs;⁷⁴ thus further supporting the role of agency.

Reflecting upon earlier studies on decision-making in foreign policy, including that of Allison, John Spanier summarised that the decision-making approach to understanding the foreign policy of a country is based on the premise that one should look at individuals responsible for making foreign policy and the positions they occupy. Among primary factors, this analysis needs to include the perceptions of decision-makers, their vision of the world.⁷⁵ The role of perceptions and misperceptions is also instrumental. As Jervis argues, a common misperception is to see the actions of others as more centralized, planned, and coordinated than they really are and there may be a tendency to squeeze complex and unrelated events into a coherent pattern.⁷⁶

In this backdrop, Derek Beach argues that decision-making models that depart from the RAM are better equipped to capture the agency involved in the decision-making process⁷⁷ but does not present a model for analysis *per se*. Knowledge of goals and objectives combined with an understanding of actors' beliefs, norms, values and behaviours as well as their ability to draw inferences from the information they possess, can provide a much more solid basis for decision-making analysis. Jervis argues that once a leader believes in something, that perception would influence the way they perceive all other relevant information.⁷⁸ Therefore, it could impact their approach to the selection of information they deem to be relevant to support their formed perceptions. Jervis concludes this may also lead to common errors; particularly, if decisions are made on satisfactory rather than optimal amounts of information

⁷⁴ Kenneth A. Shepsle and Mark S. Bonchek, *Analysing Politics. Rationality, Behaviour, and Institutions*, (W.W.Norton & Company: New York, London, 1997), pp. 15-36.

⁷⁵ John Spanier, *Games Nations Play*, Fifth Edition, (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984), p. 409.

⁷⁶ Robert Jervis, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

⁷⁷ Derek Beach, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

⁷⁸ Robert Jarvis, *op. cit.*

selected through decision-makers' current perceptions.⁷⁹ Optimal may not only relate to the quantity but more importantly, to the quality and reliability of data and the way it is selected and used to support perception-based decision-making.

In this discussion, it is also important to note that actors' perceptions and beliefs about international relations and other actors are not constant and prone to change.⁸⁰ Therefore, these should be examined over a longer period of time to enable an analyst to draw any meaningful conclusions. This deviation from the original RAM adds more flexibility, and a means to manage complexity in the analysis. Emphasising the role of agency offers a much more nuanced approach in assessing particular decisions, bringing to fore the positioning of those taking the decisions, as evidenced above. We tend to rationalize others' behaviours while cognitive dissonance tells us that actors aim for consistency between attitudes and behaviours (and hence adjust one or another to maintain the balance) and importantly may not use very rational methods to achieve it.⁸¹ In addition to attempts to reduce the dissonance, the decision-makers will actively avoid situations and information, which would likely increase the dissonance, particularly in post-decision situations, attempting to distance the decision from the alternatives.⁸² While this is more relevant to the post-decision stage, it is important to include in the overview to help explain why and how actors justify or explain their decisions to the outside world, as we shall see in the context of Russia's takeover of the Crimea.

Four major decision-making steps outlined in Allison and Zelikow's model are focussed on the process of arriving at a decision and do not explicitly discuss the implementation, albeit the model does refer to the application of means. Other authors, such as Anthony Dawn, suggest that the rationality factor extends to the implementation stage as the decision-maker will choose the reasonable way to reach their set objectives.⁸³ Beach argued that a decision-making process that follows the RAM does not necessarily mean that the optimal outcomes

⁷⁹ Jay M. Shafritz, Karen S. Layne and Christopher P. Borick, *Classics in Public Policy*, (Longman, 2005), pp. 23-24.

⁸⁰ Robert Jervis, *op. cit.*

⁸¹ S.A. McLeod, "Cognitive dissonance", (2014), Online <https://www.simplypsychology.org/cognitive-dissonance.html>, accessed on 6 January 2018.

⁸² Furthermore, dissonance theory asserts that, after making a decision, the person will downgrade or misinterpret discrepant information and avoid it, and seek consonant information... known as 'selective exposure'. R. Jervis, *op. cit.*, pp. 382, 387-8. Example could be the process leading to the annexation of Crimea – will be elaborated in subsequent chapters.

⁸³ Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1957).

are reached in relation to a goal. It does not necessarily mean that the outcome will be beneficial, and “a rational process can end up choosing an option that turns out to be bad policy”.⁸⁴ Even the most calculated approach could eventually lead to undesirable outcomes.

Perhaps the most significant limitation of the model is the assumption that decision-making is always a centralised process and that all decisions emanate from the top a structural hierarchy. In reality, many decisions are devolved to lower levels and thereby granting agency, as discussed earlier, come into play.⁸⁵

The RAM offers a useful framework for analysis; however, it is essentially an aspirational model with limited utility in practice, particularly in international relations where more than one player is involved.

2.2.3 *Incremental Model*

Incrementalism takes a different approach that is premised on the disparity between the requirements of a rational actor and their capacities for decision-making. This forms the focal point of incrementalists’ critique of the RAM.⁸⁶ Due to the complex nature of problems that decision-makers have to face when it comes to international relations, they are not amenable to total rationality. Decision-makers ‘must start from the existing policy and take, remedial steps to cope with problems as they arise’.⁸⁷

The foundational model of incrementalism applied in this research is developed by Charles Lindblom in his 1959 influential article. Lindblom identified a set of specific steps in the decision-making process that he called ‘successive limited comparisons’ (branch) or incremental. These are summarised below:⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Derek Beach op. cit., p. 101.

⁸⁵ James Walter and Paul ‘t Hart, “Distributed Leadership and Policy Success: Understanding Political Dyads”, paper presented at the Australian Political Studies Association Annual Conference, University of Sydney, (July 2014), Online https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2469597, accessed on 12 July 2019.

⁸⁶ See, for example, David Braybrooke and Charles E. Lindblom, op.cit., pp. 48-50 and 111-143; Charles E. Lindblom, *The Intelligence of Democracy*, (New York: Free Press, 1965), pp. 137-139; Charles E. Lindblom, (1979), op. cit., pp. 517-526.

⁸⁷ Robert Jarvis, op. cit., p. 77. Mintzberg’s idea of emergent strategy is also premised on the fallacy of a deliberate long-term set of decisions to guide action. Mintzberg argues that every strategy, when in contact with reality, must adapt and that adaptation must commence from where one has arrived as opposed to where one began. See Mintzberg, op. cit.

⁸⁸ Lindblom has also referred to this model as the ‘science of muddling through’ that also gave a title to his original article published in 1959.

1. There is no distinction made between the process of selecting value goals and empirical analysis of the need action, instead the two are closely intertwined. Means and ends are not distinct.
2. There is no comprehensive analysis of alternatives included; instead, the decision-maker focuses on policies that differ incrementally from existing policies (simple incremental analysis). Analysis is, therefore, limited to a few familiar policy alternatives (Lindblom's later addition⁸⁹).
3. Means-end analysis is often inappropriate or limited. Only a restricted number of 'important' consequences are evaluated. The problem is constantly redefined allowing for means-ends and ends-means adjustments, making it more manageable.
4. The decision-maker takes small steps in the 'right' direction deciding whether the decision was right or wrong and altered as required. As such, there is ongoing monitoring of each small step. Lindblom added that "incrementalism in politics is not, in principle, slow-moving... A fast-moving sequence of small changes can more speedily accomplish a drastic alteration of the *status quo* than can an only infrequent major policy change... incremental change patterns are... the fastest method of change available."⁹⁰
5. There is no 'right' solution but a 'never-ending series of attacks' on the issues at hand through serial analysis and evaluation. Decision-making is based on a sequence of trials, errors, and revised trials.
6. A greater analytical pre-occupation with ills to be remedied than positive goals to be sought.
7. The analysis is drastically limited, and only a relatively small number of policy alternatives are considered, hence simplifying the character of the investigation. Consequently, important possible outcomes, alternatives potential policies and important affected values may stay neglected. Policy comparisons are limited to those policies that differ in relatively small degree from policies presently in effect.

⁸⁹ David Braybrooke and Charles E. Lindblom. *A Strategy of Decision. Policy Evaluation as a Social Process*. (The Free Press, New York, 1970).

⁹⁰ Charles E. Lindblom, (1979), op. cit., pp. 517-526.

8. There is a reduced or even eliminated reliance on theory. Incremental decision-making is described as remedial, geared more to the alleviation of the present, concrete social imperfections than to the promotion of future social goals.⁹¹

The summary above refers to both “disjointed incrementalism” and “simple incremental analysis” that Lindblom has considered in his works over a period of time, starting from his original writings in the 1950s.⁹² Lindblom’s model is visually presented together with Etzioni’s Mixed Scanning model (discussed later) in Figure 3.

As Lindblom himself was an economist, it does not come as a surprise that the model is influenced by the free competition model of economics; it rejects the notion of centralisation in decision-making looking for a collective ‘good’ (even though, as mentioned above, it is not always clear what that good may be or what purpose it may serve). The model is based on numerous actors and decision is a product of agreement among themselves. However, Lindblom only indirectly discussed the distributive nature of incremental decision-making. In fact, he did not devote much attention at all to actors, concentrating on the process instead. It emerged in later writings that often-presented incrementalism as the typical decision-making process of pluralistic societies, as contrasted with the master planning of totalitarian societies.⁹³ Robert Putnam followed this premise in his discussion on decision-making in pluralistic societies. Thus, he rejected state-centric approaches to decision-making, arguing that decision-makers are not a monolithic body.⁹⁴ This conclusion is opposite to the premise of the RAM that emphasises the unitary nature of decision-making.

Incrementalism, while having attracted a substantial body of research, remained mostly grounded in the literature produced by North American scholars with an initial focus on

⁹¹ Charles E. Lindblom, “The Science of Muddling through”, *Public Administration Review*, 19(2) (1959), pp. 79-88; see also Charles E. Lindblom (1965), op.cit., 144-148; Charles E.Lindblom (1979), op.cit., pp. 517-526.

⁹² Charles E. Lindblom (1959), op.cit., pp. 79-88; Charles E.Lindblom, (1979), pp. 517-526; See also earlier works, for example, Charles E. Lindblom, “Policy analysis”, *American Economic Review*. 48(3), (1958), p. 298; R.A. Dahl, C.E. Lindblom, *Politics, economics, and welfare: Planning and politico-economic systems resolved into basic social processes*, (Harper & Brothers: New York, 1953).

⁹³ Amitai Etzioni (1967), op. cit.

⁹⁴ Robert D. Putnam, “Diplomacy and domestic politics: the logic of two-level games”, *International Organisations*, 42: 3, (1988), p.432.

socio-economic and budgetary planning but subsequently expanded to other areas, including foreign policy.⁹⁵

2.2.4 *Critique of the Incremental Model*

Lindblom refers to a much more opportunistic flexible model that shape strategy rather than being shaped by strategy. This is what Mintzberg describes as emergent as opposed to deliberate strategy.⁹⁶ As an analytical model, according to Lindblom, it makes the most of our limited abilities to understand. Policy is not made once and for all; it is made and re-made endlessly through a succession of incremental changes or marginal differences in policies.⁹⁷ Policy-making is a process of ‘successive approximation to some desired objectives in which what is desired itself continues to change under reconsideration’. Policy to attain certain objectives and objectives themselves are chosen simultaneously.⁹⁸ This is different from the RAM where means are chosen in the light of ends. This particular feature of the Incremental Model deprives it from being considered strategic and lacking goal orientation, which is one of the main criticisms of the model in scholarly literature.⁹⁹ Like RAM, it is also a structural model; therefore the role of agency in Lindblom’s thinking is also diminished.

Although incrementalism is referred to by some as the most realistic model (particularly in its analysis of how modern democracies decide) and the most effective approach to societal decision-making,¹⁰⁰ a serious critique of the model also exists. Lindblom himself admitted that there were imperfections, for example, a risk that the decision-maker may overlook excellent policies for no other reason than that they are not suggested by the chain of successive policy steps within the context of emergent decisions with limited analysis. And yet, 20 years after his original article, Lindblom reemphasises his original thinking that

⁹⁵ See, for example, Peter J. Schraeder, *United States Foreign Policy Toward Africa: Incrementalism, Crisis and Change*, (Cambridge University Press, New York, 1994); Michael T. Hayes, *Incrementalism and Public Policy*, (New York: Longman, 1992).

⁹⁶ Henry Mintzberg and James Brian Quinn, *The Strategy Process. Concepts. Contexts, Cases*. Third Edition, (Prentice Hall International, 1996).

⁹⁷ As Lord Salisbury supposedly noted in the nineteenth century: “There is no such thing as a fixed policy, because policy like all organic entities is always in the making”, James H. Billington, Respectfully Quoted: A Dictionary of Quotations, (Dover Publications Inc., 1992), p. 258.

⁹⁸ D.Braybrooke and C.Lindblom (1963), op. cit., pp. 82-83.

⁹⁹ On criticism of Incrementalism see Edward Woodhouse and David Collingridge, “Incrementalism, intelligent trial-and-error, and the future of political decision theory”, *Research Gate*, (January 1993), Online https://www.researchgate.net/publication/251443241_INCREMENTALISM_INTELLIGENT_TRIAL-AND-ERROR_AND_THE_FUTURE_OF_POLITICAL_DECISION_THEORY accessed on 13 March 2017.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, in Amitai Etzioni *The Active Society: A Theory of Societal and Political Processes* (New York: Free Press, 1968).

incrementalism “is and ought to be the usual method of policymaking”.¹⁰¹ The paradox of Lindblom’s thinking is that non-incremental policy proposals are not only politically irrelevant but also unpredictable in their consequences; a departure from the efficacy of deliberate strategy is underpinning the RAM.

Within the framework of Lindblom’s analysis, the notion of ‘good’ policy can be accepted, without specifying ‘why’ and ‘what’ it is suitable for. There is a rational expectation from decision-makers that their policies will only achieve a part of what he/she hopes and at the same time will produce unanticipated consequences he/she would have preferred to avoid. As Howlett and Ramesh put it, “...In this model, the decisions eventually made represent what is politically feasible, and what is possible rather than ‘maximal’”.¹⁰² Similar is its analytical value. This, as an analytical model, according to Lindblom, it makes the most of our limited abilities to understand. The succession of incremental changes allows the decision agency to avoid serious lasting mistakes, for example, through making and changing policies through relatively small steps.¹⁰³ Indeed, from the point of view of a decision-maker, incrementalism is a safer option in comparison to the RAM, but its very essence suggests that it is not fit for major decisions that are designed to drive substantial changes.

Based on his analysis of the US federal system with its distributed balanced decision-making process, Spanier, for example, challenged the ability of a policymaker to go through the rational procedure each time they have to make a decision as they neither have the time nor resources to do that. Instead, he finds that decision-makers settle on the choice that is likely to yield the most satisfactory policy. They inform their choice based on the level of success in the past,¹⁰⁴ and not on thorough analysis as proposed in the RAM. Spanier has somewhat simplified the policymaker’s thought process, based on a limited sample, suggesting that the decisions are made on the presumption that if it has worked in the past, it will work again.

¹⁰¹ Charles E. Lindblom (1979), pp. 517-526.

¹⁰² M. Howlett and M. Ramesh, *Studying Public Policy, Policy Cycles and Policy Subsystems*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2003), 170, referred in Johanna Kuhlmann, “Clear Enough to be Proven Wrong? Assessing the Influence of the Concept of Bounded Rationality within the Multiple-Streams Framework”, in *Decision-Making under Ambiguity and Time Constraints*, Reimut Zohlnhofer and Friedbert W. Rub (eds.), (ECPR Press, 2016), pp. 37-38.

¹⁰³ This approach in the literature is sometimes called ‘political incrementalism’. See, for example, Andrew Weiss and Edward Woodhouse, “Reframing incrementalism: A constructive response to the critics”, *Policy Sciences*, Volume 25, Issue 3, August (1992), pp. 255-273.

¹⁰⁴ John Spanier, op. cit., pp. 419-420.

Incrementalism to Spanier is a ‘policy machine in low gear, moving along a well-defined road rather slowly’.¹⁰⁵

Critics of the Incremental Model would say that the model is appropriate for a narrow range of decisions and cannot be applied to fundamental decisions. Indeed, a major decision, such as the declaration of war or, for example, Russia’s takeover of Ukrainian sovereign territory, requires much greater consideration of alternatives and their consequences than what is prescribed by incrementalism. On the other hand, Lindblom asserts that even incremental changes to policies could lead to major changes over time (that in itself could be an objective) and as such be a deliberate political strategy, whether overt or covert. Lindblom further noted that his model does not neglect long-run considerations. However, he provides no detail of how incrementalism incorporates a long-term and strategic perspective on ends-ways-means.¹⁰⁶

2.2.5 *Comparison of the Rational Actor and Incremental Models*

The major differences between the RAM and the Incremental Model are summarized in Table 1. It is reemphasised that these are not seen as two opposing models, on two opposite sides of a spectrum, but rather as models that can co-exist and even complement each other. Lindblom himself made it clear that incrementalism is not opposed to rationalism. Paradoxically, its main prepositions derive from a critique of rationalism, for example, the acknowledgement of limits of human cognition.¹⁰⁷ Instead, Lindblom saw the two models of decision-making as mutually supporting. Smith and May reinforced this view, concluding that the models have features in common.¹⁰⁸ It can be argued from the evidence presented earlier that these common features only appear at a fundamental level, for example, structuralism or in the derivative models, such as Simon’s bounded rationality model.¹⁰⁹ Such models may indeed have features shared with Incrementalism, rather than the models as developed by Allison and Zelikow. Smith and May’s statement that the debate between the two models is artificial is not entirely supported. The debate is useful and constructive, as

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ This is an important observation for the analysis of Russia’s foreign policy in Ukraine and Moldova.

¹⁰⁷ Charles Lindblom (1959), *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁸ Gilbert Smith and David May, “The Artificial Debate Between Rationalist and Incrementalist Models of Decision-Making”, *Policy and Politics*, Volume 8, Number 2, (April 1980), pp. 147-161.

¹⁰⁹ Some analysts see it as an alternative to the RAM, not a derivative. Alex Mintz and Karl DeRouen Jr, *op. cit.*

long as it remains purposed on the utility of these models, accepting their differences, particularly in such key categories as aims and objective, and actors.

Table 1: Comparison of Rational Actor and Incremental Decision Models

Author's own table

	Rational Actor Model	Incremental Model
Framework	<p>A theory based approach.</p> <p>Is driven by interest in major social goals that brings about a considerable change.</p> <p>Inherently rigid model of decision-making not well-equipped to deal with uncertainty¹¹⁰</p> <p>Assumes the centralisation of decision-making (nation-state is seen as a single actor represented at decision-making level by a government as embodiment of a single voice)</p> <p>Normative model</p> <p>Institutional and Structured</p>	<p>Does not rely on theory.</p> <p>Remedial, geared to the alleviation of present imperfections rather than to the promotion of future social goals.</p> <p>Does not apply to fundamental decisions, however, admits that the accumulation of incremental changes can eventually lead to major changes.</p> <p>Allows for considerable degree of flexibility.</p> <p>Is usually associates with the plurality of actors involved in the decision-making process and the agreement between them.</p> <p>Operational model</p> <p>Institutional and Structured</p>
Aims and Objectives	<p>Well defined from the outset, focussed on the maintenance of aims and therefore consistent, guides decision-making.</p> <p>Purposefulness is assumed in every step taken.</p> <p>Means are chosen in the light of ends.</p> <p>Rational behaviour is the one that is appropriate to specified goals in a given context.</p>	<p>There are no predefined aims and objectives. Objectives and policy to attain those are inter-twined and chosen simultaneously.</p> <p>The model could give an impression of aimlessness.</p> <p>Means and ends are not distinct—small steps towards a ‘right’ direction allowing for mistakes and necessary alterations in the process.</p>

¹¹⁰ Although the traditional literature international relations, cited by Allison as having explicitly used RAM, emphasised how a state's uncertainty about other states' goals and capabilities shapes its own choices. J. Bendor and T.H. Hammond, op. cit., p. 306.

Actors	<p>Unified national actor – unitary decision maker with one set of preferences. Decisions emanate from the top of a hierarchy.</p> <p>In its ‘bounded’ version, the model looks at individual decision-makers admitting that their values, beliefs, prejudices and worldview can influence decision-making.</p> <p>Structure over agency.</p> <p>Complex relationship between structure and strategy.¹¹¹</p>	<p>Rejects the idea of centralisation in decision-making.</p> <p>Decision is a distributed process.¹¹² As such, a number of actors are involved in the decision-making process, and the final decision is based on a compromise.</p> <p>Structure over agency.</p> <p>Structure dominates strategy.</p>
Alternatives	<p>Examines all possible alternatives leading to multiple layers of calculations and choices in a particular situation.</p> <p>Ends drive means.</p> <p>The focus is on finding the optimal feasible alternative that maximises output for a given input.</p> <p>In its ‘bounded rationality’ version, accepts the role of agency and limitation of knowledge and human abilities to process it within time constraints.</p> <p>‘Bounded rationality’ allows satisfactory rather than the optimal amount of information to be considered in any given decision-making process.</p> <p>Resource intensive.</p>	<p>Does not include a comprehensive analysis of alternatives, limiting it to a few; the focus being on small changes from existing policies.</p> <p>Means and ends are chosen simultaneously.</p> <p>Choices are based on a limited analysis of alternatives and their potential consequences.</p> <p>Takes account of the limited cognitive abilities of a decision-maker to process a large amount of information and consider all possible alternatives.</p> <p>Can be a model of choice where means are limited.</p>
Consequences	<p>A set of consequences is attached to each of the alternative considered.</p> <p>A consistent, value-maximising choice made on the basis of its pay-off function after a comprehensive ranking of all alternatives and their individual consequences.</p> <p>Selection of the alternative whose consequences bring maximum utility and helps achieve the pre-defined aim and objectives.</p> <p>Consequence management is limited because of fewer branches and sequels towards a fixed end. Generally, ignores context as is driven by aspirational objectives.</p>	<p>Only a limited amount of consequences is considered.</p> <p>Wrong steps and mistakes are allowed as their consequences are incremental. The incremental approach allows serious mistakes to be avoided.</p> <p>Acceptance that only part of what is desired will be achieved. Accepting risk of neglecting possible important outcomes.</p> <p>Exploratory as it is open to exploit branches and sequels in risk and opportunity.</p> <p>Partially recognises the role of context as far as determining freedom of action in the obtaining environment.</p>

¹¹¹ Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of the Industrial Empire*, (1962: The MIT Press, 1962, 1982 reprint).

¹¹² James Walter and Paul ‘t Hart, *op. cit.*

Application of Means (Implementation) ¹¹³	<p>A highly theoretical model that does not explicitly discuss implementation.</p> <p>Means to achieve the pre-defined objectives are guided by those objectives.</p> <p>A linear model with clear distinction between the decision-making stage and the process of implementation.</p> <p>Threats and opportunities arising in the international strategic “marketplace” move the nation to act.</p> <p>At the level of analysis - a higher level of predictability in implementation.</p> <p>Driven through formal state structures</p>	<p>Implementation is imbedded in the decision-making cycle.</p> <p>Means and ends are not distinct. Value goals and need actions are closely intertwined.</p> <p>There is no start and end of the implementation stage; it is an ongoing process that is being altered upon need.</p> <p>Action is a response to the strategic situation within an obtaining environment.</p> <p>Small steps are taken towards the ‘right’ direction, albeit the definition of ‘right’ is fuzzy.</p> <p>Accepts that only part of what is desired can be achieved. At the level of analysis - lower level of predictability in implementation.</p> <p>Driven through formal state structures</p>
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Author’s table based on the evidence presented in section 2.2. It is based on a synthesis of RAM and Incremental Model of decision-making.

The RAM and the Incremental Model balance needs and capabilities with different emphasis on aims and objectives, actors (decision ownership), and application of means. RAM can be described as a needs-based decision-making system while the Incremental Model focuses more on capability when needs are not immediately attainable due to resources, or other constraints. Decision-making in both models is highly institutionalised and implemented through formal state structures and apparatus.

It is no surprise that both the basis models marginalise the role of context. To understand the background for this shortcoming, one has to look at their origins. Both models were developed by economists looking at tangible, quantifiable indicators, whereas models originating in social science, whether developed through qualitative or quantitative routes, retain their contextual texture.

¹¹³ Application of Means or implementation is included here because decision-making is central not only to the study of how policies are formulated and by who but also how they are implemented. This part of the analysis is limited since the RAM does not explicitly include the implementation stage, but instead talks about the application of means. Incremental Model, on the other hand, does not distinguish between means and ends and is therefore iterative. The author considers it is essential to include the application of means in the analysis based on Incrementalism’s postulates.

The substantial criticism in the literature of the utility of these models has been already noted. As the literature points out, it is difficult, or even impossible, to come across the application of any of these models in their pure forms. Critics of incrementalism claim that that model is utilitarian, being value-free, and therefore projects an amoral stance and potentially negative impact on citizens.¹¹⁴ For example, Dror found that incrementalism could produce public policies that have a life of their own slowly evolving without full consideration of their need and effectiveness.¹¹⁵ Criticism of the RAM has been discussed at length in previous sections.

2.2.6 *Blended Models*

Sociologist Amitai Etzioni attempts to capitalise on the strengths of both models while mitigating their respective shortfalls through a blended model that he describes as Mixed Scanning. In Etzioni's epistemology, scanning implies searching, collecting, processing and evaluating the information as well as drawing conclusions. Fundamental decisions are institutional and made by exploring the main alternatives the decision-maker sees in view of the conception of their goals omitting details and specifications (in contrast with RAM that assumes close consideration of every possible alternative) focusing on having an overview. As this model is designed as a balancing act between the RAM and Incremental Model, it does not qualify as a third model but rather among the family of variants of the two foundational models. Furthermore, its fundamental underpinnings remain structural.

In the Mixed Scanning approach, it is often the fundamental decisions that set the parameters for the numerous incremental ones, giving it a strategic element (see Figure 3). In other words, fundamental decisions are frequently prepared by incremental ones in order that the final decision will initiate less abrupt substantial changes.¹¹⁶ Incremental changes are remedial, serial and exploratory. While they focus on specific ills, rather than comprehensive reforms, decision-makers can pursue long-term change through a sequence of moves; as posited in Lindblom's model.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ For a discussion on political ethics, see Irene van Starven, op. cit.

¹¹⁵ Yehezkel Dror, "Muddling through - "science" or inertia?", *Public Administration Review*, 24 (3), (1962), pp. 153-157; see also Christian Simon, *Public Policy: Preferences and Outcomes*, (Routledge: Abingdon, New York, 2016), p. 21.

¹¹⁶ Amitai Etzioni (1968), op. cit.

¹¹⁷ David Braybrooke and Charles E. Lindblom (1970), p. 74.

Developing on Etzioni's ideas, Quinn further develops the strategic dimension of objective setting, offering a new variant which he refers to as "logical incrementalism." His version is essentially also a blended model that combines aspects of rational planning with those of incrementalism as described by Lindblom and Etzioni, the nuance being on strategic outlook. Quinn supports his model with the argument that the most effective strategies are those that emerge step by step from iterative processes that involve testing, experimenting, learning and eventually leading to a strategy (emergent strategy) rather than being led by a pre-set strategy (deliberate strategy).¹¹⁸ The incremental steps are seen as part of a realised strategy where strategy is a pattern in a stream of actions.¹¹⁹ These blended models emphasise structure over strategy since in the short term structures are difficult to develop or change; strategy therefore must conform to what existing structures offer. This is an antithesis to Chandler's argument that strategy dominates structure.¹²⁰

The assumption that most incremental decisions specify or anticipate fundamental ones take us away from the conventional incrementalist thinking and brings it somewhat closer to the RAM; yet preserving its fundamental features. In the mixed models, incremental decisions are not regarded as being short-sighted but rather informed by the value of a related fundamental decision leading to its implementation through the accumulation of small steps. This, therefore, implies the presence of pre-set goals as in the RAM. These models also do not neglect the importance of the ends, but rather have a different approach to how the ends are to be achieved (application of means). In contrast to the RAM, it allows for flexibility to re-define the ends in the process.

Figure 3 below is a graphical representation of Etzioni's Mixed Scanning Model overlaid on Lindblom's Incremental Model:

¹¹⁸ James Quinn, *Strategies for Change: Logical Incrementalism*, (Irwin: Homewood, 1980), quoted in Said Elbanna, "Strategic decision-making: Process perspectives", *International Journal of Management Reviews*, Volume 8, Issue 1, (2006), pp. 1-20.

¹¹⁹ Mintzberg's notion of realised strategy as the result of deliberate long-term strategy and strategic shocks/emergent strategies. Henry Mintzberg and James Brian Quinn, op. cit.

¹²⁰ Alfred D. Chandler, op. cit.

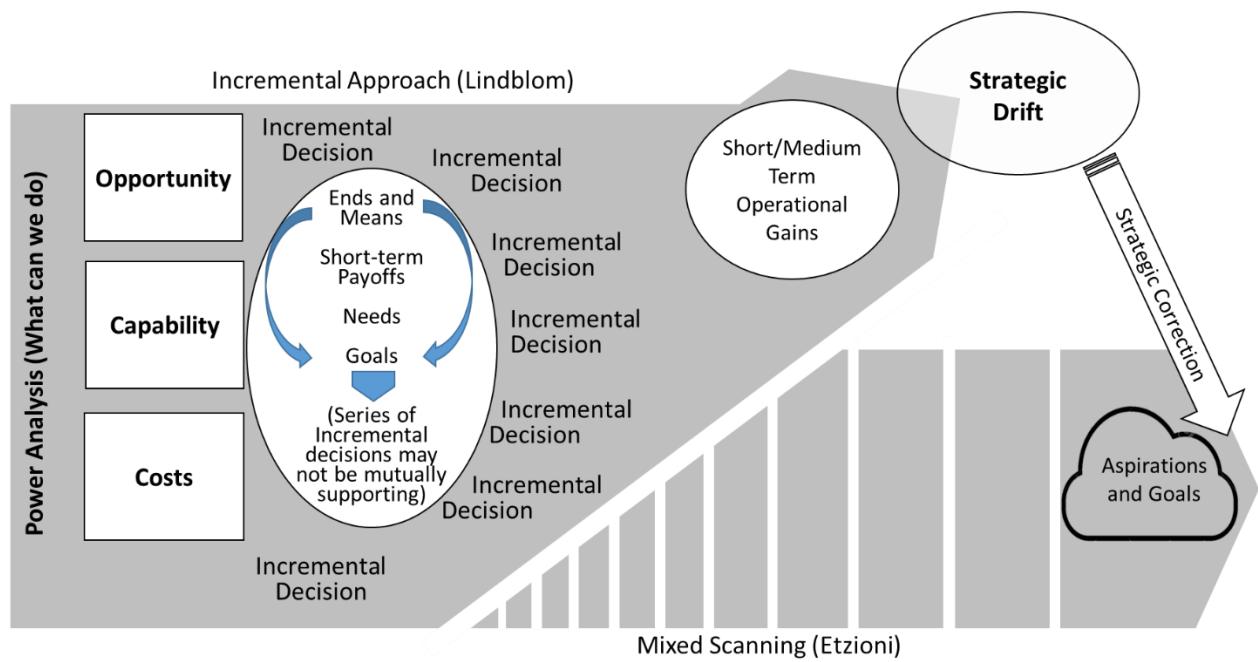


Figure 3: Incremental Model and Mixed Scanning Model

Author's own diagram

A substantial body of literature has been reviewed towards developing a comprehensive understanding of the incremental decision-making model and its deviations. This synthetic review also advances understanding of where it stands vis-à-vis other models for analysis and currency. The conclusion that emerges is that, while the model was widely cited in literature following Lindblom's original ideas and its subsequent criticisms and celebrations, the interest in this model has somewhat reduced in the last couple of decades.¹²¹ This trend is also demonstrated in the diminishing applicability of Etzioni's model, as he himself acknowledges in his later writings that, despite generating a stream of discussions and critique, the model attracted little empirical research.¹²² The loss of favour of models advancing distributed decision-making may well be due to external developments in

¹²¹ Robert Gregory, "Political Rationality or 'Incrementalism'?" Charles E. Lindblom's enduring contribution to public policy-making theory", *Policy and Politics*, 17 (2), (1989), pp. 139-153; Ian Lustick, "Explaining the Variability Utility of Disjointed Incrementalism. Four Propositions", *American Political Science Review*, 74 (2), (1980), pp. 342-353; Jones, B. D., True, J. L., & Baumgartner, F. R., "Does Incrementalism Stem from Political Consensus or from Institutional Gridlock?", *American Journal of Political Science*, 41 (4), (1997), pp. 1319-1339; J. Bendor, "A Model of Muddling Through", *American Political Science Review*, 89(4), (1995), pp. 819-840; Yehezkel Dror, op. cit.; Knott, J. H., Miller, G. J., & J. Verkuilen, "Adaptive Incrementalism and Complexity: Experiments with Two-Person Cooperative Signalling Games", *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, (2003); Leslie A. Pal, *Beyond Policy Analysis. Public Issue Management in Turbulent Times*, 3rd edition, (Toronto: Thomson, 2006).

¹²² Amitai Etzioni (1986), op. cit., pp. 8-14

technology and information distribution, which collectively support the unitary approach to decision-making, thus leaning towards the RAM. As such, the renewed emphasis on the Rational Actor Model makes it the model of choice that continues to dominate the analytical discourse; in spite of its shortcomings highlighted earlier.

Less traction may also be due to the theoretical plurality that inhabits the field of research on decision-making making. Lindblom noted that “given the alternative strategies often available, [disjointed] incrementalism is ... not always necessary in the analysis.”¹²³ Despite being a highly promising analytical framework at the stage of inception and justifiably challenging the presumptions of a normative RAM, the Incremental Model has not firmly positioned itself as a cumulative line of enquiry for theoretical and empirical research. Some authors suggest that its contribution to improving the understanding of how decision-making can better adapt to contextual limitations has been limited, for example, limitations associated with a human cognitive condition.¹²⁴ Paradoxically, the same argument was also one of the major criticisms of the RAM by incrementalists.

Mixed Scanning approach combines higher-order, fundamental decision-making with lower-order decisions (incremental decisions) in a hierarchical mode.¹²⁵ A pre-existing strategy that guides actions are, therefore, a prerequisite. This is a major departure from Lindblom’s model and approximation to Allison and Zelikow’s one.

These are two extremes of the models, the variations of which, as illustrated above, do exist. For example, Simon’s ‘bounded rationality’ on one hand and Lindblom’s incrementalism that admits the pursuit of long-term changes through the sequence of moves. On the other hand, Etzioni’s Mixed Scanning model started linking incremental and fundamental decisions, stepping outside these boundaries.

The utility of such hybrid models remains questionable. While they present an opportunity to bring the two diverse models closer together, they still remain constrained by the common denominators of the foundational models to make one more strategic and the other more

¹²³ Charles E. Lindblom (1979), op. cit., pp. 517-526.

¹²⁴ Andrew Weiss and Edward Woodhouse, “Reframing incrementalism: A constructive response to the critics”, *Policy Sciences*, Volume 25, Issue 3, (August 1992), pp. 255-273; Edward Woodhouse and David Collingridge, op. cit.

¹²⁵ Amitai Etzioni (1986), op. cit., pp. 8-14

adaptive. Dependence on structures, the relationship between strategy and structure and above all the diminished role of agency keep them bounded within the decisional spectrum of the foundational models. The author will demonstrate that this as one of the major constraints in the ability to understand Russia's decision-making where agency dominates structures and strategy to a large extent, has been driving structures in post-Soviet Russia.

2.3 TOWARDS A THIRD MODEL: RATIONAL INCREMENTALISM

Experimentations with synthetic models are not new. Etzioni, through his critical analysis of Lindblom's approach in particular, came up with a compromise model that features to an extent both the Rational Actor and Incremental Models, as presented in previous sections. While his argument that decision-making requires two sets of mechanisms: high-order, a fundamental policy-making process which sets basic directions and incremental process which prepare for fundamental decisions and work them out after they have been reached;¹²⁶ he constrains his model by remaining bounded to the fundamental premises, namely the place of structure and agency and strategy and structure.

Goodin and Klingerman noted that political scientists no longer think in term of rationality or incrementalism, all serious, rational choice models appreciate the constraints under which decisions are made in real situations.¹²⁷ This presumption follows a critical analysis of foundational models considered above. The author puts forward a hypothesis that the analysis of Russia's foreign policy cannot be comprehensively conducted through the prism of one or the models but instead requires us to consider positioning Russia on this continuum that draws on peculiarities in the Russian system, for example, the primacy of agency as witnessed through the period covered in the research and Russia's ability to create or marginalise structural primacies, for example, the elimination and then partial reinstatement of the direct election of governors.

There is a case to consider new models that recognise the role of agency and put strategy before structure,¹²⁸ while continuing to draw on the exceptional work presented in the foundational models and their further development through the work of Simon, Etzioni,

¹²⁶ Amitai Etzioni (1986), *op. cit.*

¹²⁷ Robert E. Goodin, Hans-Dieter Klingemann (eds.), *A New handbook of Political Science*, (Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 12.

¹²⁸ Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *op. cit.*

Quinn, among others. Drawing on Clausewitz's explanation of the role of theory as a roadmap clarifying the way to others that follow as demonstrated in his discussion on absolute war and real war¹²⁹ (premised on the Newtonian idea that theory can only exist to represent a perfect case), the author is inclined towards a model that demonstrates both theoretical rigour and practical utility. Clausewitz's discussion on real and absolute war is precisely positioned on this viewpoint. He argues that, while his models of war in their pure form may seem to represent the extremes on either end of a continuum (for example, given their opposing positions on how aims and objectives are defined), in fact they are not mutually exclusive. In practice, there are variations in the extent to which elements of either model are demonstrated and utilised.

A new model should allow us to move away from the ideal and theoretical nature of the RAM and also the lack of theoretical underpinning of the incremental approach.¹³⁰ Rational Incrementalism demonstrates theoretical grounding and practical relevance. It should also provide a good start for building a theoretical framework that permits objective analysis of decisions. In a way, the model is inspired by the critique of the two models (sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3.) and Etzioni's recognition for a need to offer a more comprehensive and also realistic model for analysis.

The aspirational principles on which the third model is based are:

1. *Aims and Objectives*. RAM demonstrate rigidity in its treatment of aims and objectives. This sets the strategic direction (continuum of actions) that all future iterations of foreign policy variously pursue. Rational Incrementalism incorporates this theoretical aspiration but moderates it with instruments of power¹³¹ (capability). To an extent, taking forward Lindblom's discussion on a possibility of the incremental decision being underpinned by a fundamental one (in this case not vaguely defined). Incrementalism reduces unrealistic details of Rationalism –

¹²⁹ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard and Peter Parret (trs), (Princeton, New York, 1979).

¹³⁰ A historical example of employment of the RAM, as Braybrooke and Lindblom as well as other analysts argue, does not exist. David Braybrooke and Charles E. Lindblom (1970), *op. cit.*, p. 41. See also C. John Tarter and Wayne K. Hoy, "Toward a contingency theory of decision-making", *Journal of Education Administration*, Vol. 36 Issue 3, (1998), pp. 212-222.

¹³¹ Instruments of power include diplomatic, informational, military, and economic power of a state. See Harry R. Yarger, *Strategic Theory for the 21st Century*, (Virginia: National Defence University Press, 2006).

particularly if details required for setting up fundamental decisions are limited.¹³²

Decisions are selectively emergent, guided by a predetermined strategic direction.

How far a direction can be rationally travelled (ends) is moderated by capabilities

and context. Apropos, Rational Incrementalism demonstrates maintenance of aim characteristics of RAM but moderates these in context and capability, which is a development on Incrementalism. If aims and objectives are consistent, there ought to be a degree of coherence in internal and external policy directions and in strategic and operational discourses (with due considerations for strategic communications).

2. *Agency versus Structure.* Decision models need to be context-rich and inclusive of the role of agency in leadership.¹³³ Agency presupposes power to influence and act and that power must be possessed or accumulated. Agency in decision-making considers the actor's aspirations, aims, motives, beliefs, risk appetite, cognitive dissonance, and among other things, value systems. These factors drive certain behaviours that lead to decisions made within a given context and obtaining environment. Reference to leadership here is inclusive of the different groups, individuals or levels responsible for making decisions, be it a head of state, a minister or a group of designated statespersons. ***Role of agency and structure in decision-making is balanced by type of actor within the obtaining environment.*** In terms of value systems, the third model is positioned on agency.¹³⁴
3. *Strategy and Structure.* From the above, it follows that strategy is highly influenced by agency. Connecting this with Chandler's thesis that strategy drives structures, it follows that ***agency may innovate, disregard or create structures to drive strategy.*** Indeed, it may also choose to work within structures for practical or political reasons.

¹³² In Quinn's variant, incremental decisions can be taken with a view of a longer-term perspective. This is a strength of hybrid models that needs to be drawn upon; thereby advancing Mintzberg's idea of strategy as a pattern in a stream of actions.

¹³³ The basic models emphasise structures over agency, as discussed in sections 2.2.2. and 2.2.4. It is possible to measure an actor's decisions in a variety of contexts and over a period of time. The resulting patterns of behaviour can be used to assess possible courses of action in the future. to observe patterns and consistencies.

¹³⁴ Thomas Schelling, in strategy of conflict, adds a Kantian aspect of a system of values that guide decision-making. He asserts that "the assumption of rational behaviour – not just of intelligent behaviour, but of behaviour motivated by a conscious calculation of advantages, a calculation that in turn is based on an explicit and internally consistent value system." See Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 4.

4. *Capability and Context.* Connected to the first principle, the role of context should not be limited to determining freedom of action;¹³⁵ it should illuminate choices that are available within a consistent strategic direction, given the means at hand, as well as the internal and external constraints. ***Opportunities that advance prevailing strategy are exploited after due consideration for prevailing risks and long-term payoffs.*** The decision-maker exploits opportunity when strategically prudent. The Rational Incrementalism Model should prevent the analysis from being lost in a disarray of seemingly disjointed decisions that are not guided by an overarching strategy. The decisions to act or otherwise, when opportunities present themselves, are determined by the extent to which the decision advances towards pre-set ends. The decision to pursue intermediate ends due to an opportunity is also conditioned by the sufficiency of means and ability to manage consequences. A distinction is made between core and peripheral interests; where the latter is conditioned by cost-benefit analyses, protection of core interests may instigate seemingly irrational (to the outsider) choices to be made.

The above set of parameters that underpin Rational Incrementalism are driven by the aims and objectives of this research, first and foremost explaining Russia's approach to decision-making and contribution to theoretical development that underpins academic research on decision-making in foreign policy. As such, Rational Incrementalism is an exploratory model and will be revisited following the empirical analysis through case studies presented in Chapters 4 and 5. Wider application of this model will be discussed in Chapter 6.

To summarise the strengths and criticisms of existing models and present a foundation for the third model, Table 2 below extends the synthesis of RAM, Incremental Model and introduces the third model, 'Rational Incrementalism', based on the conceptual parameters listed above.

¹³⁵ Etzioni offers a good starting point in his Mixed Scanning approach for extending the boundaries of two separate models, the shortcoming of his analysis is that it is limited to the process of arriving to decisions. By simply synthesizing the RAM and Incrementalism, as attempted by Etzioni *et al.*, it is difficult to address the decision-making that is contextually rich, while remaining strategic and also relevant at operational level. In Incrementalism and blended variants, the direction can be lost in a disarray of seemingly disjointed decisions that are not guided by an overarching strategy.

Table 2: Rational Incrementalism

Author's table

	Rational Actor Model	Incremental Model	Rational Incremental Model
Framework	Theory-based approach. ¹³⁶	Does not rely on theory, focused on practice. ¹³⁷	Empirically grounded theory.
	Strategy is deliberate.	A purely emergent approach to strategy, where ends are flexible.	Selectively emergent, guided by a pre-determined strategic direction.
	Structural Model. Driven by structures, structures change is slow.	Structural Model. Structures drive strategy.	Structure and Agency. Strategy drives structure.
	Is driven by needs and interests in major social objectives that bring about a considerable change.	Capability driven balancing means exploiting an opportunity.	Opportunity: Ways and Means towards an available end. Core Interests moderated by Ends-Ways-Means. With a series of opportunistic intermediate ends.
	The primacy of Ends drives decisions.	Changes in direction are acceptable; even if departing from an earlier direction. Negates notion of fixed ends.	Emphasises prudence. Opportunities are exploited when strategically beneficial within a broader cost-benefit analysis.
	Not sensitive to context and obtaining environment.	Sensitive to obtaining environment.	Informed by possible futures and scenarios (horizon scanning), context and obtaining environment.

¹³⁶ A historical example of employment of the RAM, as Braybrooke and Lindblom as well as other analysts argue, does not exist. David Braybrooke and Charles E. Lindblom (1970), *op. cit.*, p. 41. See also C. John Tarter and Wayne K. Hoy, *op. cit.*, pp. 212-222.

¹³⁷ Johanna Kuhlmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-38.

	Decision-making not well-equipped to deal with uncertainty. ¹³⁸ Focus is on fixed ends.	Remedial, geared to the alleviation of present imperfections rather than to the promotion of future social goals. Not designed for fundamental decisions; argues that accumulation of incremental changes can eventually lead to a fundamental one.	Establishes a link between fundamental and lower-level decisions; provided there is a causal link between the two through mutual support. ¹³⁹
	Inherently a rigid model.	Allows for considerable degree of flexibility.	Relatively flexible model but within a pre-set strategic framework that is influenced by the context. The sequence of steps taken to the chosen direction can change depending on changing context.
	Normative model with the strategic focus.	Operational model.	The model that combines strategic and operational features. Operational actions pursue strategic direction.
Aims and Objectives	Well defined from the outset and guide decision-making process.	There are no predefined aims and objectives. The model could give an impression of aimlessness.	Aims and objectives are pre-defined; however, the model can give the impression of 'muddling-through' (aimlessness) if only incremental steps are taken into consideration.

¹³⁸ Despite the fact that the traditional literature international relations, cited by Allison as having explicitly used RAM, emphasised how a state's uncertainty about other states' goals and capabilities shapes its own choices. J. Bendor and T.H. Hammond, *op. cit.*, p. 306.

¹³⁹ Extending Etzioni's argument that the lower level decisions help to advance the achievement of the fundamental and instead suggesting that the relationship can be established both ways.

	Purposefulness is assumed in every step taken. Is based on consistent value system.	Objectives and policy to attain those are intertwined and are chosen simultaneously. Opportunity objectives treated as ends in themselves.	Small steps help advance towards strategic ends. The nature of steps taken, may not necessarily reveal a direct link between aims and objectives and a policy element towards attaining them. Connects opportunities and strategic ends, thereby advocates fundamental change through incremental steps. However, decision-makers may demonstrate greater risk appetite where core interests are threatened.
Actors	Unified national actor – unitary decision-maker – can be an individual person with one set of preferences	A number of actors are involved in the decision-making process, and the final decision is based on a compromise.	While there is a plurality of actors involved in decision-making, one can see a clear attribution of kinds of decisions to levels of decision-makers. The model allows for a coordinated devolution in decision-making, albeit within the strategic framework.
	Actors exist within the institutional framework (structures).	A distributed rather than a centralised approach to decision-making. Multiple actors exist within the institutional framework (structures).	The number of actors and the level of decision-making varies depending on circumstances. While the decisions can be distributed (within the strategic framework), decisions may emanate at the highest level, depending on the gravity of the decision, thereby betraying a mixing of centralised and distributed models. Institutions may be subordinated to individual actors.
	Diminished role of agency due to structural nature of the model. ¹⁴⁰	Diminished role of agency due to structural nature of the model.	Puts emphasis on the role of agency in decision-making. The more centralised the decision-making, the higher role of agency.

¹⁴⁰ In its ‘bounded’ version model looks at individual decision-makers admitting that their values, beliefs, prejudices and worldview influence decision-making.

Alternatives	Examines all possible alternatives leading to multiple layers of calculations and choices in a particular situation. Focus is on discovering an optimal alternative that maximises output for a given input.	Rather than looking for the 'best' alternative, the model reconciles for the one that 'works'. Alternatives are developed based on limited analysis.	Closer consideration may be given to a set of alternatives that can be associated with 'bigger' change and decisions that are considered to be of a higher importance.
	Does not address the limitation of actors' (institutions and individuals) cognitive ability to process large volume of information. ¹⁴¹	Takes account of limited cognitive abilities of a decision-maker to process large amount of information and consider all possible alternatives.	The level of analysis on alternatives depends on whether a decision in question is fundamental or instrumental.
Consequences	Focus on end state.	'Muddling through'.	A balanced analysis of operational choices and strategic ends. Analysis focuses on scrutiny of causal links and consequences (cause and effect) in pursuing opportunities.
	A set of consequences is attached to each of the alternative considered.	Only limited amount of consequences is considered.	Acceptance that only part of what is desired will be achieved. Accepting risk of neglecting possible important outcomes.
	Consistent, value-maximising choice made on the basis of its pay-off function after comprehensive ranking of all alternatives and their individual consequences.	'Wrong' steps and mistakes are allowed as their consequences are incremental. Incremental approach allows serious mistakes to be avoided	Long-term view on achieving the desired outcome. Acceptance that small steps may slow down or stagnate the process. At the same time, small steps may also bring considerable change, depending on the way context is being utilised.
	Risks analysis is in-built in the articulation of choices and their prioritisation. Risk aversion manifests itself in assigning lower priorities to options with higher levels of risk, even when pay-offs are higher.	Cautious and risk-averse.	Risk appetite is linked to agency and organisational capacity. The greater risk may be taken where core interests are at stake. Failure is acceptable when over a more extended period, it contributes towards attaining strategic ends.

¹⁴¹ In the 'bounded version, recognising cognitive limitations, allows satisfactory rather than optimal amount of information to be considered in any given decision-making process.

Application of Means (Implementation)	Does not explicitly discuss implementation, however, considers means-ends causal analysis.	Implementation is embedded in the decision-making cycle.	Context-driven approach to implementation.
	Means are chosen in the light of ends. Rational behaviour is the one that is appropriate to specified goals in a given context.	Means and ends are not distinct. Small steps towards a 'right' direction allowing for mistakes and necessary alterations in the process, albeit the definition of 'right' is fuzzy.	Premises on causal links. Observers require more in-depth analysis to discover these linkages. As a result, such steps may be confused as 'muddling through'.
	There is a clear distinction between the decision-making stage and the process of implementation.	There is no start and end of the implementation stage, hence a self-informing cyclic process.	Implementation is based on a spiralled process (as opposed to a cyclic one) with a strategic outlook.
	Highly theoretical. Potentially higher level of predictability in implementation considering pre-set goals.	'Muddling through' suggests lower level of predictability; but can be mitigated through assessment of short-term interests.	Prudence serves as a guide to action. Actions correlated with capabilities at a given time.
	Maintenance of aim. Strategy is paramount	Strategic direction changes in the face of opportunity.	The direction is always strategic. Strategic corrections are possible in the face of internal and external paradigm shifts.
	Actions must support or advance towards ends.	Acceptance that only part of what is desired can be achieved. Action is focused on what is achievable.	Posits action only where opportunity allows branching to strategic ends or core interests. Inaction may occur even in the face of opportunity offering a short-term advantage.

The difference between the model presented above is self-evident and justifies Rational Incrementalism as a third model as oppose to a hybrid or blended derivative. The flexibility of incrementalism is attractive; however, its lack of strategic direction deprives it from long-term value. Strategic direction should arguably be in-bedded in every decision-making process, however small change is sought to be achieved. In this exploratory stage of Rational Incrementalism, both these notions are assumed to control and balance each other. This assertion, together with other features of the model, will need to be revisited after the empirical part of the research.

The resulting model is represented below:

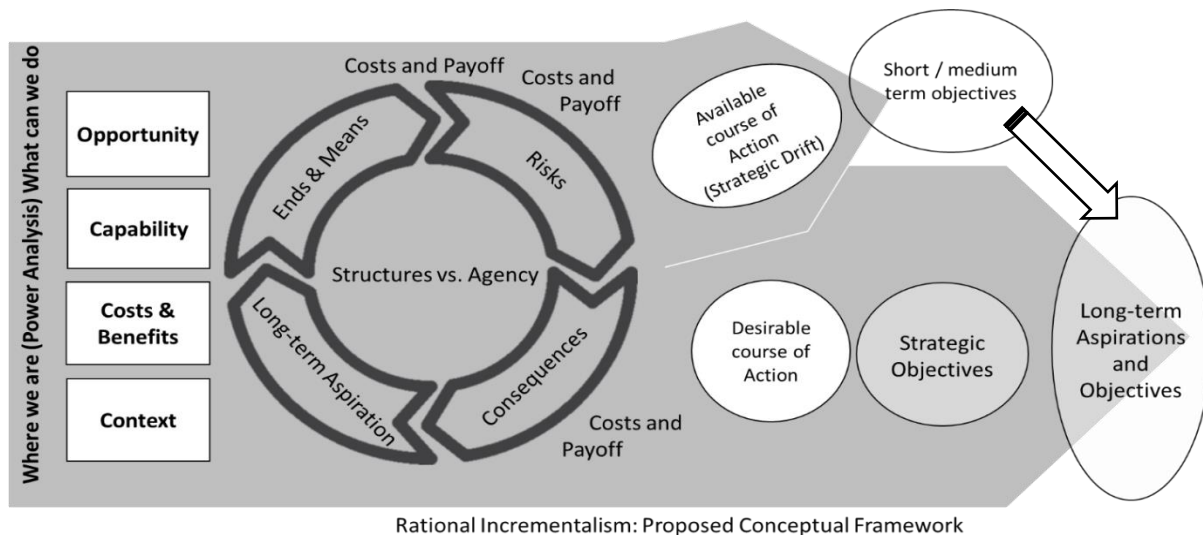


Figure 4: Rational Incrementalism: A Conceptual Model

Author's diagram

In the above diagram the four boxes on the left represent the drivers that underpin the process - circular graphic. The resulting output is either inaction, if context and obtaining environment so suggest (bottom right half of the diagram) or action/series of actions along available courses within an obtaining environment provided these are ultimately connectable to the long-term aspirations. When environment permits, a direct pursuit of strategic ends can also be done as in the RAM.

Structural foundations of the two foundational models are being extended with post-structural approaches. The post-structural features, such as the diminished influence of formal state institutions, an increased agency role in decision-making, are implicit in this model.

2.4 FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS – FUNCTIONAL INDICATORS

A set of functional indicators from the two foundational theoretical models, the RAM and Incrementalism, helps guide the empirical analysis. Based on the analysis of these two models, additional indicators need to be adopted to enable foundational models to be compared against the nuances of the third model, Rational Incrementalism. The indicators were grouped (selectively coded) into three major categories that are strongly presented in both Allison and Lindblom's models. These are:

- the process of formulating aims and objectives (addressing questions of ‘why’ and ‘what’);
- the level of formulating and decision-making (addressing the question ‘by whom’); and
- the process of decision-making leading to the application of means (addressing the questions of ‘how’).

Table 3 presents the functional indicators as summarised under the analytical framework adopted for further analysis that follows in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. These are extracts from Table 2 above. Framework, Alternatives and Choices are embedded for the purpose of consistency with the selective coding. Additionally, indicators developed for the Rational Incrementalism Model are underpinned by the analytical framework discussed in section 2.3.

Table 3 Functional indicators

Author’s own table

	Conceptual framework	Scale		
		1: Rational Actor Model	2: Incremental Model	3: Rational Incrementalism
Aims and Objectives (Why and What?)	Setting aims and objectives	Functional indicators		
		Strictly defined aims and objectives with the possibility of making clear connections between actions and pre-defined aims and objectives. Aims and objectives are not subject to regular reviews; there is continuity over a longer period of time.	Aims and objectives are not set in advance and emerge, being formulated in close correlation with other factors, such as environment and capabilities that may advance their achievements, at a particular point of time.	Aims and objectives are pre-set but can be subject to regular review to reflect changing contexts. The causal link between aims and objectives, and decisions, both fundamental and incremental, can be established.
		Objectives exist independent of context – objectives may drive context.	Contexts create objectives. There is a strong correlation between changes and political/economic/social contexts at a given point in time.	Context creates opportunities for actions to advance pre-set objectives.

	Anticipated changes	Change as an end. Aims and objectives are ambitious and are associated with aspiring toward significant social/political/economic changes.	Realising the aspired level of change at a given point of time is limited; change therefore occurs in small steps, the direction for change is determined by context, not strategy.	Combination of both small and big changes. Readiness to take a long-term approach to make change happen. Acceptance that not all chosen alternatives can bring in immediate gains and may even bring disadvantages at a given time.
Actors (Who?)	Actors (Including the level of delegation and devolution)	Unitarian model: All decisions are made at the highest political level.	Pluralistic model: A number of actors are involved in the decision-making process, and the final decision is based on a compromise	Balanced model: It is not possible to attribute all decision-making to a specific type of actor; allocation depends on the level of decisions (fundamental or low-level) but remains within the dominant strategy.
	The role of agency	The role of structures is prominent.	Structures remain prominent; agency plays a decreased role with the rising number of actors involved in decision-making.	The role of agency is prominent. The relevance is particularly apparent in the fundamental decisions, but even low level/incremental decisions can be traced back to actors' values etc., as these are linked to fundamental changes pursued.
	Application of Means ¹⁴² (How?)	Time and consideration are taken to evaluate all possible alternatives to choose the one that will help make maximum advancement towards set objectives. The alternative that leads to the most preferred set of consequences is chosen.	Some attention is given to alternatives; however, the difference between those is marginal as any change is only a small deviation from the existing practice and/or approach. The link between the incremental change and a bigger picture is ambiguous.	Alternatives are considered as dictated by context. In fluid context, more options may emerge. Actions often appear disjointed and opportunistic; exploiting the window of opportunity is; however, selective as the focus remains long-term.

¹⁴² What means are applied to achieve desired results, including time allocated to consider alternatives as part of decision-making process.

Once applied to each of the case studies, the author should be in a position to conclude which of the three models, if any, prevail. Overarching conclusions can then be drawn as to whether the hypothesis stands or is rejected. In exploratory research of this type, the weighting of factors serves no purpose. In one situation a factor may be meaningless, while in another context may elevate to top priority.

2.5 CASE STUDY ANALYSIS – CONTEXTUAL COMPARATORS

In any social science, research context plays an important role. However, as mentioned in section 2.2.5, the foundational models are dominated by economic underpinnings as opposed to social ones. Without understanding the environment in which actions occurred and how the prevailing conditions influenced those actions, or *vice versa*, the analysis will remain limited. Holsti famously defined foreign policy as “the actions of a state toward the external environment and the conditions under which these actions are formulated.”¹⁴³ From this, we can conclude that foreign policy occurs in a context, and its enactment may create ripples in the environment, thereby creating a new context. Understanding these conditions and tensions, both external and domestic, is, therefore, key in trying to build a comprehensive picture of any bi-lateral or multi-lateral relation, decisions, and for a meaningful analysis, possible courses of actions. Chadbourne et al. point out that understanding and predictability can be achieved through correlative analysis of relations between the formulation and conduct of the foreign policy and the set of domestic and systemic (international) variables observed over a specified period of time.¹⁴⁴

For the comparison of the case studies, it is important to identify relevant comparators and apply them as standard across the cases to enable symmetric and consistent analysis. Such analysis requires an overview of changes over a more extended period of time as a short period of time will not provide enough data. The following comparators will be applied to guide the analysis across both case studies discussed in Chapters 5 and 6:

¹⁴³ KJ. Holsti, *International Politics: A Framework for Analysis*, Seventh Edition, (Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1995), p. 21.

¹⁴⁴ The categorisation is explained in Stephen Chaudoin, Helen V. Milner and Xun Pang, “International Systems and Domestic Politics: Linking Complex Interactions with Empirical Models in International Relations”, online https://www.princeton.edu/~hmliner/forthcoming%20papers/CMP_Complex%20Interactions_Empirical%20Models.pdf, accessed on 28 March 2018.

- **Significant political events:** looking at the correlation between who is in power in each country and major milestone in relations with Russia. The analysis will also include an overview of strategic aims and objectives as outlined in official documents, e.g. Foreign Policy concepts.
- **Treaties and agreements:** any major bilateral agreements on economic, trade, defence judicial etc. collaborations. This will also include the overview of import/export balance.
- **High level political meetings and talks:** Meetings between head of states, ministers; pretext for meetings, key agenda points and outputs.
- **Diplomacy:** nature of diplomacy, the role of diplomats, formal structures engaged and level of representation.
- **Systemic (international) factors:** Ukraine and Moldova's relationships with the European Union and NATO; impact of any major progress (or regress) in relationships with both organization on Russia's foreign policy in each respective country.

2.6 EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

The next three empirical chapters present data and analysis that tests the hypothesis and in turn, the efficacy of Rational Incrementalism. Chapter 4 focuses on the normative approach to decision-making in Russia's foreign policy as set in official documents and reflected in official rhetoric presented by senior policymakers, the president first and foremost. This analysis will help establish the baseline while case studies presented in Chapters 5 and 6 will help validate the findings from Chapter 4. All three empirical chapters are structured around the analytical framework along with the functional indicators established in section 2.4. The comparators, identified in the previous section, will serve as a filter to select relevant data. At the end author will draw a conclusion regarding the role and relationship between the three models and the cases and thus testing the hypothesis. This structure for the analysis will enable appreciation of the influencing factors and their relationship to actual behaviours and motives within a given context.

During the analysis of the elements of the analytical framework in the next three chapters will be mapped back on to the conceptual parameters of the Rational Incrementalism Model, where relevant, with reference to the degree of coherence.

Each empirical chapter will be structured as follows (this is in accordance with the analytical framework):

1. Introduction
2. Aims and Objectives
 - a. Setting Aims and Objectives
 - b. Aspired Changes
3. Actors
 - a. Actors and Decision Owners
 - b. The role of Agency
4. Application of means – Implementation
5. Conclusion

3 DECISION-MAKING IN RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY – DOCUMENTS AND RHETORIC

*I can tell you something, but you have to be careful what you make of it*¹⁴⁵

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an analysis of the principal official document and political rhetoric during the period under review to establish a baseline for Russia’s foreign policy decision-making approach. Open source political documents and political rhetoric can be problematic from an analytical perspective because such sources are part of strategic narratives and strategic communication. However, these documents remain a viable resource, once given due consideration for the content's aspirational nature. Glen Bowen notes that the advantages of prioritising the study of documents over, for example, interviews and observations, is their lack of reactivity.¹⁴⁶ However, in analysing official documents, it is not only what is expressed but also what is excluded and why is also important.

To help navigate this part of the analysis, the following main documents, listed in Table 4, have been considered. These documents are, hereafter, referred to as ‘strategic documents’. Acknowledging their limitations as part of strategic communication, as noted above, these sources, nevertheless, provide a useful insight into aims and objectives, roles and responsibilities of actors, as well as the process of decision-making in foreign policy.

Table 4: List of official documents used in the analysis

Document title	Year
The Constitution of the Russian Federation	1993 ¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Sacks quoted in David Silverman, “Who cares about ‘experience’? Missing issues in qualitative research”, D.Silverman (ed.), *Qualitative Research: Issues of Theory, Method and Practice*, Second edition, (London: Sage, 2011).

¹⁴⁶ Glen A.Bowen, “Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method”, *Qualitative Research Journal*, vol.9, No.2, (2009), p. 37.

¹⁴⁷ The Constitution of the Russian Federation, adopted at National Referendum on 12 December 1993, came into force on 25 December 1993, <http://www.constitution.ru/index.htm>, accessed on 2 May 2018.

Foreign policy Concept of the Russian Federation	2000 ¹⁴⁸ ; 2008 ¹⁴⁹ ; 2013 ¹⁵⁰ ; 2016 ¹⁵¹
The Executive Order of the President of the Russian Federation No.940 on “Russia’s Strategic Direction with the Member-States of the Commonwealth of the Independent States”	1995 (revised in September 2005) ¹⁵²
The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation	2010 ¹⁵³ ; 2014 edition ¹⁵⁴ and 2015 edition ¹⁵⁵
The Executive Order of the President of the Russian Federation No.605 “On measures for the implementation/realisation of the foreign policy course of the Russian Federation”	2012 ¹⁵⁶
National security concept of the Russian Federation	2000 ¹⁵⁷ , 2009 ¹⁵⁸ , 2015 ¹⁵⁹
Executive Order of the President of the Russian Federation No 1478 from 8 November 2011 “On the coordinating role of the Ministry of	2011

¹⁴⁸ Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, (June 2000), online <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.htm>, accessed on 3 February 2018.

¹⁴⁹ Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (July 2008), online <http://kremlin.ru/acts/news/785>, accessed on 3 February 2018.

¹⁵⁰ Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, (February 2013), online, https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICk6B6BZ29/content/id/122186?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_CptICk6B6BZ29&_101_INSTANCE_CptICk6B6BZ29_languageId=ru_RU, accessed on 5 February 2018.

¹⁵¹ Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, (November 2016), online, https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICk6B6BZ29/content/id/2542248?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_CptICk6B6BZ29&_101_INSTANCE_CptICk6B6BZ29_languageId=ru_RU, accessed on 5 February 2018.

¹⁵² The Executive Order of the President of the Russian Federation No.940 from 14 September 1995 on “Russia’s Strategic Direction with the Member-States of the Commonwealth of the Independent States”, revised with the presidential decree No 1010 from 31 August 2005, online http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICk6B6BZ29/content/id/427752, accessed on 28 January 2018.

¹⁵³ The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation (February 2010), online http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICk6B6BZ29/content/id/976887, accessed on 10 February 2018.

¹⁵⁴ The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation (December 2014), online http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICk6B6BZ29/content/id/589760, accessed on 15 February 2018.

¹⁵⁵ The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation (March 2015), online http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICk6B6BZ29/content/id/976907, accessed on 15 February 2018.

¹⁵⁶ The Executive Order of the President of the Russian Federation No.605 “On measures for the implementation/realisation of the foreign policy course of the Russian Federation” (May 2012), online <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/15256>, accessed on 15 February 2018.

¹⁵⁷ National Security Concept of the Russian Federation (January 2000), online https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICk6B6BZ29/content/id/589768?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_CptICk6B6BZ29&_101_INSTANCE_CptICk6B6BZ29_languageId=ru_RU accessed on 3 March 2018.

¹⁵⁸ National Security Concept of the Russian Federation to 2020 (June 2009), online <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/424>, accessed on 3 March 2018.

¹⁵⁹ National Security Concept of the Russian Federation (December 2015), http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICk6B6BZ29/content/id/294430, accessed on 3 March 2018.

Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation in conducting a uniform foreign policy of the Russian Federation”	
Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation	2004, ¹⁶⁰ 2015 ¹⁶¹
Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No 327 from 20 July 2012 “On approval of the principles of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the field of naval activities for the period until 2030”	2017 ¹⁶²

All documents have been accessed in their original language, i.e. Russian, and where/when available, also in English. In some cases, translations into other available languages were also looked at to compare the consistency of translations, particularly in cases when the English translation was not precise or diverted semantically from the original.

Most of Russia’s conceptual documents, particularly the National Security and Foreign Policy Concepts, have been widely analysed; however, these analyses are not explicitly focused on decision-making. The present analysis will complement the body of knowledge with a particular focus on decision-making. The case studies, in addition to testing the Rational Incrementalism Model, allow an examination of the extent to which there are inconsistencies between the position reflected in the strategic documents, the rhetoric and the *de facto* approaches and behaviours observed in foreign policy.

However, it is important that while not contesting the role of documents for analysis, the consideration of actors, agency and the change they aspired to, cannot be understood from these documents alone. By approaching multiple sources on a particular phenomenon, a more accurate picture can be gleaned. This triangulation of data is further enhanced by examining the context in which these communications occurred. Hence the author considers that the inclusion of political rhetoric is not only useful but highly relevant to the analysis. The collection data that this chapter will also include sources such as the Russian Presidents’

¹⁶⁰ Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation (August 2004), online https://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/462098, accessed on 24 October 2018.

¹⁶¹ Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation (July 2015), online <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/uAFi5nvux2twaqjftS5yrIZUVTJan77L.pdf>, accessed on 25 October 2018.

¹⁶² Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No 327 from 20 July 2017 “On approval of the principles of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the field of naval activities for the period until 2030”, online <http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&firstDoc=1&lastDoc=1&nd=102438738>, accessed on 26 October 2018.

union addresses, Presidents' and other key political actors' interviews, speeches and other forms of verbal and written communications.

In addition to establishing a baseline, this chapter will also establish the pattern of change, if any, in how decision-making is approached in the light of the analytical framework discussed in Chapter 2. During the period of 2004-2018, Russia's foreign policy experienced a significant amount of changes, resulting from internal and external factors. Internally, the consolidation of President's power that started soon after Vladimir Putin first assumed the post, continued. This process led to a new governance model based on the ideology of what is referred to as a sovereign democracy unique to Russia.¹⁶³ Major external factors that continued shaping Russia's foreign policy were the expansions of NATO and the EU. In the context of Russia's diminished international role and in the context of the shared neighbourhood, the geopolitical change required adaptation of this new reality. Limitation of Russia was and remained its dwindling global and regional influence which arguably provided space to countries in Russia's neighbourhood to follow more independent direction. Russia continues to regard these geographical spaces as is a zone of interest and its zone of influence. Instead, Russia finds itself in a position where it needs to adjust to the environment created by actions of more influential actors as opposed to the significant role it played in shaping the environment during the Soviet era. One of the legacies that continued to influence Russian ambitions was the restoration of its great power status.

3.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Russia's Foreign Policy is determined by... long-term interests and by tendencies in global development. (President Putin in 2016)

The analysis will start with a focus on aims and objectives of Russia's foreign policy to determine to what extent these are specifically defined, consistent and long-term. Whereas in the 1990s it could be described as "inconsistent and variable" giving the impression that several foreign policies are being conducted at the same time.¹⁶⁴ The scale of anticipated or aspired changes will help determine the level of ambition in setting and pursuing aims and

¹⁶³ The architect is considered to be President Putin's aide Vladislav Surkov.

¹⁶⁴ See, for example, Nodari A. Simonia "Priorities of Russia's Foreign Policy and the Way It Works", *The Making of Foreign Policy in Russia and the New State of Eurasia*, Adeed Dawisha and Karen Dawisha (eds.), M.E. Sharpe (Armonk, New York, London, 1995), p. 23.

objectives. In this part of the analysis the author is particularly interested in determining the role of context in setting and refining aims and objectives and *vice versa*, i.e. the degree to which the pursuit of aims and objectives shapes the context towards their achievement.

3.2.1 *Setting aims and objectives*

The way aims and objectives are set and change over time is the first point for analysis. The presence of defined aims and objective, the level of consistency over time, as presented in the official documents and rhetoric, will be the focus of this part of the analysis; with the view to develop a general understanding on aims and objective in Russia's foreign policy and to create a baseline that will then be tested through the case studies of Ukraine and Moldova.

Following the close examination of all strategic documents listed earlier in this Chapter, it is possible to conclude that the level of consistency in Russia's foreign policy aims and objectives is high, particularly starting with the Foreign Policy Concepts issued from 2008 onwards.¹⁶⁵ Similar reflections are found in National Security Concepts. During the period compatible long-term objectives (defined as interests), most of which are of internal nature, focused on building a strong and stable state politically, economically, socially, culturally and demographically. Collectively these were designed to strengthen Russia's status as one of the leading global powers in a multipolar world; an ultimate long-term objective. Active foreign policy is seen as a facilitating factor for achieving national interests.¹⁶⁶

President Putin noted in 2016, "Russia's Foreign Policy is determined by ... long-term interests and by tendencies in global development".¹⁶⁷ According to the latest Foreign Policy Concept (also published in 2016),¹⁶⁸ Russia has eleven objectives spreading from securing its position as one of the centres of influence in the contemporary world¹⁶⁹ to strengthening the

¹⁶⁵ Notably it was also the last Concept with the reference to Cold War legacy, both the in context of overcoming its biases and stereotypes but also implicitly while pointing at the irrelevance of "traditional military-political alliances" as well as while discussing differences in "understanding the real meaning of the importance and consequences of the end of Cold War". It was also the Concept that had a direct reference of what was seen as attempts by the "historic West" to politically and psychologically constraint Russia, including accusing the West in manipulating with history, first and foremost the period of World War II and after-war period.

¹⁶⁶ National Security Concept 2015, op. cit.

¹⁶⁷ Address of the President to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation (1 December 2016), online <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53379>, accessed on 2 April 2018.

¹⁶⁸ Foreign Policy Concept 2016, op. cit.

¹⁶⁹ As an observation it is worth noting that the original refers to Russia as '**one of the centres of influence**' and so do translations of the documents the author had access to (in French, German, Spanish), apart from English

position of Russian language and culture in the world. Going back to earlier versions of the Foreign Policy Concept, it can be seen that with every new version of the document (four in all included in the analysis) saw the expansion of this list of objectives. The main principles, however, remained consistent offering more nuanced wording and adding objectives arising from emerging contexts, for example, the increasing role of technology in economic and social development. Moreover, the emphasis on the importance of technology in Russia's positioning in the international arena remains consistent in President's State of the Union Addresses from 2008 onwards.

One of the most consistent objectives of Russia's foreign policy throughout the period remained the strengthening collaboration and advancing integration within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). All strategic documents emphasise a desire to move towards political and economic union where Russia would enjoy the leading role. Ever since the establishment of the CIS, its role was perceived by Russia as an important factor for its inclusion in the international economic and political processes. It has always been recognized as central to Russia's vital interests in areas such as economy, defence, and protection of rights of compatriots; altogether seen as the basis for national security, as well as admittedly the important contributor to Russia assuming a more prominent role in global political and economic structures.¹⁷⁰ Prioritising relationships with the CIS members is one of the contributing factors behind the way Russia shapes and conducts its foreign policy in Ukraine and Moldova. This also explains Russia's need to maintain influence over these two countries, Ukraine in particular. This will be discussed in details in the subsequent two Chapters.

In Russia's thinking, as reflected in strategic documents, CIS offers a platform that needs to remain strong in order to provide a greater sense of stability both internally and externally. If this platform starts showing cracks, the ramifications on the feasibility of Russia achieving its

version of the Concept that refers to the same objective as 'to consolidate the Russian Federation's position as a **centre of influence** in today's world'. However, this discrepancy is important to take into account as some studies on Russia's Foreign Policy Concepts the author familiarised herself do use the English translation rather than rely on the original in Russian language. For example, see Francisco J. Ruiz Gonzales, "The Foreign Policy Concept Of The Russian Federation: A Comparative Study", Framework Document by the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies, 06/2013, (April 2013), online

http://www.ieee.es/en/Galerias/fichero/docs_marco/2013/DIEEEM06-2013_Rusia_ConceptoPoliticaExterior_FRuizGlez_ENGLISH.pdf, accessed on 13 March 2018.

¹⁷⁰ From early documents such as "Russia's Strategic Direction with the Member-States of the Commonwealth of the Independent States", op. cit.

grand objective would be significant. That is why one of the main thrust lines in Russian politics towards CIS countries is to ensure political and economic stability across the CIS.¹⁷¹ Members are expected to implement friendly politics towards Russia; ensuring that none of them enters unions and blocks that are directed [or perceived as such – author’s note] against any of the CIS countries.¹⁷² This position, adopted in the 1990s remained consistent throughout the considered period of time, explains Russia’s adverse reaction towards potential NATO¹⁷³ and EU enlargement, including the EU’s neighbourhood policy. Russia considers such actions as an interference in Russia’s area of interest and influence and a broader threat to undermine Russia’s position in the world. Such fragmentation within the CIS would limit space for its expansion in both political and economic terms; furthermore, would result in moving borders of these two competitor organisations (EU and NATO) to Russia’s doorstep, as was the case with the Baltic States.

The soft power ambition of Russia as the main educational centre in the post-Soviet space remained consistent since the 1990s. It emphasizes the importance of “raising the young generations of the CIS in the spirit of friendly attitude towards Russia.” This manifests the long-term nature of Russia’s strategic interests. The programmes to support learning Russian language and culture in the CIS (referred to in the National Security Concept, 2015) are intended towards advancing the integration processes. A number of times President Putin referred to the role of Russian higher education, including its export to CIS in particular, as a

¹⁷¹ Notably in the 1995 version of the document it was stated that in bilateral economic relations with CIS countries it was vital to ensure that Russia maintains its leading position in the markets of CIS. The amendments of 2005 replaced the above reference with the language of “mutually beneficial economic relations” and gradual integration towards building an economic and customs union.

¹⁷² “Russia’s Strategic Direction with the Member-States of the Commonwealth of the Independent States”, op. cit.

¹⁷³ Russia’s grievances regarding NATO enlargement eastward are enrooted in a firm believe that she was given unequivocal promises on the eve of Germany’s unification by the US and allies that NATO will not expand beyond East Germany. Thus, during the 2+4 negotiations to reunify the two Germanies, US Secretary of State James Baker and German Foreign Minister Hans-Dieter Genscher gave assurances to the Soviets that NATO would not expand after the incorporation of East Germany. Genscher stated in a speech at the Tutzing Protestant Academy on 31 January 1990: ‘What NATO must do is state unequivocally that whatever happens in the Warsaw Pact *there will be no expansion of NATO territory eastwards, that is to say closer to the borders of the Soviet Union.*’ Stephen F. Szabo, *The diplomacy of German unification* (New York: St Martin’s, 1992), p. 58 (emphasis added) cited in Andrew T. Wolff, op. cit. In his speech in Brussels on 17 May 1990 the then NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner said: “The very fact that we are ready not to deploy NATO troops beyond the territory of the Federal Republic gives the Soviet Union firm security guarantees.”, online https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/1990/s900517a_e.htm, accessed on 31 March 2018.

tool for strengthening the cultural and intellectual influence of Russia in the world. See, for example, Putin's State of the Union Address in December 2013.¹⁷⁴

Russia's strategic interests have, therefore remained consistent. What it can achieve in this direction of travel has been revised without losing a sense of direction. While the consistency of aims maps on to RAM, the moderation of these over successive strategic documents deviates away from RAM. The modifications of objectives do not demonstrate 'muddling through' as the strategic direction remains consistent, but is moderated along the same continuum. As such, these actions could be explained by Conceptual Parameter 1 of Rational Incrementalism.

3.2.2 *Aspired Changes*

Maintenance of aims and objectives, as discussed earlier, suggests relative consistency in Russia's external aspirations. Its foreign policy, therefore, could be defined as ambitious. The focus remained on the creation of an international system, where Russia would play a more prominent regional and global role. Regional forums, first and foremost the CIS, were seen as a pathway to greater weight in international forums. This level of ambition has seen a downward trend over the years, particularly post-2000. A reference to Russia as 'a great power', as legacy of Soviet-era influence, fades away from the strategic documents. It is replaced in 2000 with a desire to become "one of the most influential centres of the modern world", and any perceived actions on the part of other states (unspecified) to undermine this process were considered by be a direct threat.¹⁷⁵ In 2013 the above ambition was further moderated to "one of the centres of influence" with reference to a 'direct threat' removed.¹⁷⁶

National Security Concept, 2000 offers a more modest assessment of Russia's position in the world than the Foreign Policy Concept issued in the same year, noting that "Russia is one of the biggest countries in the world... that continues play an important role in world

¹⁷⁴ Address of the President to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation (12 December 2013), online <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19825>, accessed 28 March 2018.

¹⁷⁵ Foreign Policy Concept 2000, op. cit.

¹⁷⁶ Foreign Policy Concept 2013 and 2016, op. cit.

processes.”¹⁷⁷ Nevertheless, it also references the country’s aspirational status as one of the centres of influence in a ‘multi-polar world’¹⁷⁸.

The language of post-2000 documents also becomes softer and includes reference to Russia’s ‘potential’ as opposed to a claim of an existential centre at the international stage. This theme continues in the 2008 Foreign Policy Concept, which states that the “Russian Federation possesses the real potential for taking a respectable place in the world.” The National Security Concept provides strategic direction on how this to be achieved with policy guidance to the effect that this can be achieved through strengthening from within, i.e. politically, economically, socially and demographically. Indeed, from the early 2000s the aspiration remained to achieve a wider integration of the country into the world’s economic systems to prevent weakening of Russia’s political, economic, and military influence in the world. Lack of integration is considered to be one of the major threats to the country in the international arena.¹⁷⁹ The National Security Concept, 2009 claims that Russia has enough potential to create, in the mid-term perspective, conditions for strengthening its position amongst the global economic powers. Like other documents that replaced their earlier editions, the concept refers to the aspiration of becoming a global power, politically and economically (note the omission of a reference to military power). The trend of neoliberal ideas, with their emphases on soft power, particularly economic, become increasingly visible in the strategic documents and rhetoric. Additionally, the post-2000 strategic documents it recognises the importance of strengthening civil society institutions; and sets directions for support by the state for these organisations (this privilege is limited to organisations that are interested in promoting Russia’s foreign policy interests).

A similar narrative on the aspirations emanates from the political rhetoric, albeit here the messages are more mixed. For example, in December 2013, President Putin noted that Russia does not have the ambition to obtain the status of a superpower and does not have claims to have global or regional hegemony. Symbolically, in the same speech, he added that Russia does not impose its will on anyone and does not threaten anyone’s interests.¹⁸⁰ Three months

¹⁷⁷ National Security Concept 2000, op. cit.

¹⁷⁸ In all the strategic documents reviewed during the temporal boundary of this research (in fact, from the early 1990s onwards), another common feature is rejecting the popular notion of unipolarity in the international system, often referred to as “a new world order”.

¹⁷⁹ National Security Concept 2000, op. cit.

¹⁸⁰ Address of the President to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation (December 2013), op. cit.

later it took over the Crimea, a sovereign Ukrainian territory. A year earlier, Putin noted that Russia must be a sovereign and an influential country.¹⁸¹ According to the President, Russian ambition is to become a leader based on legal, ethical and moral grounds (such as protector of international law, respect to national sovereignty, independence and identity of peoples). Simultaneously, the material aspects of power-politics remain the focal point, particularly during the second round of Putin's Presidency. Thus, in December 2013, Putin said: "No one should have the illusion regarding the possibility of achieving military superiority over Russia. We will not allow that! Russia will respond to these challenges, both technologically and politically. We have all the necessary potential for that."¹⁸² While this passage does not refer as to who it is pointed at, there is an inherent reference to NATO and its potential expansion eastwards. In 2018 State of the Union address included a significant display of military power. At the same time, the language becomes more pointed concerning NATO's closer ties with Ukraine (and Georgia): "We will respond appropriately to such aggressive steps, which pose a direct threat to Russia."¹⁸³ The view of NATO 'aggressive' and 'irresponsible' steps links back to earlier concerns about losing control and having NATO's military infrastructure in the proximity of Russia's border.

While expression of the ambition for great power status dilutes over time, concurrently the language alters, drawing on context (obtaining environment). Russia was economically hit hard by the global economic crisis in the late 1990s.¹⁸⁴ Consequently, the language used in the Foreign Policy Concept of 2000 talks about a need to create favourable external conditions "for steady development of Russia, for improving its economy, enhancing

¹⁸¹ Address of the President to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation (December 2012), online <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/17118>, accessed on 27 March 2018.

¹⁸² Address of the President to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation (December 2013), op. cit.

¹⁸³ President Putin speaking at the meeting of ambassadors and permanent representatives of Russia on 19 July 2018, online <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58037>, accessed on 15 December 2018.

¹⁸⁴ There were a number of reasons, not all entirely external, for the level of impact the global economic crises had on Russia. While decline in global demand of crude oil (also non-ferrous metals; however Russia also experienced decline in export of its ferrous metals such as steel - Russia is the third-largest world's steel exporter impacted Russia's foreign exchange reserves, other factors, such as declined productivity, conflict in Chechnya, high fixed exchange rate between the ruble and foreign currencies, also played their role making Russia's economy more vulnerable to external factors. All these factors led to government's decision to devalue the ruble in August 1998 and declared a temporary moratorium on repayment of foreign debt. See Global Steel Trade Monitor Report (June 2017), online <https://www.trade.gov/steel/countries/pdfs/2017/q1/exports-russia.pdf>, accessed on 2 April 2018; Abigail J. Chiodo and Michael T. Owyang, "A Case Study of a Currency Crises: The Russian Default of 1998", (Federal Reserve Bank of St.Louis November/December 2002), online <https://files.stlouisfed.org/files/htdocs/publications/review/02/11/ChiodoOwyang.pdf>, accessed on 2 April 2018.

standards of living of the population...”¹⁸⁵ The 2013 edition returns to more assertive choice of words, for example referencing to ‘sustainable and dynamic growth of Russia’s economy’ based on technological innovation putting more emphasis on domestic factors.¹⁸⁶ With this, semantics transcends into the latest Foreign Policy Concept of 2016, in some ways it also resembles the one used in 2000 as it talks about creating an external environment that would allow the economy to grow and become more competitive, promoting technological modernization and raising standards of living and quality of life for country’s population. The acknowledgement of the impact of a broader context on the way aims, objectives and ambitions are defined at a conceptual level is very apparent. As with the context underpinning the 2000 Concept, Russia’s economy in 2016 saw a recession for several reasons, including the fall in global oil prices and Western economic sanctions against Russia following the takeover of the Crimea. Country’s GDP per capita in 2016 fell almost two-fold from the level of 2013.¹⁸⁷ This resulted in an increased emphasis on the need for a conducive external environment for advancing economically and strengthening Russia’s position in the world. In 2018 President Putin summarised the ambition and its pre-conditions as follows:

The main goal of our foreign policy is to provide favourable conditions for the Russian Federation, its economy and social sphere, to ensure unfettered movement forward and to strengthen our country from the inside, above all, so that it can take its rightful place in the international arena as an equal among equals.¹⁸⁸

Once again what we witness here is an aspiration in the direction of a great power, the distance along this continuum (desired end-state), however, is moderated by capability and context. This maps on to the Principles 1 and 4 of Rational Incrementalism (Chapter 2.3). Also, the gradual merger of domestic and international factors in shaping foreign policy become more obvious though discourse and within the narrative of the strategic documents; demonstrating coherence at strategic and operational levels.

¹⁸⁵ Foreign Policy Concept 2000, op. cit.

¹⁸⁶ Russia’s GDP per capita peaked in 2013 reaching \$15,543; it reduced to \$8,748 in 2016. In comparison, in 2000 it was only \$1,771.

¹⁸⁷ According to World Bank Open Data, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=RU>, accessed on 2 May 2018.

¹⁸⁸ President Putin’s annual press conference (20 December 2018), online <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59455>, accessed on 4 April 2018.

3.3 ACTORS

The next part of the analysis will focus on actors (through the prism of structure and agency) who makes the decisions and at what level. Margaret Archer argues that “it is essential to distinguish between the existence of structural properties and exercise of their causal powers...” She continues her discussion on causation linking it with agency, stating: “Conversely, whether constraints and enablements are exercised as causal powers is contingent upon agency embracing the kinds of projects upon which they can impact.”¹⁸⁹ Archer takes a structuralism view of the agency; this is particularly evident in her assertion that “the duality of structure and agency..., which conceptualise them as inextricably intertwined, are both hostile to the very differentiation of subject and object that is indispensable to agential reflexivity towards society.”¹⁹⁰ Chandler, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of agency, arguing that agent decisions should drive structures and not vice versa.¹⁹¹ Another perspective on this debate is presented by Dowding, who suggests that “whilst the agency-structure divide is false, our interpretation of the world... means we cannot fully transcend the structure-agency divide using natural language. Whether we choose to use the language of structures or of agents depends upon the questions we are seeking to answer and commitments we wish to make in assigning responsibility.” He further that “ultimately, structural and agential accounts can describe the world in non-contradictory ways though the choice of description demonstrates the sorts of commitments the describer has towards changing the world.”¹⁹² In other words, context-driven mutual precedence of structure and agency.

In the light of this discussion, other important questions that emerge are how, if, when and to whom powers are delegated (in structure and agency terms)? Conclusions can then be drawn whether decisions are unitary, pluralistic or through balanced contributions to the process based on the role of various actors in decision-making; thereby, enabling us to conclude which model they map on to.

¹⁸⁹ Margaret S. Archer, *Structure, Agency: Internal Conversations*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003), 7.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 2.

¹⁹¹ Alfred D. Chandler Jr., *op. cit.*

¹⁹² Keith Dowding, “Agency and structure: Interpreting power relationships”, *Journal of Power*, 1:1, 21-36, (2008), 21.

3.3.1 Agency

In philosophy, agency is defined as the capacity of an actor to act in a given environment which in sociology is related to the social structures. The ability to act is personal to a particular individual based on their values, beliefs, personal judgements, motivations.¹⁹³ The notion is directly related to the way individuals make their decisions. Only relatively limited analysis can be made on the role of agency at this point of research. To some degree, it is bound to be normative being limited to strategic documents and political rhetoric. However, some useful insight could be made by triangulating official documents and political rhetoric, the way they complement or perhaps contradict each other. Through diverging from a purely normative approach in this part of the overview, the author draws from a synthesis of further analysis of strategic documents and rhetoric.

In his views on the conduct of international relations President Putin comes across as being rather pragmatic and purposeful, as in optimizing the pursuit of country's interests with the available means and resorting to what he considered to be the most optimal alternative to solving the problem faced by Russia. Responding to one of the questions after his Munich Security Conference speech in 2007, Putin noted that it [international relations] is about achieving symmetries either through conventional or asymmetrical answers adding that "there is nothing personal; it is simply a calculation... the system of international relations is just like mathematics. There are no personal dimensions."

There are a number of lessons one can take from here. The calculus approach to international relations that assumes consideration of options and alternatives, adherence to the principle of reciprocity and balance can use alternative means to achieve that. At the same time, the calculus approach does not exclude the consideration given to the importance of flexibility for a policymaker. According to President Putin, flexibility may imply conceding, but only in case if it eventually leads to a victory, drawing on parallels with judo.¹⁹⁴ This approach

¹⁹³ For a debate on structure and agency, see Archer, op. cit. A generic debate is presented in Nicholas Arbercrombie et al, *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*, 5th ed., (London, Penguin books, 2006).

Agency combines role of structural subjectivity, free will and the collective understanding between events happening in the agency or to the agency and taking control of events or doing things. For generic explanations of ACTION, AGENT, DETERMINISM and FREE WILL, see Simon Blackburn (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Oxford, 2008, 4, 9, 97, 141.

¹⁹⁴ Oliver Stone, *The Putin Interviews. The Full Transcripts* (in Russian), (Moscow, Alpina Publisher, 2018), 28-29.

demonstrates a rational actor who sees value in calculating and taking a game theory¹⁹⁵ approach to decision-making in foreign policy. Putin's comment is arguably not value-free, as decisions are driven by a desire to achieve equilibrium by any means, revealing a deep interest that by definition, cannot be impartial or purely game theoretical. The above also reveals an incremental decision-maker who sees value in flexibility (Incrementalism), and, in trial and error, as long as it helps to achieve the desired goal (Rational Incrementalism, Principle 1).

The context for decisions in Russia's foreign policy with that of direct relevance to the chosen case studies can be drawn from a well-known statement made by President Putin in his annual address to the Parliament, 2005:

*...we should acknowledge that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster of the century. As for the Russian nation, it became a genuine drama. Tens of millions of our co-citizens and compatriots found themselves outside Russian territory. Moreover, the epidemic of disintegration infected Russia itself.*¹⁹⁶

There is a shared consensus on this issue among Russia's political leadership, as for example expressed by a long-standing Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.¹⁹⁷ The collapse meant the loss of territory of strategic importance, particularly when it implied access to seas and the loss of zones of influence. It led to the collapse of the world order, where rules were accumulated around clear terms of reference of the balance of power which, as perceived by Putin, is "a collective or social good", in which the Soviet Union played a well-defined role.¹⁹⁸ With the

¹⁹⁵ A typically mathematical calculation of how various factors affect choices. According to Quackenbush, "Game theory is the analysis of how decision makers interact in decision-making to take into account reactions and choices of the other decision makers. International conflict and other phenomena in international relations occur as a result of decisions made by people. These people may be leaders of states, members of the legislature or military, members of nongovernmental organizations, or just simply citizens of a country." See Oxford Bibliographies online, Stephen L. Quackenbush "Game Theory and Interstate Conflict", June 2014, available at <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199743292/obo-9780199743292-0071.xml>, accessed on 11 September 2018.

¹⁹⁶ Address of the President to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation (25 April 2005), online http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2005/04/25/2031_type70029type82912_87086.Shtml, accessed on 8 April 2018.

¹⁹⁷ Sergey Lavrov, "Historical Perspective of the external politics of Russia" in *Russia in Global Politics* (in Russian), (3 March 2016), online <https://globalaffairs.ru/number/Istoricheskaya-perspektiva-vneshnei-politiki-Rossii-19208>, accessed on 29 April 2018.

¹⁹⁸ Ilias Iliopoulos, op.cit.

collapse of this system came the loss of status and control over large territories. It also blurred the erstwhile clarity, creating new terms and conditions and a diminished role for a weakened Russia. Much later, reflecting on criticism towards his assessment of the collapse of the Soviet Union, based on geopolitical considerations, Putin downplayed the first part of his much-cited phrase bringing a human dimension to the fore. He pointed at the fact that 25 million Russian people found themselves living abroad.¹⁹⁹ Whether or not he saw it as a personal tragedy as such, or as a geopolitical opportunity, is a purely constructive argument. The fact that it provided traction to Russia's policy towards populations in former Soviet Republics (referred to as historic compatriots) is a pathway to influence. While this was reflected in strategic documents from the early 1990s and very much defined relationships with neighbouring countries including some key decisions that were made with the official justification of protection of the rights of compatriots abroad using soft power; the takeover of the Crimea and long-standing military presence in Transnistria region are hard power manifestations.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, its major concern became the prevention of unilateralism. In a much-noted speech in 2007 at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, President Putin unequivocally criticized the US 'unipolar' system as 'illegitimate' and 'unacceptable.'²⁰⁰ Instead, there is a continuous emphasis on multilateralism, where Russia also has role to play, advancing its own interests and zones of influence. If this premise is correct, Russia's actions in Ukraine in 2014 can then be interpreted as a recognition that Ukraine is no longer in Russia's zone of influence, as such Russia may not be able to prevent the country changing its course and slipping out from into Western influence. This assumption compels Russia to protect its core interest of access to the Black Sea, hence the takeover of the Crimea under the pretext of diaspora arguments that has been built up over the years. It could be argued that the zones of interest are considered to be part of Russia's sovereignty (extra geographical notion), and therefore the loss or even decrease of the influence is regarded as having a negative impact of sovereignty *per se*. Putin points-out that "Russia treasures its sovereignty, it is not a toy ... we need sovereignty to protect our interests and to ensure our own development" notably adding that there are no many

¹⁹⁹ See, for example, President Putin's annual press conference (19 December 2013), online <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19859> , accessed on 15 April 2018; Oliver Stone, op. cit., 17.

²⁰⁰ President Putin's speech and the following discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy (10 February 2007), online <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034> , accessed on 8 April 2018.

countries that possess full sovereignty.²⁰¹ Interesting to note that two years earlier President Putin in his speech at the UN General Assembly gave his definition of sovereignty: “what is the meaning of state sovereignty... It basically means freedom, every person and every state being free to choose their future.”²⁰² Reference to the legality of this view of sovereignty with international law is carefully omitted; whereas, respect for international law remained a common iteration in strategic documents.

The notion of sovereignty is linked to the one of uniqueness that started to appear more profoundly in presidential addresses from the second part of the 2000s (applicable to both Presidents Putin and Medvedev). Increased emphasis was put on morality, spiritual identity and wealth (that ought to be preserved), as Russia claims its place as “an influential power” (Medvedev in 2008)²⁰³ or as “a leader in the world” (Putin in 2012).²⁰⁴ This rhetoric becomes even more evident after the start of Putin’s second round of presidentship. More often than not there are references to cultural and historical uniqueness of Russia that separates it from the rest of the world and in some remarks, particularly separates it from the West.²⁰⁵

Moral authority of the state is presented as a foundation for Russia’s development. This could be seen as a dissonance with President Medvedev’s critique of the cult of a state and administration expressed in his first annual address to the Parliament four years earlier emphasising the need to strengthen the role of civil society.²⁰⁶ Post-2012, Putin tended to emphasise the role of the president (and parliament) as central to strengthen democracy in Russia (hence it was then proposed to extend the presidential term to six years). While granting himself a longer stay in the office, there was also a visible inclination to merge

²⁰¹ Transcript of the Plenary Meeting at the St Petersburg International Economic Forum, (2 June 2017), online <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/54667>, accessed on 4 April 2018.

²⁰² Said it the context of the aftermath of the takeover of Crimea and advocating for a greater role in the governance of Ukraine for Donbass region this definition has an angled meaning ignoring the sovereignty right to Ukraine. See President Putin’s address to the 70th General Assembly of the UN, New York, (28 September 2015), online <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50385> accessed on 15 April 2018.

²⁰³ See, for example, Address of the President to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, (November 2008), online http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_81294/#dst0, accessed on 28 March 2018; Address of the President to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, (December 2013), op.cit..

²⁰⁴ Address of the President to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, (December 2012), op.cit.

²⁰⁵ If in 2012, along with the reference to uniqueness, there is a room for rather considerable amount of self-reflection and self-criticism about the state of the Russian society that, according to the President, experiences deficit in such moral values as compassion, mutual support and help, the language of subsequent addresses is much more confident portraying Russia as a spiritual leader.

²⁰⁶ Address of the President to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, (November 2008), op.cit..

notions such as democracy²⁰⁷, strong state²⁰⁸ and presidency,²⁰⁹ leading to the consolidation of power and its legitimisation as the basis for its material and spiritual development. In doing so, Putin extracts agency for himself through structures. It is also interesting to note his comment regarding a world full of ‘otherness,’ which puts a unique Russia under potential threat.

The ‘otherness’ is contrasted with the ‘historic West’, the interests of which are perceived to clash with those of Russia, including Russia’s position in the world. The ‘historic West’ is blamed for attempting to prevent the development of alternative centres of power (such as Russia itself considering its objective to be acknowledged as one of the centres of influence in the world). This stems from a perceived willingness of the West to maintain their position in the world, including imposing their point of view based on certain ideological values (not necessarily corresponding to those of Russia). At the same time strengthening of military-political unions, for example, the expansion of NATO. The positioning of foreign military infrastructure near Russia’s borders, described as a ‘serious provocation’,²¹⁰ was considered as one of the major threats (later soften to a danger) to Russia in the international sphere.²¹¹

²⁰⁷ The value Putin puts in the central role of the state and the type of regime, drawing from democracy and autocracy, he is cultivating in Russia is not estranged from the view taken by the citizens of Russia. While 62 per cent of Russians consider that Russia needs democracy, only 13 per cent of respondents in 2014 thought Russia needed the kind of democracy found in Europe and America. Worth mention here that 16 per cent wanted it to revert to political order as it was in the Soviet Union, and that percentage seems to be declining over time (11 per cent in 2011 and 26 per cent in 2013). Instead, 55 per cent believe that Russia needs a completely special kind of democracy that corresponds with the national traditions and specific character of Russia (albeit the form those might take was not defined). Does Russia Need Democracy?“, Public opinion poll conducted by Levada centre in September 2014 throughout all of Russia in both urban and rural settings, online <https://www.levada.ru/en/2014/11/05/does-russia-need-democracy/>, accessed 30 March 2018.

²⁰⁸ Majority consider that ‘order’ (even if achieving this means that some democratic principles are violated, and personal freedoms are limited) is more important for Russia than ‘democracy’, albeit both are only in combination. “Ideas about Democracy”, public opinion poll conducted by Levada centre in April 2015 throughout Russia in both rural and urban settings, <https://www.levada.ru/en/2015/04/29/ideas-about-democracy/> accessed on 31 March 2018.

²⁰⁹ The institute of Presidency in Russia, and Putin in particular, consistently enjoyed comparatively high level of public support. Well above other state institutions at average 80 per cent since 2014 (before that it was fluctuating between 60 per cent, end of 2013 and above 80 per cent in mid-2000s), online <https://www.levada.ru/en/ratings/> accessed 30 March 2018; in 2018 elections Putin received 77 per cent of votes. Putin’s high levels of popular support have sometimes been interpreted as public acceptance of the moves toward greater autocracy. Ellen Carhaghan, “Popular Support for Democracy and Autocracy in Russia”, *Russian Analytical Digest*, No.117, (19 September 2012), online <http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/RAD-117-2-4.pdf>, accessed on 4 April 2018.

²¹⁰ President Putin’s speech and following discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, op. cit.

²¹¹ National Security Concepts, Military Doctrines, Maritime Doctrine, op. cit.

Issue about the foreign military infrastructure was, for example raised by the President Putin during the Munich Security Conference in 2007. He noted that: “...ensuring one’s own security is the right of any sovereign state. We are not arguing against this. Of course, we are not objecting to this. But why is it necessary to put military

In Russia's thinking, the above constitute factors contributing to instability in international relations and increasing turbulence at regional and global levels. While the strategic documents avoided naming specific countries or organisations, in rhetoric both Putin and Medvedev were rather open in naming specific countries which Russia was in disagreement with. In 2013 there was a move towards more explicit language regarding Russia's relations with the West. It was characterised as being in a critical state of affairs with the direct criticism towards some countries, in particular, the United States and other Western countries for their 'geopolitical expansion' and unwillingness to form 'a pan-European security system and cooperation' [proposed by Russia in 2000s]²¹² as well as for the attempts to put restraints on Russia.

EU was comparatively more favourably viewed in Russia's official documents, both as an organization *per se*²¹³ and in its relations with Russia. One would not find a reference to the EU as a possible source of the threat, as opposed to NATO, being a US-dominated political-military alliance. We see this in Putin's statement (2004) that "... the EU enlargement does not only make us closer geographically but also economically and spiritually". Interaction with the EU was seen as key to new opportunities for the future of "Big Europe".²¹⁴ Relations with the EU can be seen through the prism of Russia's view of itself as a European nation, as an integral and inseparable part of European civilization, tasking itself with the creation of a common economic and humanitarian space from the Atlantic to the Pacific. However, post-2012, as evidenced in President's rhetoric, one can observe the causal link between self-identification and relationships with the West, including the EU. As contestations were

infrastructure on our borders during this expansion? Can someone answer this question? Unless the expansion of military infrastructure is connected with fighting against today's global threats?" Putin further makes a reference to terrorism as such a global threat. President Putin's speech and following discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, op. cit.

²¹² In 2008 President Medvedev, who took generally a more collaborative approach to the West and some Western European countries in particular, proposed to create a new architecture of global security, particularly in Euro-Atlantic area, uniting Russia, EU and the US – proposal on the Agreement of European security. This was, of course, the proposal that was designed to fail taking into account the context of Russia's conflict with Georgia that took place earlier that year. See Address of the President to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, (November 2008), op. cit.

²¹³ In one of his addresses President Medvedev even suggested to look at normative base of the EU for building regulations, admitting that for too long these issues cannot be resolved in Russia. Address of the President to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, (12 November 2009), online

http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_93657/#dst0 accessed on 01 April 2018.

²¹⁴ Address of the President to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, (26 May 2004), online <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22494>, accessed on 30 March 2018.

intensifying, Russia as a European nation discourse of the early 2000s²¹⁵ was then changed to the one of Russia as a Eurasian nation with the emphasis on Russia's unique role between Europe and Asia.

Strategically, the importance of permanent dialogue for mutually beneficial economic connections and enlargement of scientific, humanitarian and other exchanges with the EU, highlighted by the president in 2006²¹⁶, remained relevant throughout the period and reflected in all subsequent documents. However, in the wake of EU's Neighbourhood Policy, in 2004, the then Ambassador to Russia's Permanent Representation to the European Union, Vassily Likhachev wrote in his article that "cooperation between Russia and the EU can be effective only when it is governed by international law rather than the whims or rules of one of the negotiating sides."²¹⁷ Some authors tried to explain Russia's scepticism towards or even rejection of EU's Neighbourhood Policy through the prism of EU's regional normative hegemony and values, and in the process, the imposition of European norms.²¹⁸ It was seen as incompatible with Russia's ideas concerning the legitimate course of action internationally and its role. The sense of exclusion from the dialogue, considering Russia's view of itself as one of the centres of influence, particularly in the immediate neighbourhood, could not but alienate it, causing a negative reaction. Therefore, the EU and its policies in the common neighbourhood, even if well-intended, are often viewed as intrusive and undesired attempts to encroach on Russia's sovereignty and its relations with its neighbours.²¹⁹

The above context is rather important for explaining Russia's foreign policy decisions, including those with particular relevance to Ukraine and Moldova considering their aspirations for closer ties with the EU and eventual membership. Further steps taken by the EU to pursue closer relations with shared neighbours caused more questions in Russia. Indeed, from the outset, the Neighbourhood Policy called for enhanced ties with Moldova and Ukraine, at the same time emphasising strengthening relations with Russia following the

²¹⁵ Address of the President to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, (25 April 2005), online <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22931>, accessed on 30 March 2018.

²¹⁶ Address of the President to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, (10 May 2006), online <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23577/videos>, accessed on 30 March 2018.

²¹⁷ Vassily Likhachev, 'Russia and EU: Proficiency Essential', *Russia in Global Affairs*, 2 (2), (2004), p.104

²¹⁸ Hiski Haukkala, "Explaining Russian Reaction to the European Neighbourhood Policy", in Richard G. Whitman and Stefan Worlff, (eds.), *The European Neighbourhood Policy in Perspective: Context, Implementation and Impact*, (Palgrave Studies in European Union Politics, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2010), p.162.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

enlargement.²²⁰ The introduction of the Eastern Partnership in 2009²²¹ was seen in Moscow as a deliberate manoeuvre to hinder closer collaboration between Russia and the Eastern Partnership countries.²²² Despite some signs of concern, mostly of economic nature, the rhetoric towards the EU remained comparatively positive. Even in the context of economic sanctions and tensions, post-2014 (that President Putin called ‘short-term’), Europe and the EU have never received the sort of criticism that NATO attracted.

It is interesting to observe how this discourse shaped public opinion in Russia. The more confrontational were the statements by Russia’s leaders and the narratives of official documents, the more negative the public opinion became toward the West. In 2014 only 26 per cent of Russians believed that Russia and the West could be truly friendly in comparison to 52 per cent in 1999. The proportion of the population that believed that these relationships will be always built on mistrust rose from 38 per cent in 1999 to 64 per cent in 2014.²²³

The above analysis demonstrated a consistent set of key ideas and beliefs, the legitimacy of which among its citizens serves as impetus and justification for the direction of policies. This included the decisions underpinned by the course of the foreign policy by the President with his personal views on the role of the state, the meaning of sovereignty, the notion of

²²⁰ See “Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours”, The Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, Brussels 11.3.2003, COM (2003) 104 final, online http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/enp/pdf/pdf/com03_104_en.pdf and “Paving the way for a New Neighbourhood Instrument”, Communication from the Commission of the European Communities, Brussels 1.7.2003, COM (2003) 393 final, http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/communic/wider/wider_en.pdf, accessed on 2 January 2018. Russia and EU’s relations were seen as multi-dimensional to include dialogue and cooperation on political and security issues, energy, environment, science and technology, a new Neighbourhood policy was seen as only one pillar of the overall EU-Russia strategic partnership. It is also worth noting that by then (since the end of 1990s) all three countries had separate Partnership and Cooperation Agreements establishing bilateral political dialogues and encouraging trade and investments, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:r17002>, while Russia and the EU also had the Common European Economic Space initiative launched in May 2001 http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-01-414_en.htm, accessed on 10 April 2018.

²²¹ EU Eastern Partnership was inaugurated in May 2009 as an initiative of the European External Action Service of the EU governing its relationship with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The Partnership had a budget of 600 million Euro. It was established with the aim to provide a forum for discussion of trade, economic strategy, travel agreements, and other issues between the EU and its Eastern European neighbours. Through these discussions it was hoped to improve political and economic trade-relations with these countries, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/82/about-the-european-external-action-service-eeas_en, accessed on 15 April 2018.

²²² Andrei Zagorsky, “Eastern Partnership from the Russian Perspective”, online http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/ipg/2011-3/05_zagorski.pdf, accessed on 15 April 2018.

²²³ “Does Russia Need Democracy?”, Public opinion poll conducted by Levada centre in September 2014 throughout all of Russia in both urban and rural settings, online <https://www.levada.ru/en/2014/11/05/does-russia-need-democracy/>, accessed 30 March 2018.

international relations and the position of Russia in the world and how it should pursue its interests. While on the one hand, this is a combination of rational and incremental approaches to decision-making, the increased role of agency is a nuance. This maps more closely on to Principle 2 and 4 of Rational Incrementalism.

3.3.2 *Decision owners*

The Russian Federation's Constitution empowers the President to determine the main directions of foreign policy of the state and provide leadership to it (pointing to agency of the President).²²⁴ In other words, the president is the main decision owner within what can be referred to as Weberian hierarchy of authorities.²²⁵ This unsurprisingly remains consistent over time and is reflected in all key documents analysed as part of this research. Thus, all key strategic documents outline the president's leading role consistently, making it even more implicit in the latest editions. Although the President's leadership position in providing national security is outlined in 2009 National Security Strategy, the 2015 edition makes a notable addition to essentially the same text; namely, the explicit additional phrase 'under the leadership of the President'. This addition betrays the role of both structure and agency. The leading role of the President is also strengthened in subsequent clauses of the document with the emphasis on leadership function in both agenda-setting and control over the implementation. The Military Doctrines of 2010 and 2015 also state that the President defines the objectives of the military-technical co-operation [with other countries]. Similarly, the Maritime Doctrine (2015) states that the President determines the strategic priorities and tasks related to military naval activities.²²⁶ Moreover, the Fleet's role in foreign policy and the role of the President in defining objectives of the national naval policy has strengthened considerably in the 2015 edition of the Maritime Doctrine (compared with the previous edition of the Doctrine adopted in 2004).

At the operational level, all policy decisions are implemented through structures; therefore, the fact that the strategic documents reflect a hierarchical model (with assigned roles and responsibilities and centralised way of decision-making) is to be expected. This does not imply structure without agency and distribution of decision power amongst other actors. The

²²⁴ The Constitution of the Russian Federation, adopted at National Referendum on 12 December 1993, came into force on 25 December 1993, in Russian, <http://www.constitution.ru/index.htm>, accessed on 2 May 2018.

²²⁵ Max Weber, "Bureaucracy", *Rationalism and Modern Society. Translations on Politics, Bureaucracy, and Social Stratification*, Tony Waters and Dagmar Waters (eds. trs.), (Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), pp.75-128.

²²⁶ Articles 40, 41 and 94 of the Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation (2015), op. cit.

Executive Order of the President of the Russian Federation No.605 of May 7, 2012 (hereafter the Executive Order) talks directly to the diversification of actors involved in the process of foreign policy. The role of different institutions, at the national and regional level, both generalist and with the focus on specific areas, is about formulating proposals and making suggestions on the issues related to foreign policy and then implementing decision signed off by the president. However, signing off by one lead actor does not imply the absence of a collective as part of the structures. For example, the National Security Concepts²²⁷, until the latest edition of 2015, suggested a more coordinated approach to the formulation of state policy in the area of national security, assigning a coordinating role to the Security Council of the Russian Federation that includes representatives of both executive and legislative branches of state power. The remit of the Council has become more comprehensive from the focus on international security (as per Foreign Policy Concept of 2000²²⁸), to a broader set of issues. The role extends from directing foreign and military policies to drafting decisions.²²⁹ The President chairs this merger of the strategic and operational levels. The remit of the Council includes foreign, security and military policies.²³⁰ In addition to formulation policies in these areas, the role consists of forecasting, analysis and evaluation functions underpinning decisions. The change of the remit and role of the Council was gradual; its role was not just diversified but also strengthened during the considered period. The 2008 National Security Concept refers to the analytical role of the Council but limits it to evaluating challenges and threats to national interest and security of the country in the international sphere, and not the foreign policy at large. The 2008 edition also adds the Council's role in coordinating other federal agencies' activities in the implementation of decisions concerning the provision of national security. The intellectual aspects of the role of the Council have also been specified in the Foreign Policy Concept (2016) that implicitly suggests an engagement of a broader set of expertise than what Council membership alone may provide. In this document, the Security Council is mandated with the formulation of decisions. As a Chair of the Security Council, the resident's leading role is noted in setting the

²²⁷ Considering that one of the objectives of national security has direct implication to the way the country approaches the conduct of its foreign policy through what is defined in documents as “strategic stability and equal strategic partnership”, it is important to include it in the analysis.

²²⁸ Foreign Policy Concept 2000, op. cit.

²²⁹ Foreign Policy Concept 2013 and 2016 editions are identical

²³⁰ This is comparable with practices in other countries that also vary. For example, the remit of US National Security Council includes security and foreign policy. While National Security Council in the UK is tasked with overseeing all issues related to national security, intelligence coordination, and defence strategy.

agenda on issues related to foreign policy and deciding whether or not these issues are included for consideration by the Security Council.²³¹

The role of the other institutions supporting the President and responsible for preparing the decisions has also evolved. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' role changed from being mainly an implementer of the foreign policy course approved by the President²³² to also take responsibility for developing the overall strategy for the foreign policy.²³³ This extension of responsibility, first documented in the 2008 Foreign Policy Concept, remained throughout this research's temporal boundary. As noted in the Executive Order, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs defines the main principles and directions of the Russian Federation's foreign policy.²³⁴ These are based on the principles of pragmatism, openness and multi-vector in the context of the formation of a new polycentric system of international relations. This became a mantra, reflected in numerous documents and repeated in numerous public address of Russian leaders. Considering the role of the President and the Security Council in the formation of foreign policy, the role of the Ministry has an executive nature ultimately and, although clearly extended, its remit remained limited to making suggestions to the President as the chief decision owner in foreign policy. President's Executive Order also tasks the Foreign Ministry as a lead agency for the implementation of actions in foreign policy outlined in the document in collaboration with other federal executive bodies. This coordination function remained consistent throughout the examined period.²³⁵ The federal executive bodies have their role defined in implementing international and foreign economic cooperation "in strict compliance with sovereignty and territorial integrity of Russia and making use of the capabilities of the Council of the Heads of the Russian constituent entities, which operates under the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation". It is recognized that "the development of cooperation in neighbouring regions is an important

²³¹ National Security Concept 2009, op. cit.

²³² Foreign Policy Concept 2000, op. cit.

²³³ Foreign Policy Concept 2008, 2013 and 2016, op. cit.; latter two contain identical texts on the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

²³⁴ Principles of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Naval Activities for the Period until 2030, op. cit.

²³⁵ The latter is detailed in the Executive Order of the President No.1478 from 8 November 2011 "On the coordinating role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation in implementation of united foreign policy course of Russian Federation", op. cit.

source for bilateral relations with relevant countries in trade, economic, humanitarian and other fields.’²³⁶

Considering the permanent membership of two major security services in the Security Council²³⁷, it is worth briefly considering their role as actors involved in foreign policy decision-making. As permanent members, their status is worth noting as equivalent bodies in most other countries do not follow the same practice limiting the membership to the ministerial level.²³⁸ While this inclusion demonstrates a more direct role of the services in Russia’s security, defence and foreign policy, the main strategic documents are silent about their specific role in foreign policy decision-making (beyond providing information that underpins a decision and playing a role in their implementation). Some analysts argue that during the first round of Vladimir Putin’s presidency, security and intelligence agencies gained some power, losing it considerably following the collapse of the Soviet Union.²³⁹ Their authority extended considerably since Putin’s return to the presidency in 2012.²⁴⁰ However, despite the expanded role in general, their role in shaping policy and decision-making is weakened due to their proliferation,²⁴¹ lack of unity, common goals and even mutual competitiveness due to overlapping remits.²⁴² President Putin acknowledged the

²³⁶ Foreign Policy Concept 2013, replicated in 2016 edition, op. cit.

²³⁷ Federal Security Service (FSB) and Foreign Intelligence Service (SRV)

²³⁸ For example, neither UK National Security Council nor US National Security Council include the heads of comparable services.

²³⁹ Arguably, during the tenure of Yevgeny Primakov as SRV’s chief in 1990s the agency enjoyed a lot of influence over foreign policy through its role in providing information and analysis. For further details see for example, F. Stephen Larrabee and Theodore W. Karasik, “Foreign and Security Policy Decision making Under Yeltsin”, Report prepared for the Office of the Secretary of Defence, RAND, (1997), online https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph_reports/2007/MR831.pdf, accessed on 12 January 2018.

²⁴⁰ Mark Galeotti, “Putin’s Hydra: Inside Russia’s Intelligence Services”, Policy Brief, European Council of Foreign Relations, (May 2016), online https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR_169_-_PUTINS_HYDRA_INSIDE_THE_RUSSIAN_INTELLIGENCE_SERVICES_1513.pdf accessed on 5 January 2018.

²⁴¹ Ibid; see also Julia Latynina, “Big Brother Hears You” (in Russian), Novaya Gazeta, (10 October 2017), <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2007/10/11/31565-bolshoy-brat-slyshit-tebya> accessed on 10 January 2018; Mark Galeotti, “Russian intelligence is at (political) war”, NATO Review, (12 May 2017), <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2017/Also-in-2017/russian-intelligence-political-war-security/EN/index.htm>, accessed on 11 January 2018.

²⁴² From two agencies of the Soviet era, the KGB (Committee for State Security) with the responsibility for internal security, intelligence and secret police; and the GRU (Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff) with the responsibility for military intelligence, to a much more crowded space that includes, FSB (Federal Security Service) responsible for internal security, counter-intelligence, counter-terrorism and surveillance; Foreign Intelligence Service; the GRU (both with the responsibility for external intelligence); The Federal Protection Service (FSO) including the Presidential Security Service (SBP). Broader intelligence

above-mentioned shortfalls in the connectedness of agencies in his address in 2015, made on the eve of the 95th anniversary of the Foreign Intelligence Service. He then urged the unity and coordination between the security and intelligence agencies.²⁴³ Plurality and siloed working of security and intelligence services serves the purpose of providing triangulation on the information of interest and to mitigate the consolidation of power. It is no surprise that Putin refused an ambitious plan by FSB to consolidate power by integrating other agencies under its umbrella, recreating a structure that would resemble KGB.²⁴⁴ The acknowledgement of services' operational role in providing information (or as some reports argue – telling Kremlin what it wants to hear) and implementing the decisions is also evidenced in the steady increase of their budgets, particularly during the second round of Putin's presidency.²⁴⁵

The role of the government as a collective body is only vaguely described with a general reference to the executive role in implementing foreign policy. President Putin himself during the period when he assumed the role of prime minister would say that it is the resident's role to conduct foreign policy (thus claiming that he was not involved in foreign policy decision-making during Medvedev's tenure). He iterated this during a number of his annual press conferences after returning to presidential seat in 2012. The government received a more prominent role in some areas, particularly in relation to the CIS as a responsible body for implementing strategy and delegating specific roles and responsibilities to ministries and other agencies.²⁴⁶

Both Chambers of the Parliament, in addition to their chairpersons being permanent members of the Security Council, are empowered with the traditional role in the legislative process, for example, the ratification of the international treaties. The Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation has a defined remit in developing proposals and implementing

community also includes the Interior Ministry (MVD), Prosecutor General's Office (GP), Investigatory Committee (SK), the Federal Anti-Drug Service (FSKN), National Anti-Terrorism Service (NAK).

²⁴³ Vladimir Putin address at gala reception to mark Security Agency Worker's Day, (19 December 2015), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50977> accessed on 14 December 2018.

²⁴⁴ Mark Galeotti, (2016), op. cit.

²⁴⁵ For further details see, for example, Vladimir Degrachov and Elizaveta Antonova, "Tag: Russian draft budget 2017-2019", *The Russian Reader*, (23 October 2016), online <https://therussianreader.com/tag/russian-draft-budget-2017-2019/> accessed on 5 January 2019.

²⁴⁶ Strategic Course of Russia with the States – Participants of the Commonwealth of the Independent States, op. cit.

Russia's foreign policy in the areas of international development, providing international humanitarian cooperation, supporting Russian diaspora, encouraging the Russian language in the world, and developing a network of Russian scientific and cultural centres abroad.²⁴⁷

In later additions of the strategic documents²⁴⁸ and the Executive Order, in particular, the role of the civil society became more visible. It was recognised that to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of foreign policy; it is essential to engage civil society in the foreign policy process. This included strengthening collaboration with non-commercial and non-government organisations with interests in foreign policy and more specifically their “broad participation in the activities of the global expert political forums”.²⁴⁹ This recognition of an inclusive role for civil society started to emerge during the last ten years of the reviewed period, moving the semantics of optional (if necessary or when required (2000)) to the one of expected (2008 onwards), explicitly stating that federal institutions are to collaborate on a continuous basis with civil society organizations in the process of formulating foreign policy. As reflected in the strategic documents, it is accepted that broad engagement with civil society institutions in foreign policy processes is essential for the effective implementation and corresponds to have a consensus built foreign policy.²⁵⁰

At the level of political rhetoric, the delegation of power received a considerable amount of attention in nearly all annual presidential addresses to the Parliament. This becomes particularly apparent in the narratives used after Putin's return to the presidential post in

²⁴⁷ Foreign Policy Concepts 2013 and 2016, op. cit.

²⁴⁸ For example, Foreign Policy Concepts of 2013 and 2016 note the importance of the “institutes of civil society in solving international problems in order to enhance the effectiveness of Russia's foreign policy”

²⁴⁹ Specific mention is given to the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation established on 1 July 2005 and is a state funded consultative and advisory organization. 40 out of 168 members are appointed by the President, <https://oprfr.ru/about/>, accessed on 3 May 2018. Another specific mentioned was received by the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy (Фонд поддержки публичной дипломатии имени А.М. Горчакова), established with a decree of the President Medvedev on 2 February 2010 to help advance Russia's foreign policy interests and facilitate favourable public, political and business environment for Russia outside its borders as well as act as channel for the involvement of institutions of civil society in the foreign policy processes; it is funded from the state budget and via voluntary contributions, <https://gorchakovfund.ru/about/>, accessed on 2 May 2018.

²⁵⁰ Further analysis will be required to establish the extent to which non-governmental actors are indeed involved in the global processes and importantly, the background of these organizations – i.e. does their engagement indeed promote the plurality of contributions in formulation and conduct of foreign policy or they are just the extension of already expected course in pursuit of giving it more legitimacy and public face. For example, Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund.

2012.²⁵¹ Thereafter, power decentralization and citizen engagement became one the highlights of his rhetoric. Marking the 20th anniversary of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, President Putin in his December 2013 address²⁵² particularly focused on the role of civil society and local authorities as well as the delegation of power to the regional level to convey intent for as much direct involvement of people in decision-making as possible. This part of the address's timing is particularly important as it comes just three months before the referendum in Crimea, organized in haste and orchestrated by Russia. This appears to be a practical manifestation of citizens' involvement in decision-making, albeit on the territory of another country and in breach of that country's constitution. In Russia itself, however, the opposite occurs and, despite the above rhetoric, what we see is a move towards further central government control over local politics and elections. An example of this is the abolishing of direct mayoral elections; this is seen, for instance, in the case of Yekaterinburg, Russia's fourth-largest city.²⁵³

While plurality figures in the rhetoric conclude that Russia's foreign policy decision-making is based on a pluralistic model is highly doubtful. The decision process, as prescribes by the strategic documents, demonstrate proximity to the RAM. This is reflected in Presidential powers who ultimately signs off foreign policy decisions. However, the hierarchical structure does not exclude the elements of plurality at operational levels. Over time the role of a collective, such as the Security Council chaired by the president as well as the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs gained more traction as well as the number of institutions, both at

²⁵¹ For example, in the Address of the President to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation (December 2012), given on the Constitution day in Russia, 12 December, a lot of attention was given to the need to ensure the transparency of power and a need to enable people to engage and contribute to the governance. Op. cit.

²⁵² Address of the President to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation (December 2013), op. cit.

²⁵³ The instances emerged in mid-2000s, (see for example, Masha Lipman, "Russia's Hidden Power Struggle", in *Washington Post*, (2 December 2006), online <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/01/AR2006120101326.html>, accessed on 15 April 2018. For example, Moscow mayoral elections were abolished in 2004 to be re-instated due to popular pressure; Putin's backed candidates got a marginal majority in both 2010 and 2013. The latest such example can be found in the fourth largest Russia's city of Yekaterinburg where independent candidate (a critic of Putin) would have been up for re-election in September 2018. Governor, appointed by the President in 2012, backed the decision. Instead of direct election, mayor candidates will be put forward from those put forward by a commission made up of MPs and members of the governor's staff. Alec Luhn, "Pro-Russian officials cancel elections in city with Russia's only elected mayor", *Telegraph*, (3 April 2018), online <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/04/03/pro-kemlin-officials-cancel-mayoral-elections-russias-fourth/>, accessed on 15 April 2018. Less than 10 Russian cities still have direct mayoral elections while the rest rely on appointment system, Natalia Shurmina and Andrew Osborn, "Russian city with opposition scraps mayoral elections", *Reuters*, (3 April 2018), online <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-politics/russian-city-with-opposition-mayor-scraps-mayoral-elections-idUSKCN1HA1C4>, accessed on 15 April 2018.

state and non-state level that are expected to contribute to the formulations of policies and deliberations before decision-making. While the role of these institutions role in shaping the decision should not be underestimated, at the same time there is no evidence in the documents that the final decision is based on a compromise to observe a clear trend towards a more incremental model. Instead, the leading role in the final act of decision-making remained designated to one person, the President, whose leadership in foreign policy has been reinforced and who may or may not be inclined towards a compromise. Additionally, there is no explicit reference to a specific level of decisions delegated to various levels; instead, the documents refer operational issues, namely implementation and coordination, while the decision-making *per se* remains at the top. All in all, the model of decision-making by the type of actors involved is rather strongly incline towards the RAM, and while some elements of pluralisation can be observed, these are clearly at the level of inputs that may or may not be taken into account at the level of decision.

From the above discussion, we can summarise that the President defines foreign policy strategic direction and its manifestation at the operational level by way of tasking the instruments of national power. In addition to the strategic documents, this is also reflected in Presidents' annual address to the Parliament.²⁵⁴ These addresses in themselves are a profound manifestation of the role of the president's institution across the breadth of spheres in politics, economic and social life; from strategic to daily operational matters; from national to local levels. The above assertion supports the presence of both structure and agency approaches. This balancing of the influence of structure and agency in decision-making manifests to a large extent Principle 2 of Rational Incrementalism. The role of agency is discussed in the next section.

3.4 APPLICATION OF MEANS – IMPLEMENTATION

Openness and predictability of Russia's foreign policy, the main characteristics of which is regarded to be consistency, transparency and pragmatic nature,²⁵⁵ is challenging to discern purely from strategic documents and rhetoric. It needs to be seen through the evidence of actual actions in the application of instruments of national power towards achieving those

²⁵⁴ Foreign Policy Concept 2010, op. cit.

²⁵⁵ These statements are consistent in all reviewed editions of the Foreign Policy Concept and is also reflected in the National Security Concept 2015, op. cit.

objectives. Strategic documents provide a clear aspiration for sovereignty defined through indicators such as independence, political and territorial integrity, safeguard of compatriots abroad, strengthen its economy within the context of “unstable world economy.” This ambitious self-assessment was also included in the 2015 National Security Concept, published in the midst of Russia's relative economic and political isolation, following the takeover of the Crimea.²⁵⁶

Through the years, strategic documents, such as Foreign Policy and National Security Concepts, pay considerable attention to the importance of international collaboration in addressing the challenges of the modern world. Strategic documents iterate that active foreign policy as a facilitator of the pursuit of national interests.²⁵⁷ From an implementation perspective, Russia's natural resource potential and its pragmatic exploitation are viewed as instruments in strengthening Russia's influence in the world.²⁵⁸ This point is particularly important in the light of energy policy conducted by Russia that to a large extent defined its relations with Ukraine and Moldova as well as parts of Europe reliant on the supply of Russia's natural resources.

Analysis of political rhetoric level can also provide some insights. In 2009, President Medvedev said that Russia's foreign policy must be exclusively pragmatic. He suggested that its effectiveness should be assessed according to a simple criterion. First, whether foreign policy improves the living standards in the country (the term ‘economic diplomacy’ is used in his 2010 address to the Parliament) is effectively employed for long-term development.²⁵⁹

On the timing of applying means towards advancing policy, Putin's website provides a clue. Putin states that feeling the moment, along with the ability to recognise an opponent's strengths and weaknesses, is one of the keys in striving for the best results; a lesson he took from judo.²⁶⁰ The latter brings incrementalism with its appreciation of the moment and a need for a quick action within emerging and changing contexts. However, the earlier argument of maintaining direction steers away from Incrementalism. The importance of context as a

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ National Security Concepts 2009 and 2015, op. cit.

²⁵⁸ National Security Concept, (2009), op. cit.

²⁵⁹ Address of the President to the Federal Assembly of Russian Federation, (2009), op. cit.

²⁶⁰ Vladimir Putin. Personal website. <http://eng.putin.kremlin.ru/interests>, in Russian <http://putin.kremlin.ru/interests/page-0>, accessed on 3 September 2018.

catalyst or impediment is apparent in thought and action. This closely resembles Principle 4 of Rational Incrementalism.

3.5 CONCLUSION

The review of major strategic documents and rhetoric was based on the analytical framework and the functional indicators. A summary is presented below:

Table 5 Summary of the analysis of the official documents and political rhetoric

Author's own table

Aims and Objectives (Why and What?)	Conceptual framework	Functional indicators and degree of mapping to the Principles of the Rational Incrementalism; expressed as high (H), medium (M) and low (L)	
	Setting aims and objectives	<p>Russia's strategic interests have remained consistent. In modifications of objectives, the direction remains consistent. There is a clear causal link between aims and objectives and decisions, both fundamental and incremental.</p> <p>The importance of context as a catalyst or impediment is apparent in thought and action. Ability to shape the context is limited, and hence it brings in a degree of adaptation reflected in the official documents but more profoundly – the opportune use of the context.</p>	<p>RAM</p> <p>Principle 1, M</p> <p>Principle 4, H</p>
	Anticipated changes	Aspired changes are fundamental (pursuing the aspiration of a great power). It is not time-bound and is moderated by capability and context.	Principle 1, M Principle 4, H
Actors (Who?)	Actors (Including the level of delegation and devolution)	<p>The dominance of the unitarian approach. The President defines foreign policy strategic direction as well as its manifestation at the operational level.</p> <p>The Presidents in their personal views on the role of the state influencing policy represent agency.</p>	<p>RAM</p> <p>Principle 2, H</p>
	The role of agency	<p>Agency plays a substantial role in the way decisions are formulated and priorities defined. There is a link between aims and objectives that underpin decisions and actors' values, beliefs, aspirations and experiences.</p> <p>In the combination of rational and incremental approaches to decision-making, the increased role of agency is a nuance</p>	<p>Principle 2, M</p> <p>Principle 4, H</p>

Application of Means (How?)	<p>At the implementation level, the role of strategy over structure. One example is the modification of structures such as abolition and/or restoration of the direct election at regional and local levels; the other evidence comes from the swapping of roles between the president and prime minister due to constitutional constraints and Putin's need to remain in power while adjusting the system. However, more data will be needed before a conclusion whether this principle maps onto Russia's actions or otherwise.</p> <p>Combination of small and significant changes with various degree of difference made. However, fundamental or incremental, these changes are not detached from the overall strategy.</p>	<p>Principle 3, L (due to lack of data)</p> <p>Principle 1, H</p>
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The analysis is limited to the first two categories of aims and objectives (why and what) and actors. Only a limited analysis of the application of means or implementation category is possible at this stage. Analysis of the conceptual basis of decision-making in Russia's foreign policy reveals a high degree of consistency in what is considered to be key aims and objectives. While moderated in various iterations of the documents, the directions remain consistent since the 1990s and, in particular, over the period considered. The moderation in ambition, based on the evidence of the analysis of the document and the prevailing environment in which they emerged, suggests a due consideration for context. From the discussion above, it is possible to observe how the context influenced the way aspirations were formulated and not vice versa; the major historic shift (collapse of the Soviet Union) has already taken place, what we see here is subsequent adjustment as a result of a new global order. Hence the moderations are seen to be connected directly to Russia's own ability to pursue national interests (capability), constraints imposed by the external order and events (obtaining environment) and the broader international climate of the time (context). Putin's drive towards the consolidation of power was largely seen as a move towards authoritarianism. However, it allowed a move away from the multiple foreign policies of the early 1990s. While, from the point of view of removing multiplicity, the centralisation of power by the President (structuration) can be seen in the positive light, it can also be viewed as power accumulation (agency).

4 DECISION-MAKING IN RUSSIA'S FOREIGN POLICY – THE CASE OF UKRAINE

Russia needs a strong Ukraine and Ukraine, a strong Russia. Such states can, must and will certainly be faithful allies and reliable strategic partners for each other.

*President Putin, in a speech on 23 January 2004 in Ukraine*²⁶¹

4.1 INTRODUCTION

President Putin in the above quote, suggests the mutual importance of two neighbouring countries to forge faithful relationships. Post-independence Ukraine's relationship with Russia had a rocky beginning. The negotiation process leading to the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, signed in 1994, is an example. These tensions had a more extended historical context going back to the integration process of the Soviet Union. Even Khrushchev's arguably meaningless gesture to 'gift' the Crimea to Ukraine could be regarded as a sign of reconciliation after Stalin's 'Ukrainophobia' both before and after World War II.

On the one hand, he premised this gift on a notion of permanency of Soviet Union external borders; on the other, the internal adjustments of territories had a purely administrative impact. The trend continued even during the periods of appeasement and more cordial connections between political leaders, evident during the presidency of Leonid Kuchma²⁶², in particular, who, much to Russia's distaste, actually started the process of formalizing relationships with NATO.²⁶³ At the same time, there was no shortage of attempts to reconcile tensions between the two countries. For example, agreements such as the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation signed

²⁶¹ President Putin during the closing ceremony of Russia's year (2003) in Ukraine on 23 January 2004, <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22333>, accessed on 5 March 2018.

²⁶² President Kuchma was a Ukrainian President Putin met most.

²⁶³ For example, signing of NATO-Ukraine Charter during Madrid summit in July 1997 and related Kuchma's statement where he expressed a hope that "the doors of the European and transatlantic institutions should remain open to all countries" and stated that "Ukraine has made its choice and is ready together with NATO member countries and the Alliance partners to take an active part in the construction of a secure future for Europe", online https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_25600.htm?selectedLocale=en, accessed on 16 May 2018.

in 1997²⁶⁴. The Treaty on State Border between Ukraine and Russia signed in January 2003. These were designed to reiterate the amicable relationships between the two countries to appease the ongoing contested issues. President Putin noted during his visit to Ukraine on 23 April 2004 that the treaty “will remove the existing disagreements and will create conditions for the development of Russia-Ukrainian relations in the economic and humanitarian areas.”²⁶⁵ Above all, it was an opportunity for Ukraine to seek yet another reassurance (in addition to the Budapest Memorandum) that Russia will respect its territorial integrity and inviolability of the borders between the two countries. It is important to note that in Ukraine concerns about the status of the Crimea were building up in light of comments and discussions among Russian politicians following the break-up of the Soviet Union.

During the period covered in this research Ukrainian aspirations to align with Western economic, political and military structures became increasingly evident, while Russia’s own regional integrational projects were gearing up with Ukraine in mind. This disparity of aspirations could not but impact the relationships between the two countries, setting the context for Russia’s decisions in relation to Ukraine. It is not uncommon to connect post-2004 tensions between Ukraine and Russia solely with Ukraine’s inclination towards EU, particularly NATO, however one should not dismiss the underlying historic context mentioned above. When we further relate these tensions to Russia’ core interest (access to and control of the Black Sea, the continuous presence the Russian Black Sea Fleet on Ukrainian territory, as well as Russia’s aspirations for the Eurasian Economic Union), membership of the EU and NATO would seriously jeopardise Russia’s long-term interests.

²⁶⁴ The Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, signed on 31 May 1997. It is regarded as a basic document for bilateral relations between Russia and Ukraine. Recognition of inviolability of existing borders, respect of territorial integrity and mutual commitment not to use its territory to harm the security of each other; not to use economic and other means of pressure against each other. The treaty is automatically renewed on each 10th anniversary unless one party advises the other on its intention to end the treaty. Despite some proposals from both sides to denounce or partially denounce the treaty, it remains in force. For example, Deputy Head of Ukraine’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs Olena Zerkal stated in March 2018 that the treaty could not be prolonged since Russia has grossly violated it. See Ukraine MFA: Russian-Ukrainian Friendship Treaty can’t be prolonged “Ukraine MFA: Russian-Ukrainian Friendship Treaty can’t be prolonged”, UNIAN, (29 March 2018), online <https://www.unian.info/politics/10061045-ukraine-mfa-russian-ukrainian-friendship-treaty-can-t-be-prolonged.html>, accessed on 3 April 2018. The deputy of the Committee of Russia’s State Duma on CIS matters, Constantin Zatulin (United Russia) suggested to partially denounce the treaty in January 2018, in the part where both countries recognise each other borders. See “Zatulin suggested to reconsider the cooperation agreement with Ukraine”, Ria Novosti, (14 January 2018), online <https://ria.ru/politics/20180114/1512576766.html>, accessed on 3 April 2018.

²⁶⁴ Transcript of St Petersburg International Economic Forum plenary meeting, op. cit.

²⁶⁵ “Russian-Ukrainian agreements on state boarder and collaboration in Azov-Kerch waters...” (23 April 2004), online <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/30823> accessed on 25 February 2018.

In 2008, in assessing Russia-Ukraine's relations, Putin acknowledged that more could have been achieved, adding that "...there has been a lot of political froth in our relationships. We have spent many years arguing the gas transport system and Ukraine has very much politicised this issue."²⁶⁶ However, he also noted, with a degree of fatalism, that he would not dramatize the fact that problems do arise - this has always been the case and always will be. Public opinion in Russia reflected such strains to a large extent.²⁶⁷ Even in light of political tensions, also reflected in negative public opinions, the dialogue and collaboration between the two countries continued based on Russia's long-term interests to keep Ukraine in its sphere of influence. As a maximum, part of Russia's-led political and economic structures, such as the Eurasian Economic Union, and as a minimum a buffer between Western economic, political and military structures. This is particularly evident in economic terms with Russia remaining the major trading partner²⁶⁸ and a significant investor in Ukraine's economy.²⁶⁹ Similar to the opening quote of this Chapter, Putin repeated at the end of 2018 that Russia wants "to see peace and prosperity on the entire territory of Ukraine [which by then excluded the Crimea as far as Russia was concerned], including Donbas" as Ukraine remains one of Russia's biggest trade and economic partners.²⁷⁰ Although Putin did not say what Russia is not interested in, by then it was very clear that the interests do not include Ukraine's membership in NATO and the EU. In making this geopolitical argument, the

²⁶⁶ President Putin's press conference, (14 February 2008), online <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24835>, online 30 April 2018.

²⁶⁷²⁶⁷ Public opinion in Russia over a longer period of time, and long before the events leading to the annexation of Crimea, reflected tensions between the two countries. Between 2006 and 2014, a survey measuring public opinion in Russia consistently ranked Ukraine at number six in the list of countries identified as unfriendly towards Russia. Apart from 2009, a year of gas crises, when Ukraine the third behind Georgia and the US. Following the conflict in 2014 it rose four places, second only to the US. Allies and "foes" of Russia, European Integration", opinion poll conducted by Levada Centre during 20-23 May 2016 across the Russian Federation, published on 2 June 2016, online <https://www.levada.ru/2016/06/02/13400/>, accessed on 5 August 2018

²⁶⁸ Thus, in 2017 Russia remained the main destination for Ukraine's export amounting to \$4 billion of 10% of the total volume. This followed by Poland (\$2.7), Turkey and Italy (\$2.5 each), India (\$2.2), China (\$2), Germany (\$1.8). See Yuliana Romanyshyn, "Ukraine's export and imports increase in 2017; Russia remains top trade partner despite 4 years of war", Kyiv Post, 16 March 2018, <https://www.kyivpost.com/business/ukraines-exports-imports-increase-infographics.html>, accessed on 21 April 2018.

²⁶⁹ Over the years Russia remained the fourth largest investor in Ukraine. The overall share is higher in 2018 than it was in 2004 and amounts to about 7%. Even in 2014 the level of foreign investments from Russia remained within its usual limits of 5.9% that nominally was equal to \$2724,3 (out of total \$45916mil), although it was a fall in comparison to 2013 when Russia invested 3785,8mil or 7% of total \$54462. However, it is necessary to note that following the takeover of Crimea and military operations in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, these were not included in total numbers and this may explain the perception of overall fall. If anything, it indicates, that Russia continued investing in Ukraine's economy after the escalation of conflict at the level sustained from the beginning of the period of analysis, i.e. 2004.

²⁷⁰ President Putin's press conference, 20 December 2018, online <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59455>, accessed on 4 April 2018.

author iterates that the geo-economic context should not be downplayed. In fact, it plays a significant role in informing Russia's decisions towards Ukraine, outside of the Crimean issue, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

The analysis of the case study will be built around the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2. As was done in the previous Chapter, which presented a secondary analysis of documents and rhetoric and how they related to the foundational models and Rational Incrementalism, the analysis in this Chapter and the conclusions that emerge will likewise be tested against the three models. The author's focus will remain on major factors of interstate relations and decisions related to foreign policy directions. Omissions of other ongoing interactions are deliberately omitted, considering that the period covered in this analysis is rather substantial.

4.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Identifying Russia's foreign policy aims and objectives in Ukraine is not a straightforward task, despite the importance prescribed to the country from both political, military and economic point of view. Strategic documents analysed in Chapter 3 make only occasional specific references to Ukraine; the exception being Maritime Doctrines that consistently referred to the importance of Sevastopol, the principle port on the Black Sea and located in the Crimea. Apropos, Russia's aims and objectives toward Ukraine need to be seen as part of other relevant contexts, such as Russia's positioning in the world, its ambitions in relations to the CIS, and policies towards compatriots abroad as geopolitical constraints among other related contexts. Therefore, a lack of mention of Ukraine is semantic but implied nonetheless;²⁷¹ however, political rhetoric, directly related to Ukraine, more than compensates the scant references to Ukraine in strategic documents. For example, this is evidenced in the fact that not a single Presidential annual press conference has gone by without a considerable amount of time devoted to discussing Ukraine. In comparison, the President has hardly ever mentioned Moldova on such occasions during the temporal bounds of this research.

²⁷¹ This links to the author's assertion in Chapter 3 that when analysing strategic documents, what is not said or what is avoided, is equally important from an analytical point of view.

4.2.1 *Setting aims and objectives*

In the absence of a consistent line of documents that over the years would prescribe Russia's aims and objectives towards Ukraine, the task of the following analysis is to establish whether or not we can talk about well-defined, long-term aims and objectives that guide actions. Moreover, until 2013 Ukraine did not receive a particular reference in the Foreign Policy Concept in the context of Russia's relations with the CIS countries, nor any other context; however, it is safe to assume that aims and objectives associated with CIS and other Russia's pan-regional initiatives would apply to Ukraine as well. It is the specific objectives that are bilateral or unilaterally pointing to Ukraine that is more challenging. Interestingly, Ukraine is not explicitly mentioned in any of the principal Military Doctrines even though it hosted a considerable contingent of Russia's Navy in the Crimea that was of paramount strategic importance for Russia's military position in the South. Its mention is relegated to subordinate documents, in this case, the Maritime Doctrine.

However, a reference to Ukraine is implicit; it should be viewed within the context of the key direction of Russia's foreign policy that consistently remained focused on further development and diversified collaboration with the CIS as a collective. Belarus and Kazakhstan are the only countries in the CIS discourse have been singled out.²⁷² However, it does not reduce the significance of each individual component—as weakening of the integration processes within the CIS is perceived as one of the significant external threats to Russia.²⁷³ Each component is considered of vital importance for the coherence of the CIS as a whole. Russian decision-making towards Ukraine is underpinned by these considerations, particularly because Ukraine is considered one of the essential pieces in the economic union. This may explain why explicit references to Ukraine are seen in the strategic documents in 2013. It is also a direct reaction to the direction of Ukraine's own foreign policy developments and their potential impact on Russia. This was a time when Ukraine was making steady advancements towards an association agreement with the EU. On the other hand, Russia was strengthening its plans for the Eurasian Customs Union; the centrality of

²⁷² This is reflected in all Foreign Policy Concepts and National Security Concepts, particularly since 2008 and 2009 respectively that starts making reference to the Eurasian Economic Community with these two countries. As well as in the National Security Concept 2015 that makes further references to the development of the Treaty Organisation of collective security.

²⁷³ As outlined in the National Security Concept 2000 and consequent editions of the document.

the role of Ukraine was laid the very foundations of the enhanced economic integration.²⁷⁴ According to Putin, Ukraine and Russia's economies are mutually dependent for their existence and should be viewed as parts of a single unit. Ukraine's approximation towards the EU was clearly perceived to be at odds with this view. In response, Foreign Policy Concept of 2013, unlike its predecessors, explicitly recognized the importance of building relationships with Ukraine as a priority partner within the CIS and makes an unequivocal remark about the need to facilitate its participation in extended integration processes [with the CIS].²⁷⁵ This is probably the most explicit reference to Russia's foreign policy objectives towards Ukraine at the level of strategic document examined here. Having recognised advancements in Ukraine's ambitions towards EU and NATO on the one hand and having taken over the Crimea on the other, subsequent documents, for example, the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept, return to a more generic level of reference.²⁷⁶ The rhetoric began to assume a different tone focusing on the military confrontations between the two states.

The importance of Ukraine in Russia's economic initiatives within the CIS and the formation of the Common Economic Area (CEA) in particular, is evident in the amount and frequency of visits by the President of Russia to Ukraine and his meetings with the Ukrainian counterparts, both in Ukraine (for example, Ukraine was the most visited country by Russian President in 2004) and in the context of the CIS meetings. CEA remained central to the agenda. After President Kuchma's departure, Ukraine's commitment remained at a level of rhetoric despite Russia's calls to appoint the representative for the negotiation of the formation of the CEA in later years.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ In fact, it was Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma who was first with his Russian counterpart in 2003 to request their respective governments to start preparations for measures necessary for the formation of the CEA between Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine. (23 December 2003), <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/30029> and (19 September 2003), <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/29386> accessed 19 March 2018.

²⁷⁵ Considering the time frame this remark should be read as direct reference to Russia's led Eurasian economic integration process with aspirations to transform the Eurasian Economic Community into the Eurasian Economic Union.

²⁷⁶ Such as reference to Russia's interests in developing multidimensional relations with its biggest neighbour on the Western side of the border, i.e. Ukraine. However, what worth noting is that the conflict in Ukraine, that was by then actively ongoing for over two years, received only a passing reference as 'an internal Ukrainian conflict'.

²⁷⁷ Russia's President called to appoint the representative of Ukraine for the negotiations on the formation of the CEA. According to Kremlin, Prime-Minister Timoshenko reassured President Putin that she supported the creation of the CEA and suggested to hold a meeting between the governments of both countries to discuss the matter, (19 March 2005), <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/32989> accessed on 25 March 2018

The “Orange revolution” of late 2004 – early 2005, with its clear pro-Western course, figures prominently in political rhetoric, however, it did not encourage mention of Ukraine in strategic documents. This is not unexpected due to the permanent nature of the written word. In 2004 President Putin predicted that it would take 15-25 years for the issue of Ukraine’s membership in the EU to be even considered at the same time emphasising the benefits of the CEA between Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, plans for which were under the development at the same time.²⁷⁸ While this timeframe may seem optimistic, particularly in hindsight, it needs to be seen in the broader context of strategic communications and the range of intended recipients, other CIS members, internal populations in Ukraine and Russia. Despite being dismissive of Ukraine’s EU prospects, Russia’s reaction was rhetorically sharp and followed by stern economic steps, for example, taking away subsidies on gas prices, significantly increasing energy costs on Ukraine making these consistent with EU prices. This caused the first gas crises in January 2006.²⁷⁹

After the “Orange revolution” and with Ukraine’s desire to pursue economic and political integration with the West, particularly the EU, Russia’s desire to keep Ukraine as a core part of its own economic integration project did not diminish. This reality defined the relationships between the two neighbours and influenced their foreign policy decisions. Ukraine’s potentially irreversible move towards an Association Agreement with the EU, Russia’s major competitor in its economic integration plans for the CEA, with Ukraine in it, pushed for more radical steps from Russia. Although the Action Plan signed between Russia and Ukraine on 17 December 2013 had a short life span; it was a manifestation of the vital importance of Ukraine in Russia’s plan for deepening CIS integration. Russia’s offer of \$15 billion loan and reduced gas price in exchange of revoking or indefinitely delaying the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU. Putin described an Action Plan as an act

²⁷⁸ President Putin’s press conference for Russian and foreign journalists, (23 December 2004), online, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22757>, accessed on 15 May 2018.

²⁷⁹ In November 2005 Gazprom proposed raising charges to Ukraine for natural gas from \$50 to \$160 per 1,000 cubic meters. A month later Russia raised the price to \$230 per 1,000 cubic meters. The average price for the EU was \$240; Belarus then paid \$47, Armenia and Georgia and the Baltic States around \$110. Ukraine’s demands to phase it out were rejected and Russia cut supplies to Ukraine (and hence effecting the European consumers as well since Ukraine is also a transit state) on 1 January 2006. The dispute was resolved by reaching an agreement according to which Ukraine would buy gas from a RosUkrEnergo. RosUkrEnergo would buy gas from Gazprom at \$230 per 1,000 cubic meters, and from Turkmenistan for much less. It would then supply gas from both sources to Ukraine, and Ukraine would pay an average of \$95 per 1,000 cubic meters, “Q&A: Ukraine Gas Row”, (4 January 2006), online <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/4569846.stm>, accessed on 30 March 2018.

of help to a family member in a difficult political, economic and social situation: “We are doing it because of our special relationship with Ukraine and because we want to continue our cooperation, which they are also interested in.”²⁸⁰ Ukraine was special to the CIS project and to the Economic and Customs union in particular, without it, the whole enterprise falls within a different category. This explains Russia’s direct interference with Ukraine’s EU association process.

Despite the varying nature of how Russia’s aims and objectives towards Ukraine are defined in strategic documents, throughout this research’s temporal bounds, Russia continued to exercise a purposeful foreign policy towards Ukraine. However, its ability to pursue these aims and objectives through creating favourable context was limited, and the reactive elements become more pronounced. Russia appeared to react to threats and opportunities while attempting to make advances towards its longer-term direction.

Application of RAM would consider Russia’s actions as inexplicable. In contrast, Incrementalism would see them as exploiting available windows of opportunity and would not link them with long-term objectives. As demonstrated above, neither is the case. This is because context plays a substantial role in terms of the pursuit of aims and objectives. When seen in the light of long-term interest and the obtaining environment, what appears reactive produces actions deeply embedded in a strategic outlook. While the obtaining environment does not influence aims and objective, only how they are pursued.

A major shift in context occurred as a result of developments in Ukraine between autumn 2013 to spring 2014. Russia would now have to pursue its long-term interests without the possibility of rapprochement with Ukraine. This implied that its ambitions for CIS, a cornerstone of Russia’s policy, would need serious modification. Furthermore, another geopolitical consequence was the potential loss of Russia’s naval presence in the Crimea, critical to her domination of the Black Sea and access to the Mediterranean and beyond.²⁸¹ In

²⁸⁰ President Putin’s press conference, (19 December 2013), online <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19859> , accessed on 15 May 2018.

²⁸¹ The perceived threat of increased NATO presence in close proximity to Russia’s territorial waters jeopardized Russia’s position because of its increased dependence on the Mediterranean as a result of military presence in the Middle East since the war in Syria. See Articles 53 and 58 of the Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation, op. cit. By 2017 most the Black Sea Fleet’s most modern ships were assigned to the Mediterranean force. Alexandra Kuimova and Semeon Wezeman, “Russia and Black Sea Security”, SIPRI Background Paper, (December 2018), https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-12/bp_1812_black_sea_russia_0.pdf , accessed 5 January 2019.

defence of its core interests, the risk and pay-off justified what was labelled as a rash action in the Crimea. In 2004, following the “Orange revolution”, Russia’s actions were only moderate. This disparity is explained by the risks and pay-off analysis.

From the above discussion, the following conclusions emerge. Russia’s aims and objectives in Ukraine remained long-term and should be viewed within the context of Russia’s pursuit of its regional and global ambitions. This set the strategic direction where even incremental decisions (such as an increase in gas prices) should be seen as contributing factors, moderated with available instruments of power. Fundamental change accrued as a result of Russia’s inability to influence

Ukraine’s choices were in sharp contrast with Russia’s aims and objectives. Therefore, one can conclude that the choices, with due consideration of risks and pay-offs, were moderated by context (example of the takeover of the Crimea). In particular, Principle 1 and 4, the third model appears to offer a more nuanced way of analysing Russia’s approach in setting aims and objectives in its foreign policy in Ukraine.

4.2.2 *Aspired Changes*

Ultimately the aspired change in Russia’s foreign policy towards Ukraine ensured its closer integration within the CIS and maintained the status quo with respect to Ukraine’s non-allied status. In other words, aims and objective guiding Russia’s decision-making in relations to Ukraine in economic and political terms were to get it in the CEA, and later to the Eurasian Economic Union, that would mean keeping it out of the European Union. In military-political terms to keep Russia’s Black Sea Fleet in Ukraine,²⁸² and Ukraine out of NATO (which would be two mutually exclusive notions). These factors remained constant in how Russia defined its foreign policy towards Ukraine. The steps taken were measured against achieving these aspirations, in some instances keeping the status quo (Black Sea Fleet), and in some, pushing for a change (Eurasian Economic Union) and, in others, preventing it (Ukraine’s

²⁸² Partition Treaty on the Status and Condition of the Black Sea Fleet, signed in 1997, the status of Russia’s Black sea fleet in Sevastopol was agreed until 2017 (extended in 2010 for another 25 years hereafter).

The treaty allowed Russia to maintain up to 25,000 troops, 24 artillery systems, 132 armoured vehicles, and 22 military planes on the Crimean Peninsula. Russia paid \$526 million as a compensation for its part of the divided fleet (Russia received 81.7% of the former Soviet Black Sea Fleet while Ukraine received 18.3%) and agreed to a \$97 million price (a year) for leasing Crimean bases. The treaty is no longer available on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia. The treaty of terminated by Russia after the takeover of Crimea on 31 March 2014, full text in the original language is available at:

<https://docs.cntd.ru/document/1902222?marker=64U0IK>, accessed on 16 April 2018.

membership of NATO and the EU). Their actions are closely related and focused towards the same ends in policy terms.

For Russia, Ukraine's potential membership in NATO is probably the major change that had to be prevented; and should be seen both in a context of the position of the Russian Black Fleet and Russia's general antagonism towards NATO's expansion eastwards. This is clearly expressed in President Putin's speech at the Munich Security Policy Conference in 2007 as referred to in the previous chapter and strategic documents. A year earlier, in June 2006 the State Duma of the Russian Federation passed a resolution that addresses Russia's position towards Ukraine's potential membership in NATO explicitly. It said: "Ukraine's accession to the military bloc will lead to very negative consequences for relations between our fraternal peoples."²⁸³ The resolution was passed in the context of Ukraine preparing to hold a joint military manoeuvre with NATO code-named Exercise Sea Breeze in the Black Sea the same month. The exercise was eventually cancelled in the light of external and internal pressures. This was in part due to widespread protests in the Crimea and in part lack of political appetite to pursue the preparations in the midst of political crises following the Parliamentary elections in spring 2006. On its own, the incident could be regarded as an incremental change; however, its meaning cannot be detached from a broader context of Russia's aspirations with regard to Ukraine as discussed above.

Subsequently, Ukraine's application to join the NATO Membership Action Plan in 2008 caused a series of adverse reaction from Russia at the level of political rhetoric but was not reflected in strategic documents. For example, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister said that "... Ukraine's membership in the alliance is a huge mistake which would have most serious consequences for pan-European security."²⁸⁴ A similar view was expressed in July 2017 when Russian President made a statement about the beginning of the discussion with NATO on Membership Action Plan saying that possible [Ukraine's] membership in the Alliance will not boost stability and security in Europe.²⁸⁵ Both statements were accompanied by

²⁸³ Nick Paton, "Russia tells Ukraine to stay out of NATO", *The Guardian*, (8 June 2006), online <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/jun/08/russia.nickpatonwalsh>, accessed on 25 March 2018.

²⁸⁴ "NATO denies Georgia and Ukraine", BBC News, (3 April, 2008), online <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/7328276.stm>, accessed on 22 March 2018.

²⁸⁵ "Kremlin: Possible NATO membership for Ukraine won't boost stability", Reuters News, (10 July 2017), online <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-nato-kremlin/kremlin-possible-nato-membership-for-ukraine-wont-boost-stability-idUSKBN19V1CC> accessed on 20 March 2018.

references to guarantees on NATO non-expansion towards the East (in the early 1990s); thus shifting the onus of consequences on NATO, deflecting flack for any remedial actions that Russia may be forced to take.

As with aims and objectives, aspired changes regarding Ukraine should be considered in the context of Russia's foreign policy aspirations at large. The Black Sea fleet's role in Russia's positioning in the world as strong power was central. The Navy is considered to be a tool for Russia's foreign policy, as outlined in successive Maritime Doctrines. Moreover, in the context of the contemporary geopolitical situation, it is only through the possession of robust Naval Forces, Russia can acquire "leading position in the multipolar world of the 21st century that will allow to implement and protect her national interests."²⁸⁶

Strengthening Russia's positions in the Black Sea should be seen in a broader context of aspiration to strengthen country's role as a maritime power and its position in the "World Ocean", particularly in the context of the diminishing resources, potential of the dry land and the vital role of the control over key lines of communications.²⁸⁷ Thus, the Black (and Azov) Sea Fleet's primary task is considered to be the accelerated reestablishment and comprehensive reinforcement of the strategic position of the Russian Federation.

A special place was devoted to Sevastopol to maintain it as the main base of Russia's Black Sea Fleet and related to the need to perfect the legal base with the fleet's functioning on the territory of Ukraine.²⁸⁸ Notably, this was written ten years before the takeover of the Crimea, when there was a perceived threat to lose Sevastopol as Russia's Black Sea Fleet's main base. Therefore, it is highly likely that scenario building for, and contingency plans to take over the Crimea, may have existed long before the actual takeover and perhaps since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the first stocktaking of Russia's geopolitical interests. Over the years

²⁸⁶ Article 53, Decree of the President of the Russian Federation no. 327 of 20 July 2017 on approval of the principles of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the field of naval activities for the period until 2030, op. cit.

²⁸⁷ This approach, albeit expressed stronger in the current version of the doctrine, was present in the previous version as well. Maritime Doctrine 2004, op. cit.; Decree of the President of the Russian Federation no. 327 of 20 July 2017 on approval of the principles of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the field of naval activities for the period until 2030, op. cit.

²⁸⁸ Maritime Doctrine 2004, op. cit.

Russia was pushing towards the extension of the lease, as was achieved in 2010 with the Kharkiv Pact, and would aim to overcome potential obstacles.²⁸⁹

The factor of military presence of other nations that are not considered friendly in the close proximity to Russia's territorial waters and the mainland, also has a substantial role to play, including the perceived interests of other nations, particularly the U.S. and its NATO allies, to dominate the World Ocean. For example, the Maritime Doctrine notes that the defining factor of relationships with NATO remains unacceptability for the Russian Federation plans of approximating the alliance's military infrastructure.²⁹⁰ In this context one of the biggest aspirations, perhaps, was to move from merely keeping the fraction of Russia's naval force in the Southern flank to securing full control over it, namely ceasing the control over the Crimea to eliminate a probability to a possible negative impact on Russia's position on the peninsula due to Ukraine's internal and external factors, such as change of political power, advancement towards membership in the EU and NATO. President Putin admitted that the fear of Ukrainian entry into NATO had partly motivated his decision to takeover Crimea. Putin explains the decision as follows:

Needless to say, first and foremost we wanted to support the residents of Crimea²⁹¹, but we also followed certain logic: If we don't do anything, Ukraine will be drawn into NATO sometime in the future. We'll be told: "This doesn't concern you," and NATO ships will dock in Sevastopol, the city of Russia's naval glory."

²⁸⁹ Securing a long-term positioning of the fleet in Crimea was an ultimate goal as manifested in the Kharkov Pact signed in April 2010, extending the lease of Crimean naval facilities until 2042 (this was due to expire in 2017). This came on the back and quite possibly in exchange for a multiyear discounted contract to provide Ukraine with Russian natural gas. The significance of this agreement for Russia was also evident in its rapid ratification. Unlike, for example, Friendship Treaty of 1997 that took Russian Parliament almost two years to ratify, the Kharkov agreement was ratified by the parliaments of two countries in six days after signing. Russia terminated the treaty after the takeover of Crimea on 31 March 2014.

²⁹⁰ Maritime Doctrine 2015, op. cit.

²⁹¹ It is not uncommon to hear President referring to Crimea as a decision of its people that Russia simply followed, led by the sense of responsibility for its population, when it has incorporated the peninsula. While this motivation may well have played its role, in addition to other factors, it is used selectively to justify this particular decision and does not represent a pattern. Crimea was not the first or the last other country's territory with the large proportion of Russian population that voted for separation and unification with Russia. A number of such votes took place in Transnistria and every time the results were dismissed by Russia.

Allegedly as early as in 2007, President Putin said that, if Ukraine is to join NATO, it will join the Alliance without the Crimea.²⁹² Although it was not possible to identify the direct source of this claim, the above Putin's quote suggests that such intent did exist, it not the plan and timing for its execution. On a more pragmatic side Putin also admitted that:

*If NATO troops walk in, they will immediately deploy these forces there. Such a move would be geopolitically sensitive for us because, in this case, Russia would be practically ousted from the Black Sea area. We'd be left with just a small coastline of 450 or 600km, and that's it!"*²⁹³

This change would not be acceptable to Russia, and even though in 2014 Ukraine was not closer to the membership in NATO than before (in fact, the goal of "integration into Euro-Atlantic security and NATO membership" was excluded from Ukraine's National Security Concept on 3 June 2010,²⁹⁴ soon after the election of President Yanukovich who took a non-alliance approach), Russia was presented with an opportunity to make a decisive step towards securing its position in the Black Sea (or threat if not taking such a step) despite the new long-term lease (that could also be challenged with the change of power in Kiev).

Another pragmatic consideration (omitted from Putin's above remark), was the fact that the Sevastopol's naval infrastructure built around access to deeper waters. Despite a more modern military infrastructure being built in Russia's Black Sea port of Novorossiysk, that started before the takeover of Crimea costing \$1.4 billion²⁹⁵, and Putin's statement that military base in the Crimea by itself was not of importance (most likely referring to it as an infrastructure rather than its geopolitical and historical meaning, as noted in previous two President's quotes),²⁹⁶ Novorossiysk does not have a natural deep-sea harbour like

²⁹² Interview of Gleb Pavlovsky, op. cit.

²⁹³ "Direct line with Vladimir Putin" (17 April 2014), online <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/7034>, accessed 1 May 2018 Author's remark: The pre-Crimean takeover Russia's Black Sea costal line was 421km. Crimea added another 750km making it a total of about 1200km, which became *de facto* second longest coastline after Turkey. President Putin may have given a range that both excluded and included the territory of Abkhazia that Russia has military presence in with access to the Black Sea. Hristo Stanchev et al, "Determination of the Black Sea area and coastline length using GIS methods and landsat 7 Satellite images", *Geo-Eco Marina*, (17/2011), online, https://www.geocomar.ro/website/publicatii/Nr.17-2011/03_stanchev_BT.pdf, accessed 29 March 2019

²⁹⁴ "Ukraine's parliament voted to abandon NATO ambitions", BBC News, (3 June 2010), online <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10229626>, accessed on 12 April 2018.

²⁹⁵ Damien Sharkov, "Russia to Unveil New \$1.4 Billion Black Sea Fleet Base Near Crimea", *Newsweek*, (28 July 2016), online <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-unveil-new-14-bn-black-sea-fleet-base-four-years-484974>, accessed on 20 February 2018.

²⁹⁶ Oliver Stone, op. cit., pp. 93-94, 232.

Sevastopol and is already a heavily utilised commercial port that limits its military capacity.²⁹⁷ Furthermore, the Crimea dominated access to and from Novorossiysk. Moreover, control of the Black Sea protects Russia's Southern flank while securing its vital economic and energy interests in the Black Sea region.

In addition to the above factors that are predominantly connected to deterring a perceived threat to national interests in geopolitical terms, Ukraine's closer ties with the EU also were perceived as damaging for Russia's economic interests. Plans for the Eurasian Economic Union, established in 2015,²⁹⁸ and stages leading to it (such as the Eurasian Customs Union and the Single Economic Space) remained an important factor influencing Russia's foreign policy decisions in Ukraine. Ukraine's initial role in setting up the CEA ambitions in 2003-2004 has been already discussed. While following the country's political changes, Ukraine did not pursue the membership; both countries maintained a dialogue within the framework set up for the establishment of the Economic Union. 2010 marked the creation of the Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia.²⁹⁹ This should be considered when analysing the broader context of Russia's relations with Ukraine. From the beginning of the Union, Russia was lucid about its interest to see Ukraine as a party to it, due to a variety of factors discussed earlier. Over the years President Putin described Russia and Ukraine's economies as being components of a single unit that cannot exist without each other; with a shared energy and transport systems, with the level of cooperation between enterprises is as such as it does not exist with any other country;³⁰⁰ an argument reflected in Ukraine's prime

²⁹⁷ Kathrin Hille, "Ukrainian Port is key to Russia's naval power", *Financial Times*, (28 February 2014), online <https://www.ft.com/content/1f749b24-9f8c-11e3-b6c7-00144feab7de>, accessed on 14 April 2018.

²⁹⁸ Treaty on establishing the Union was signed on 29 May 2014 and came into force on 1 January 2015. While it is promoted as a platform or structuring relationships with the EU, it is also promoted as an alternative to the EU and has a much broader ambition than the CIS. For example, as a potential alternative to the EU in Western Balkans (Serbia in particular); negotiations on free trade agreements were started with Egypt, India, Singapore and discussions took place with many more countries; free trade agreements were signed with Vietnam in 2015, with Iran in 2018. See, for example, Rilka Dragneva and Kataryna Wolczuk (2017), op. cit.

²⁹⁹ It was in fact Kazakhstan's president Nursultan Nazarbayev who in 1994 proposed to form a Eurasian Union. However, this proposal was not well received then, first and foremost by Russia's president Boris Yeltsin who believed it was too premature bearing too much comparison with the Soviet Union. It was not after the economic crisis in 1998 when Russia's interest in economic integration revived leading to the formation of the Eurasian Economic Community in 2000 eventually leading to the establishment of the Customs Union between the three countries formed on World Trade Organisation's principles. By 2011 Russia expressed an interest to extend the economic union to include areas such as defence, border security and foreign policy – something that Kazakhstan objected to seeing the union as merely economic.

³⁰⁰ President Putin's press conference for Russian and foreign journalists, (23 December 2004), online <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22757>, accessed on 15 May 2018; Oliver Stone, op.cit., pp. 77-79.

minister's remarks following Ukraine's decision not to proceed with signing the Association agreement in late 2013.³⁰¹

Putin explained Russia's reaction to Ukraine's progression towards signing the Association Agreement with the EU as a direct departure and regression from its own plans for the Eurasian Economic Union³⁰² with the detrimental impact on the free trade agreement between Russia and Ukraine and free trade zone in the CIS more broadly. Albeit, Putin himself admitted that "over the past two years, trade levels between the countries had dropped [due to Russia's tariffs]" adding that the range of new agreements [in lieu of the association agreement] would rectify that. Thus, from Russia's point of view, presented by both the President and the Foreign Minister, Russia's position towards the Association Agreement was nothing more than the protection of Russia's economic interests. At the level of rhetoric, it was driven by a desire to secure Russia's market from the potential influx of European custom free goods, first entering Ukraine and then Russia and other free trade countries within the CIS (without reciprocal approach for Russian goods entering EU markets). As President Putin noted in 2015:

*We are not against the association agreement... but we will have to protect our own economy because we have a free trade zone with Ukraine and we will not be able to leave those doors wide open in the present situation if Ukraine opens its doors wide open to the European Union. We will have no choice but to close our doors.*³⁰³

³⁰¹ The then-Ukrainian Prime Minister Mykola Azarov noted: "The Russian government made it clear to us that signing of an agreement means it would be subsequently impossible to discuss trade and economic relations". He added that "Russia's retaliation against Ukraine had entailed almost \$7bn (£4.3bn) in lost exports over the past year. "Ukraine U-turn on Europe pact was agreed with Vladimir Putin. Shaun Walker, "Vladimir Putin offers Ukraine financial incentives to stick with Russia", *The Guardian*, (26 November 2013), online <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/17/ukraine-russia-leaders-talks-kremlin-loan-deal>, accessed on 7 April 2018. It was politically unpopular but economically not a difficult decision to make at that point of time in terms of potential implications for an already suffering Ukrainian economy.

³⁰² While having an observer status in Eurasian Economic Community, Ukraine had not expressed intention to join the Customs union, much to Russia's despair.

³⁰³ See, for example, Vladimir Putin's annual press conference, (17 December 2015), online <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50971> ; "Ukraine-EU trade deal "big threat" to Russia's economy", 26 November 2013, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-25108022> accessed on 12 December 2018
Sergey Lavrov's interview to the journal "National Interest", (29 March 2017), in Sergey Lavrov, op. cit., pp. 516-518.

Another reason for Russia's hostile stance towards Ukraine's approximation towards the EU was the sense of being marginalized from the decision-making point of view in the region that it considers being its zone of interest. Alleged EU position of not willing to discuss, made Russia resort to the alternative, namely ultimatum to Ukraine, that eventually led to the events in late 2013 and early 2014 in Ukraine.³⁰⁴ Both President Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov noted in a number of their public statements and interviews that Russia should have been involved in the discussion on the Association Agreement (with Ukraine but also with Moldova) as it could have led to mutually acceptable arrangements.³⁰⁵ Instead, Russian politicians expressed a regret about being put in front of the fact by the EU and Ukraine (and Moldova) resulting in Russia suspending the agreement on free trade zone between Russia and Ukraine from 1 January 2016 by the Presidential decree. The suspension was triggered by "exceptional circumstances affecting the interests and economic security of Russia and requiring immediate action."³⁰⁶

³⁰⁴ Arguably, it was not solely the fact of Russia's pressure that played a role; it was also a context of already weak Ukrainian economy with the potential for further decline. By the end of 2013 Ukraine was continuously in the state of recession. Between mid-2012 and the first half of 2013 it contracted by 1¼ % reflecting lower demand for Ukrainian exports and falling investments. "Why is Ukraine's economy in such a mess", *The Economist*, 5 March 2014, <https://www.economist.com/blogs/freexchange/2014/03/ukraine-and-russia>, accessed on 6 April 2018.

Ukraine's economy was doing the worst in comparison with other CIS countries as result of succession of poorly managed reforms, over-subsidising energy consumer market, lack of capital investments, large portion of shadow economy (according to IMF at around 50%, one of the biggest in the world). Persistently high level of corruption impacted on further degrading state of the economy, making Ukraine vulnerable to external influences. Thus in 2013 Ukraine was ranked 144 (out of 175), down from 122 in 2004, in terms of level of corruption and score 25 out of 100 (100 being the cleanest) in Corruption Perceptions Index by the Transparency International, online <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2013/results#myAnchor1>. The situation improved slightly in 2017 when Ukraine was ranked 130 (out of 180) and scored 30 out of 100, online <https://www.transparency.org/country/UKR>; https://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/cpi_2004/0, accessed on 7 April 2018.

Therefore, when Ukraine was put in a position of choosing between Russia and the EU, it was not only a decision dictated for political reasons, it was also very much economic. The country was in desperate need for reforms and the IMF hard line on economic measures that needed to be taken would mean unpopular decisions, such as increase in heating and hot water rates for domestic use and an end to farming subsidies. The letter from the IMF arrived just a week before Ukraine's decision to pull out from the signing of the Association agreement and may have also a role to play. It is worth noting that In April 2014 IMF returned to its initial requirement expressed in 2013 to increase consumer prices for natural gas and heating tariffs for consumers by 56 percent and 40 percent respectfully. Josh Cohen, "Ukraine Cannot Afford the IMF's 'Shock Therapy'", *Foreign Policy*, (10 September 2014), <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/09/10/ukraine-cant-afford-the-imfs-shock-therapy/>, accessed 7 April 2018.

³⁰⁵ Oliver Stone, op. cit., 77-78; Sergey Lavrov, op. cit.; Joint Press Conference of President Putin and President Dodon, (17 January 2017), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53744>, accessed on 12 May 2018.

³⁰⁶ Vladimir Putin's annual press conference, (17 December 2015), online <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50971>, accessed on 13 May 2018.

"Russia suspends free-trade agreement with Ukraine", *Moscow Times*, (16 December 2015), online, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/12/16/russia-suspends-free-trade-agreement-with-ukraine-a51261>, accessed on 15 May 2018.

Contestation related to the Association Agreement with the EU³⁰⁷ led to a considerably larger geopolitical gain for Russia that, as a result of the rapid decision amid a political crisis in Ukraine, brought a major change. While arguably Russia's conduct during the takeover of Crimea was predominantly incrementalist, the purposefulness of the decisions and actions in pursuit of a major change featured rational actor approach. Incrementalism provides the analytical framework for analysis only in so far as the process of decision-making in a particular context within a limited period of time is concerned. These limitations preclude from thorough considerations of all possible alternatives and their consequences, but any temporary consideration is not detached from a long-term ambition. Any collateral damage that Russia encountered would be considered part of a flexible approach that President Putin described as an acceptance of giving if this approach eventually leads to a victory.

We see from the above discussion that Russia has a set of key, mutually dependent, aspirations regarding Ukraine, collectively defining the overall 'desired end-state'. With Russia recognizing that it is not in a position to achieve all aspired changes, it can be seen the decisions are being made in a way so as to enable favourable positioning in advancing aims and objectives at an opportune time or when the risk of non-action is far greater than a risk of action. Short-term and long-term gains and occasional losses are directed towards an approximation of aspirations. These actions could not be fully explained through either of the foundational models. They, however, maps on to Principles 1 and 4 of Rational Incrementalism. Ukraine's example brings to fore the primacy of pay-offs underpinning decisions in pursuit of strategic gains; notwithstanding the risk factor. The foundational models and Rational Incrementalism in its conceptual form do not adequately consider this aspect. More data is needed before Rational Incrementalism can be modified to cater for this.

4.3 ACTORS AND DECISION OWNER

As discussed in Chapter 3, Foreign policy decision-making in Russia is the prerogative of the President. While the role of other actors was brought more to the fore over the years, at the same time, the move towards centralisation and accumulation of power by the President has

This decision was the reflection of above-mentioned statements by Putin and Lavrov that Ukraine cannot be in a position to be part of the free-trade zone with the EU and Russia considering their share a not just a boarder but also energy and transport infrastructure.

³⁰⁷ In fact, even after the Association agreement came into force and Russia cancelled the free trade agreement with Ukraine, the trade level between the two countries increased.

also been observed. These are contradictory trajectories. In this regard Ukraine is not only a case to illustrate this but it is also the case where it was taken even further in comparison, for example with Moldova where President remained less prominent and more delegation to the level of the government could be observed, as will be discussed in the next Chapter. In case of Ukraine, the President played not only decisive but also very public role that is evident in high level of intensity of bilateral and multilateral meetings between the two countries.

Key decisions, such as the takeover of the Crimea, remained prerogative of the President. As President Putin revealed in the documentary “Crimea. The Way Home”, he gave an order at the end of a meeting with the heads of the security services (according to the President to discuss the extradition of the deposed Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovych) on 24 February 2014 saying that “we must start working on returning the Crimea to Russia”.³⁰⁸ It took less than four weeks for it to happen, suggesting that contingency plans were already in place. While this was a major decision, even lower-level decisions remained the President's prerogative, for example, the resolution of disputes over gas prices, which should have been the remit of the ministerial level applying the policy. The decision to increase and later to end the supply of gas to Ukraine on the face of it rested with Gazprom, a state-owned company for commercial reasons. The subsequent actions, however, were led directly by Kremlin, demonstrating that politics and economics are closely intertwined, leading to the top of the decision-making chain. President's close involvement in matters concerning Russia-Ukrainian relationships in the energy sector is reflected in the open letter of President Medvedev to the outgoing president Yushchenko³⁰⁹ on 11 August 2009:³¹⁰

We have the impression that Kiev consistently seeks to break traditional economic ties with Russia, first and foremost in the energy sector ... As a result, the stable use by our countries of what is effectively a single gas

³⁰⁸ Motivating the decision by willingness to protect the population of Crimea from “ultra-right nationalists” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t42-71RpRgI> viewed on 15 July 2018, since then the content has been removed as deemed inappropriate or offensive by some audiences.

³⁰⁹ Whose public support slumped from a high of 52 per cent in 2004 to below 3 per cent at a time of writing. With Ukrainian presidential elections scheduled in January 2010, President Medvedev clearly knew he was not addressing the future Ukrainian president. Perhaps in part it was an opportunity to give a public slap to the outgoing president knowing that his popularity among Ukrainians was very low.

³¹⁰ Originally published on www.kremlin.ru but not available any longer.

pipeline³¹¹ network serving the energy security of Russia, Ukraine and many European states has been put at risk. ...

The supreme Ukrainian leadership is negotiating the supplies of gas — Russian gas — with the European Union, bypassing Russia, and is signing a document contradicting the Russian-Ukrainian deals of January [2009] (struck by Prime Minister Julia Timoshenko on restoring gas supplies).

Extending the narrative of the letter to a more general context and in a rather personal note, Medvedev noted:

What we have seen throughout the years of your presidency cannot be viewed as anything other than a departure by the Ukrainian side from the principles of friendship and partnership with Russia.

And as a nod towards the next president, he added that:

Russia hopes a new Ukrainian leadership will be ready to build ties between our countries, ties that will indeed answer the true hopes of our peoples in the interests of strengthening European security.

Such hopes were soon realised with the election of President Yanukovich whose plans were “to revive normal, good neighbourly, equal and mutually beneficial relations with our strategic partner Russia.”³¹² This was soon manifested in the signing of Kharkiv Pact in April 2010 that extended the lease on Crimean naval facilities to Russia’s Black Sea fleet until 2043, made in exchange for a multiyear discounted contract to provide Ukraine with Russian natural gas. The importance of the Kharkiv Pact was also manifested in the fact that it took just six days for the parliaments of both countries to ratify it, while, for example, the Russian Duma took almost two years to ratify the Friendship Treaty of 1997. At the time of agreeing on the extension of the lease, Yanukovich and his administration kept making progress on the Association Agreement with the EU as a reflection of his balanced foreign policy, with the focus on EU integration and improving relations with Russia, viewing Ukraine as a bridge between Europe and Russia. This was reflected in President Putin’s rhetoric, as will be

³¹¹ Note that Russia does not own the pipeline infrastructure crossing Ukrainian territory.

³¹² UPDATE 3 – Russia’s Medvedev wades into Ukraine polls, Reuters, (11 August 2009), <https://www.reuters.com/article/russia-medvedev-ukraine/update-3-russias-medvedev-wades-into-ukraine-polls-idUSLB59146620090811?pageNumber=1&virtualBrandChannel=0>, accessed on 16 July 2018.

discussed later. Worth noting that Yanukovych's first foreign trip after the inauguration was to Brussels followed by Moscow.³¹³

As noted in Chapter 2, the more recent strategic document made more explicit references to the role of the civil society in addressing the matters of international concern in pursuit of enhancing the effectiveness of Russia's foreign policy. The activities of these organisations, particularly those with affiliations with the government, could be a useful indicator of their role as instruments of policies and strategic communications. For example, the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund discussed earlier, organized the international conference in April 2018 on "The Historic connections between Russia and Serbia" in Luhansk. Apart from the disconnect between the theme and the location, noticeably, there was no reference to Ukraine but to the Luhansk People's Republic (the Ministry of education and science) – one of the organisers of the conference.³¹⁴ Considering the funding body, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is unlikely that an event of this nature could be organised without ministerial, possibly presidential consent. Besides, the symbolic nature of the event, the venue is clearly strategic communication.

Another important aspect in the context of actors is delegation, devolution of decision-making and the implementation of decisions. It is important to observe as to what extent the decision owner is directly involved in the subsequent implementation of these decisions; or is there a degree of devolution visible? On 25 November 2018, Russia's Coast Guard of the Border Service (that structurally sits under the FSB) opened fire against Ukrainian military vessels amid alleged violation of Russia's territorial waters in the Kerch Strait. This is an interesting example as it brings in another group of actors mentioned in the previous chapter, namely security services. The incident raises the question on proportionality of Russia's response, even if the fact of violation took place and the vessels were not in the shared waters

³¹³ Natural gas plays a particular role in this status. After Yanukovych's first meeting with the then President of the European Commission Emmanuel Barroso he said that "we also discussed natural gas deliveries to European consumers. To make that goal come true, we will enhance our relations with Russia... and the modernisation of our (gas pipeline) infrastructure". "Victor Yanukovych, "Ukraine's Yanukovych: EU ties a key priority, (1 March 2010), online <https://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/ukraine-politics/ukraines-yanukovych-eu-ties-a-key-priority-60720.html>, accessed on 16 July 2018.

³¹⁴ "International Conference 'Historic ties between Russia and Serbia' will be held in Luhansk", (30 March 2018), online <https://gorchakovfund.ru/news/view/v-luganske-proydet-mezhdunarodnaya-konferentsiya-istoricheskie-svyazi-rossii-i-serbii-prinimayutsya-/>, accessed on 9 May 2018.

as Ukraine claims.³¹⁵ The incident should be seen in a broader context, not just strained relationships between Ukraine and Russia, but also between Russia and the West. While this appears to be a local decision, such disparate events are tied into a larger narrative. The firing can be explained in terms of liberty of action granted by a higher competent authority, to exploit a strategic opportunity through tactical actions. It also demonstrates Russia's border relations with Ukraine and its intentions to be the dominant power in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. Although it is implausible that the two small vessels of the Ukrainian Navy were considered to represent a threat, the seizure had a significant symbolic meaning with a direct indication of reinforcing the claim to the full control over the Kerch Strait. Drawing parallels with the takeover of the Crimea, and the likely high international resonance further supports the earlier conclusion that the decision was taken elsewhere. It is more likely that the coast guard was the applied instrument of foreign policy on this occasion. The incident itself did not make a significant change and can be considered an incremental decision. However, if seen in a broader context of the strategic role of control over the Azov and Black sea, the nature of the incident can be seen in a different light and link directly to a more significant change that Russia aspires to achieve and the role of ceasing maritime control in it. Furthermore, following the takeover of the Crimea, Russia built a bridge across the Strait; the height of the bridge has been kept low to serve as an obstacle for the larger commercial and naval vessels to enter the Sea of Azov;³¹⁶ further reinforcing the conclusion that the decision carried a strategic dimension.

³¹⁵ Incident was reflected widely in the media, presenting different 'facts' and interpretations, some more credible than others and only some presenting potential gains from the situation for both sides. Indeed, surprising was the sharpness of Ukraine's reaction whose parliament voted in favour of President Poroshenko's proposed declaration of martial law in Ukraine-Russia's border territories (albeit reducing the term from the proposed 60 to 30 days), four months before the Presidential elections in Ukraine. Oliver Carroll, "Ukraine votes to introduce martial law across ten regions after clash with Russia", *Independent*, 26 November 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/ukraine-russia-martial-law-un-security-council-regions-putin-poroshenko-ships-vessels-a8653276.html>, accessed on 29 May 2018. No such measures have been introduced during the four year conflict in Eastern Ukraine that took over 10,000 lives; in fact, no such measures took place since the end of World War II.

Russia's internal interest are also often cited, first and foremost an opportunity to boost President Putin's rating that has fallen by about 20 per cent since the takeover of Crimea. See, for example, "Explaining the naval clash between Russia and Ukraine", *The Economist*, (1 December 2018), online <https://www.economist.com/europe/2018/12/01/explaining-the-naval-clash-between-russia-and-ukraine>, accessed on 30 May 2018.

³¹⁶ Note negative economic impact on Ukraine's commercial ports of Mariupol and Berdyansk after the construction of the bridge. It is worth adding that the idea of the bridge was not new and plans existed and discussed between Ukraine and Russia long before the takeover of Crimea.

While the engagement of a variety of actors could be observed, decision-making over Ukraine remained very much in the hands of the President who set the main directions and retained control over implementation. This is another example of the high level of direct engagement of the President in affairs regarding Ukraine. Even during the years when there was limited direct contact with Ukrainian counterparts, Russian communications still emanated from the highest level, the President, such as Medvedev's letter, cited above. This centralisation links to one of the key features of the RAM and the proposed Rational Incremental Model (Principle 1), but does not fit Lindblom's incrementalist approach.

4.3.1 *The role of agency*

The discussion on the role of agency needs to determine to what extent a particular individual based on their values, beliefs, personal judgements, and motivations influence decision. Agency plays a particularly prominent role in unitarian models and diminishes in pluralistic models; due to its association with compromise-based decision-making. The public nature of foreign policy decisions underpinned by the context set in the official documents and public statements, can offer insight to the role of agency within actors.

President Putin's inclination towards an international system based on balance of power was discussed in Chapter 3. His vision for Ukraine was articulated in his speech to the 70th session of the UN General Assembly on 28 September 2015. He described Ukraine as a vital link in creating a common space of security and economic cooperation, both in Europe and in Eurasia.³¹⁷ This echoes John Mearsheimer's plea for the creation of a Ukrainian buffer zone as part of a restoration of Europe's balance of power after the end of the Cold War.³¹⁸ The view also reflects President Yanukovich's position to look both East and West as the way forward for Ukraine. Putin's implies that Ukraine should either be a neutral player or have equal stakes in both in Russian and Western structures. However, when applying the logic of East-West to the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, Putin contradicts this position, linking NATO expansion to the East with the escalation of conflict in Ukraine:

³¹⁷ President Putin's address at the 70th session of the General Assembly of the UN, New York, (28 September 2015), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50385>, accessed on 15 April 2018

³¹⁸ John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault: the liberal delusions that provoked Putin", *Foreign Affairs* 93: 5, (Sept/Oct 2014), pp. 77–89. Stephen F. Larrabee foresaw this return of geopolitics in 'Russia, Ukraine, and central Europe: the return of geopolitics', *Journal of International Affairs* 63: 2, (Spring– Summer 2010), pp. 33–52.

*The post-Soviet states were forced to face a false choice between joining the West and carrying on with the East. Sooner or later, this logic of confrontation was bound to spark off a major geopolitical crisis. And that is exactly what happened in Ukraine... This has triggered a civil war.*³¹⁹

Actions taken by Russia to prevent Ukraine from institutionalizing its links with the EU further testify that equal stakes towards both directions was not a real option and Ukraine needed to choose one or the other.

President Putin's position in the light of discussions in Chapter 3, demonstrates that his views on the collapse of the Soviet Union strongly influence his position on Ukraine. Arguably, the structuration of the problem flows from a personal position deeply held by Putin, suggesting structures were driven by agency. Ukraine remained referred to as an indivisible part of 'fraternal' Russia's sphere of interest.³²⁰ Following President Putin's logic, what was expected from Ukraine by Russia can hardly be described as being 'a common space' but rather a significant player that Russia would like to see in its zone of influence and part of Russian-led economic and political structures. In the case of NATO, Ukraine's membership was unacceptable, the line towed by President Yanukovich. Both in Russia and Ukraine, the role of agency becomes prominent bypassing the constraining influence of structures. These decisions by and large are driven as much by national interests as they are by these leaders' private positions on the issues.

Throughout the years, one could observe a noticeable impact of personal dynamics in relationships between the leaders of Russia and Ukraine. The inter-personal dynamics impacted on the choices of approaches, dialogue or alienation. For example, Putin never met with any other Ukrainian president as much and as frequently than with Leonid Kuchma. In

³¹⁹ President Putin's address at the 70th session of the UN General Assembly, op. cit.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov echoes this view of "a false choice" some European countries are forced to face by Brussels (in the context of discussion on Serbia) – to either join Europe or Russia. Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions on the results of Russian diplomacy in 2016, (17 January 2017), online http://www.mid.ru/en/press_service/minister_speeches/-/asset_publisher/7OvQR5KJWVmR/content/id/2599609?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_7OvQR5KJWVmR&_101_INSTANCE_7OvQR5KJWVmR_languageId=ru_RU, accessed on 1 April 2018.

The same was repeated during Lavrov's press conference on Russian diplomacy in 2018, Moscow, (15 January 2019), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J5EKSoaNpoo>, accessed on 25 March 2019.

³²⁰ See, for example, "Putin casts doubt on return of election", *The Independent*, (3 December 2004), online <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/putin-casts-doubt-on-rerun-of-election-675111.html>, accessed on 3 June 2018.

May 2003 Putin stayed for six days in the Crimea following Kuchma's invitation. Until the turning point after the Orange revolution, Ukraine remained on top as the most visited country by a Russian president. In 2004 Putin visited Ukraine to meet with his counterpart at least eight times while he visited the country only once in 2005 and in 2006. Subsequently, he did not visit Ukraine until the end of his first round of presidency. The intensity of interactions in 2004 (and 2003) could be seen as an attempt to constrain Ukrainian President's declared interest for Ukraine to join NATO in 2002, albeit Putin would have certainly known that the relationships between Ukraine and NATO were under strain.³²¹ Following the Orange Revolution, a decision was made not to refer to negative rhetoric and continue the intense level of visits and meetings, despite Ukraine's expressed desire to expand relationships with the Alliance and aspiration to seek membership in it. The lack of rapport between President Victor Yushchenko and his Russian counterparts is reflected in the low level of intensity of interaction grounded in opposing views on the course of events leading to Yushchenko coming to power. It was Ukraine's European ambitions, but its perceived distancing from Russia that became the main concern. The former, in fact, remained continuous from previous administrations.³²² This was evident in a rather personal and yet public note Medvedev sent to Yushchenko in August 2009 that was mentioned earlier in this Chapter. Medvedev would be aware that his letter would be regarded with sympathy by many Ukrainians who despite two instances of gas supply crises in 2006 and 2009 and conflict in Georgia maintained a positive outlook about Russia viewing it as a more preferred ally than the EU and NATO.³²³ In the light of these attitudes, Medvedev's message is not

³²¹ However, by then Ukrainian government, and President in particular, have discredited itself in NATO's eyes by alleged transfer of a Ukrainian Kolchuga early-warning aircraft detection system to Iraq that became public in 2002. Stephen Castle, "Kuchma says he will attend summit in defiance of NATO", *Independent*, (18 November 2002), online <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/kuchma-says-he-will-attend-summit-in-defiance-of-nato-128228.html>, accessed on 12 September 2018. In September 2003 Ukrainian forces joined US-led coalition in Iraq that was widely regarded as Ukraine's attempt to restore relationship with the alliance and western governments. It was the third-largest Coalition forces contingent, with about 1700 soldiers from 2003-2005. Rodney Foliente, "Ukrainians complete mission in Iraq", (11 December 2008), online https://www.army.mil/article/15056/ukrainians_complete_mission_in_iraq, accessed on 12 September 2018.

³²² Which was at odds with public opinion in Ukraine at a time. A Gallup poll conducted in September 2009 revealed that 46% of respondents in Ukraine considered that Russia had a positive influence in Ukraine (25% opposed this view). 58% believed that Russia would remain a dependable ally that Ukraine could continue rely on. Erin Carriere-Kretschmer, "Ukraine's National Election – a Problem of Democracy?", (14 January 2010), <http://www.pewglobal.org/2010/01/14/ukraines-national-election-a-problem-of-democracy/>, accessed on 15 April 2018.

³²³ According to another poll conducted in 2009, over 40% of Ukrainians preferred Collective Security Treaty Organisation led by Russia, while only 12.5% favoured NATO; 36% respondents preferred Ukraine to stay neutral. Neli Esipova and Cynthia English, "Ukrainians May Oppose President's Pro-Western Goals", (1

likely to be viewed by the public as interference but rather as a personal appeal speaking directly in support of public moods.³²⁴ Public moods in relation to the rival in the region were closely followed and brought up to a public display as President Putin did a year earlier when he noted that most Ukrainians opposed joining NATO.³²⁵

The context of NATO expansion provides another aspect for examining the role of agency. In 2008, as Ukraine moved towards signing the Membership Action Plan with NATO, Russia's position towards NATO's further enlargement also moved towards active opposition. This was far more profound than what was witnessed with regards to the Baltic States' membership. From the geopolitical point of view, Russia's concern could be understood through its continuous fear of encirclement and potential vulnerability from the South and NATO bordering Russia in the West already. NATO plans for continuous enlargement were believed to have a direct threat:

*I think it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernization of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended?*³²⁶

October 2008), <http://news.gallup.com/poll/110848/Ukrainians-May-Oppose-Presidents-ProWestern-Goals.aspx> accessed on 15 May 2018.

According to another poll conducted in 2008 32% of respondents in a Gallup poll a year earlier expressed their believes that it was more important for Ukraine to have a close relation with Russia even if it might hurt relations with the EU; while 45% believed that it was important for Ukraine to have close relations with both Russia and the EU. In addition, the performance of Russia's leadership was approved by 59% of respondents in Ukraine, by far more than the next in the list Germany. It was a significant increase from 45% in 2006. The poll was conducted a few months before Russia-Georgia's conflict, it is interesting to observe that Georgia's leadership was approved by 18% of respondents, behind UK, US and other Western countries. Neli Esipova and Cynthia English, "Ukrainians May Oppose President's Pro-Western Goals", 1 October 2008, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/110848/Ukrainians-May-Oppose-Presidents-ProWestern-Goals.aspx> accessed on 15 May 2018.

³²⁴ The moods did change over time with the approval rating of Russia's leadership declining even before the escalation of conflict in 2014. Thus, in mid-2013 it was just over 42% on average, with lower and higher level in the West and the East of the country respectively. This was still slightly higher than the approval rating of the EU leadership the level of which was significantly pushed down by low number in the East of the country. Julie Ray and Neli Esipova, "Before Crisis, Ukrainians More Likely to See NATO as a Threat", 14 March 2014, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/167927/crisis-ukrainians-likely-nato-threat.aspx>, accessed on 16 May 2018.

³²⁵ Vladimir Putin's annual press conference, (14 February 2008), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24835>, accessed on 30 April 2018.

³²⁶ President Putin's address at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, op. cit.

It is not only the enlargement of NATO *per se* that makes Russia uncomfortable but the fact that NATO's military infrastructure, argues Putin, "expanding and approaching our borders." He further adds that "this cannot but cause concern for us, and we have mentioned it many times publicly."³²⁷ Apropos, Russia's position on Ukraine's expressed interest in joining NATO has to be viewed in the context of Russia's attitude to the expansion of the Alliance in general (structural position) and its potential move to the zone of vital Russian interests in particular. As noted by Andrew Wolff, the Russian government viewed the situation in Ukraine through "a lens of repeated western betrayal, creeping NATO encroachment and disrespect for its security concerns".³²⁸

The case of Crimea is perhaps the most vivid manifestation of complex relationships between national interests, objectives and issues associated with agency such as personal beliefs and attitudes. President Putin noted that "In people's hearts and minds, the Crimea has always been an integral part of Russia"³²⁹ This speech to Russian State Duma on 18 March 2014, brings in a historical and emotional appeal to the audience. The line between beliefs and simple justification becomes blurred, and yet it was still considered essential to explain the actions on moral, historical, cultural, legal and legitimate grounds.

The Crimean Peninsula has always been a contested issue in Russia's relations with Ukraine. The sentiments remained high that Crimea is part of Russia and should never have been handed over to Ukraine in 1954. As discussed earlier, this became important after the break-up of the Soviet Union. Numerous times, opinions expressed from different corners of Russia's political spectrum would urge for what was often referred to as a historical injustice to be repelled.³³⁰ Among those sounding their views was the then Mayor of St Petersburg,

³²⁷ Transcript of St Petersburg International Economic Forum plenary meeting, (2 June 2017), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/54667>, accessed on 4 April 2018.

³²⁸ Andrew T. Wolff, "The Future of NATO Enlargement after the Ukraine crises", in *International Affairs* 91: 5, (2015), p. 1103.

³²⁹ Address by the President of the Russian Federation, (18 March 2014), online <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>, accessed on 15 December 2017.

³³⁰ For example, in January 1992 the Foreign Ministry and Parliament of Russia condemned the transfer of Crimea to Ukraine and there further attempts in the Parliament to challenge the legality of handover. Among those urging to reconsider 1954 decision by Politburo suggested by Khrushchev, were former vice President Rutskoi, politicians Zhirinovskiy and Baburin, former Foreign Minister Kozyrev.

For references see, for example: *Crimea: Dynamic, Challenges and Prospects*, Maria Drohobycky (ed.), (Rowman&Littlefield Publishers INC.), 1995, xxvii; Roman Solchanyk, "Crimea: Between Ukraine and Russia", in *Crimea: Dynamic, Challenges and Prospects*, Maria Drohobycky (ed.), op. cit., 6; John Burke and Svetlana Panina-Burke, "The Reunification of Crimea and the Citi of Sevastopol with the Russia Federation",

Anatoly Sobchak, who incidentally had Vladimir Putin as his deputy at the time and also widely considered to be Putin's mentor, cited historical reasons, arguing that Crimea never belonged to Ukraine. Much later President Putin would echo this view:

This [Crimea operation] was not simply about land, of which we have no shortage as it is ... The issue at stake was the sources of our history³³¹, our spirituality and our statehood—the things that make us a single people and a single, united nation.³³²

Russia's efforts to justify its actions in the Crimea through historical, cultural, linguistic, legal interpretive, strategic and operational grounds demonstrates the desire for these actions to be understood; if not accepted. The basis of dissonance theory lies in the postulate that people seek strong justification for their behaviour to reassure themselves that they have made the best choice having considered all possible alternatives and that their actions are commendable and consistent.³³³ "Ironically, then", as Jarvis notes, "the drive to see one's self as a better, more rational decision-maker will reduce the person's rationality by impairing his ability to utilize information and examine his values."³³⁴ This could be interpreted as values

Russian Law Journal, Volume V, Issue 3, (2017), 35; Viacheslav Pikhovshek, "Will the Crimean Crisis Explode" in *Crimea: Dynamic, Challenges and Prospects*, Maria Drohobycky (ed.), op. cit., p. 57.

³³¹ But President Putin is also known for making incorrect references to history. Thus, in justifying the non-compliance with the Budapest Memorandum signed in December 1994 (officially known as Memorandum on Security Assurances in Connection with Ukraine's Accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons) that among other things recognised territorial integrity of Ukraine, Putin noted that the change of power in Ukraine was illegal and Yanukovich had been removed in 'an anti-constitutional coup' (echoed in Sergey Lavrov's address to the UN General Assembly on 23 September 2016, online, <https://m.rusemb.org.uk/article/foreign-minister-sergey-lavrov-delivered-a-speech-at-un-general-assembly-23-september-2016>) or a 'revolution'. If it was a revolution, Putin said, that would mean the emergence of 'a new state ... in this territory ... a new state with which we have signed no binding agreements. He then draw a parallel with what happened "when the Russian Empire collapsed after the 1917 revolution and a new state emerged" Vladimir Putin answered journalists' questions on the situation in Ukraine, (4 March 2014), online <http://eng.kremlin.ru/transcripts/6763>, accessed on 17 March 2017. Arguably this statement was no correct as "The revolutionary government that took power from the Russian Empire in March 1917 proclaimed, 'that it would respect strictly all engagements entered into by the government of the Czar before the revolution'. David S. Yost, "The Budapest Memorandum and Russia's intervention in Ukraine", in *International Affairs* 91: 3 (2015), 505-538. Soviets, however, deposed the initial revolutionary government and proceeded in late 1917 and early 1918 to declare 'annulled' many treaty obligations assumed by the czarist government and the first revolutionary government.

³³² Putin quoted in David M. Herszenhorn, "A year after seizing Crimea, Putin celebrates as Ukraine seethes", *New York Times*, 18 March 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/19/world/europe/a-year-after-seizing-crimea-putin-celebrates-as-ukraine-seethes.html?_r=0, accessed 22 March 2017.

Putin gave similar remarks in his address at the 70th session of the UN General Assembly consistently referencing to 'returning of Crimea' in support of arguments of rectifying historic omission.

³³³ R. Jarvis, op. cit., pp. 382-406.

³³⁴ Ibid, p. 406.

having a de-rationalising impact on the ability of a decision-maker to make a rational choice and consider all alternatives, including those that fallout from the scope of their set of values. This postulate of dissonance theory has strongly manifested itself in the *post-factum* behaviour of Russia's political leadership; the author argues that values and beliefs continue playing a key role at the decision-making stage, particularly in a unitarian model such as Russia.

Putin, in his interviews and public rhetoric, is not unknown to utter strong personal views that are often reflected in policy decisions as well. In an interview with Oliver Stone, he said: "No one can be cornered; put in a position of no exit".³³⁵ On the situation in the Crimea in early 2014, he echoes this again stating, "...indeed, we were pushed to some kind of limit. We had to react."³³⁶ His reference to what seemed to matter most for Russia, i.e. access to the sea and the Black Sea fleet, provides more insight into his personal convictions. Putin noted in his speech to Russian State Duma on 18 March 2014, "If you push the spring too hard at some point it will spring back. You always need to remember this."³³⁷

Measuring the influence of agency on decision-making can be challenging. Allison and Zelikow did not include deliberations on the role of agency in their model. As discussed earlier, this in part is due to the mathematical origins of their model developed at the heights of the structural discourse. Due to the hierarchical nature of decision-making, there was no reason to believe that there were ever contestations among beliefs as those can be attributed to the central decision-maker. Arguably, efforts, discussed in structural arguments above were a matter of necessity and not an effort to create pluralism. In this regard, Bass notes in his critique of agency and structure that:

Power holders want to retain their power, so the power distribution... remains stable over time.... But temporary downward shifts in power become necessary as leaders' positions enlarge. Increasingly, leaders need to rely on

³³⁵ Oliver Stone, op. cit., p. 29.

³³⁶ Oliver Stone, op. cit., pp. 10, 291.

³³⁷ President Putin's news conference, (19 December 2013), online <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19859>, accessed on 14 January 2018.

*subordinate staff as intermediaries, deputies, and surrogates. Kings had to share their power in distant colonies with viceroys.*³³⁸

Applying the above to Russia's case, it is important to recognize that, while some power may have been actually shared, a degree of necessity also drives the distribution of decision roles when running large and complex government machinery. The process of centralization of power, which has been well evidenced, it would appear that the first part of Bass' argument applies in Russia's case. Power to act is vital for agency. Taking Putin's case as the shaper of contemporary Russia's foreign policy, what we see is aspects of his deep convictions from his earlier political career brought into action once he accumulates sufficient power to cause strategic changes towards the aspirations discussed in this Chapter. Putin in his years as president has provided meaning to Russia's national ambitions by addressing issues like 'why this direction', 'what needs to be done to get there', 'what needs to be protected, if we are ever to get there', and last but not least, the 'how' by way of which instruments of national power are applied in a particular context, to what extent and to what cost. The above, together with carrying of risk in decisions and their consequences, suggests that once the power consolidation process was over, Putin exercised a high level of agency in steering Russian politics in general and foreign policy in particular.

The earlier discussion in this section on centralization of power in decision-making suggests closeness with the RAM, however in the light of the above it is observed that the agency component of Principle 2 of the Rational Incrementalism stands; this is because the role of agency appears to prevail, as opposed to balance, structure.

4.4 APPLICATION OF MEANS – IMPLEMENTATION

This part of the analysis is concerned with the final stages of the decision-making, namely the extent to which consideration of all available alternatives and their consequences plays a role. President Putin's assigned importance to the ability 'to feel the moment... to strive for the best results.'³³⁹ While this may be construed as an opportunist approach, it refers to the broader context and the obtaining environment in the light of the discussion so far. This points towards strategic 'contextual opportunism'. The environmental factors then inform

³³⁸ Bernard M. Bass, *The Bass Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Application* (Free Press, New York, 2008), 293.

³³⁹ Vladimir Putin. Personal website, online <http://eng.putin.kremlin.ru/interests>, accessed on 3 September 2018.

means by way of constraining or enabling certain instruments of national power. This strategic contextual opportunism represents a considerable departure from the prescriptions of the RAM and the absence of a long-term strategic context in the case of Incrementalism.

Rynnig, when discussing Russia's actions in Crimea, for example, defined it as a "foreign policy of surprise and intimidation".³⁴⁰ This definition derives from the inability to see Russia as a strategic actor, but rather an incrementalist.³⁴¹ But seen through the prism of contextual opportunism within long-term objectives, neither fits the RAM nor Incrementalism. In the Crimean case, Russia demonstrates readiness to strike when the opportune moment arrives or at the point of no return. In other words, the application of means is not an act of spontaneous thinking and reckless decisions, it was a moment of either seizing the opportunity or arriving to a moment of desperation or a combination of both. "Putin as improviser" discourse in relation to Crimea is only valid when discussing it in the context of seizing the opportunity moment but not in the context of the lack of strategy. The takeover's operational part may well have not been planned long in advance, as Putin himself noted, and could well have been an improvised gambit.³⁴² However, it is doubtful that there was a lack of strategic considerations and the lack of a scenario within such a takeover could become possible with a quick turnover.

This lack of anticipation of Russia's action in Ukraine in early 2014 takes us back to Anthony Dawn's conclusion, mentioned earlier, revealing why purely RAM is difficult. Dawn argues that knowing the end goal of a decision-maker, an analyst can predict their actions by calculating the most reasonable way for him/her to achieve those goals. It assumes that a rational approach to decision-making is automatically taken to the stage of application. The failure of analysis to predict Crimea demonstrates the point that such conclusion is not applicable to all circumstances, at least not in case of Russia's approach to Ukraine or possibly, and more significantly, towards preserving its core interests. As a result, the utility

³⁴⁰ Sten Rynnig, "The false promise of continental concert: Russia, the West and the necessary balance of power", *International Affairs* 91: 3, (2015), p. 544.

³⁴¹ Apparently not a single analyst in the US or Europe could anticipate Russia's annexation of Crimea prior to it happening. Gabriel Collins, J.D. "Russia's Use of the "Energy Weapon" in Europe", (18 July 2017), https://www.bakerinstitute.org/media/files/files/ac785a2b/BI-Brief-071817-CES_Russia1.pdf, accessed on 30 July 2018.

³⁴² Daniel Treisman's reference to his conversation with President Putin during a reception in Sochi in October 2015, Daniel Treisman, "Why Putin Took Crimea. The Gambler in the Kremlin", *Foreign Affairs*, (May/June 2016), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2016-04-18/why-russian-president-putin-took-crimea-from-ukraine>, accessed on 20 February 2018.

of the foundational models in analysing Russia's approach to decision-making is limiting and may lead the analysis to incorrect conclusions and outlooks, as is seen in the case of the analysts above.

According to Andrew Monaghan, towards the end of the second term of Putin's first round of presidency, there was a realization in Moscow that Russia cannot afford a confrontation with the West.³⁴³ That might have been correct for the period; however, the situation changed dramatically by the end of 2013 when the perceived potential loss was too high not to risk possible confrontation with the West. Besides, the relationships had deteriorated to a relatively low level allowing rhetoric comparisons with the relations during the 'Cold War' albeit without predicting another one.³⁴⁴ It would be naïve on Russia's part not to expect any adverse reaction from the international community, particularly from the EU and NATO member states. The decision to seize the opportunity in Crimea was much more than any potential prospects of sanctions that perhaps were regarded as possible temporary measures, particularly with Russia by this point in time having created dependencies in Western Europe on its energy and other resources. This also points to the long-term view taken by Russia; for example, the synergy between Gazprom's decisions and foreign policy, creating incentives for consumers in the West. The small actions and inactions accumulated over time towards a gain that was considered to be much more significant and long-lasting as far as Russia's strategic interests are concerned.

Conversations within Russia following the takeover, for example, Alexei Pushkov, head of the foreign affairs committee of the State Duma, suggests Russia had considered possible outcomes. He tweeted after the referendum in Crimea: "Economic sanctions make sense when their goal is to prevent something. The reunification with Crimea is already a fact.

³⁴³ Andrew Monaghan, "'An enemy at the gates' or 'from victory to victory'? Russian foreign policy", *International Affairs* 84: 4, (2008), p. 718.

³⁴⁴ See, for example, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's address at the ministerial panel discussion during the Security Conference in Munich on 13 February 2016. Lavrov said: "Today, the level of interactions between Euro-Atlantic organisations and Russia in certain spheres is even lower than during the Cold War period..." http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2086892; while at the same time adding that he does not believe that the Cold War has started as he mentioned during the interview for the journal "National Interest" on 29 March 2017, Op. cit. Sergey Lavrov, *We are Polite People*, 2018, p.523. Moreover, in another article Lavrov noted on 1 on that Russia is open to the widest possible cooperation with its Western partners, see Sergey Lavrov "Russia's Foreign Policy in a Historical Perspective, 30 March 2016, <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Russias-Foreign-Policy-in-a-Historical-Perspective-18067>, accessed on 5 January 2019.

There's nothing they can prevent. What's the point?"³⁴⁵ Indeed, as Robert Jarvis noted, "when a policy has high costs, decision-makers are likely to believe they have accomplished something worthy of their sacrifice."³⁴⁶ We see here a willingness to act in pursuit of preserving core interests that appeared to be under imminent threat with the pace at which Ukraine was advancing westwards. While the author argues that Russia has probably started developing contingencies for Crimea from as early as 1990, which may have included take-over, it is very difficult evident this from available data. However, it does not preclude a possibility of such scenarios already being in existence (with potential losses calculated) waiting for the right moment to strike.³⁴⁷ In an interview, answering a question whether he expected Russia to be separated from the European community as a result of its actions in Crimea, President Putin admitted that he expected exactly such reaction but did not consider it to be an influencing factor. Instead, he referred to a public poll in Russia (prior to the annexation) where over 80 per cent of participating Russian citizens endorsed the reunification even if it would have a negative effect on relationships with other countries. According to President, he based his decision not on preferences of his colleagues from other countries but on the mood of the Russian people;³⁴⁸ which happened to align with his own inclinations.

The issue with the aspirations of the Russian diaspora in Eastern Ukraine, namely the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, emerged within the same context and time period. Russia, however, took a somewhat different approach to the situation; urging the need for a political

³⁴⁵ Griff Witte and Will Englund, "Russia celebrated Crimea annexation while Ukraine looks to West for support", (21 March 2014), *The Washington Post*, online https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/putin-signs-bill-completing-annexation-of-crimea-as-sanctions-take-hold/2014/03/21/ef038a44-b0f3-11e3-a49e-76adc9210f19_story.html?utm_term=.ea9f62a8a7d5, accessed on 12 January 2018.

³⁴⁶ Robert Jarvis, op. cit., p. 394.

³⁴⁷ There were earlier opportunities for Russia to cease control over the peninsula based on requests coming from the authorities in Sevastopol; nevertheless, it did not happen. For example, in 1994 with 70% votes, it elected Yuri Meshkov, who wanted Crimea to leave Ukraine and integrate with Russia, as president (Crimea adopted its own constitution in 1992). Although the referendum organized shortly after the Presidential elections in Crimea in 1994 was recognized by Kiev as illegal, it served as a significant indicator of public views. 78.4% of those who cast their votes wanted greater autonomy for Crimea (but within Ukraine), and 82.8% wanted to be granted a right to dual citizenship. There was arguably an opportune moment to consider the operation of "return of Crimea" then considering the support of the local authorities but in 1994 it would have been certainly a challenge to Russia that has just signed an agreement with the US, UK and Ukraine according to which it obliged to respect Ukrainian territorial integrity and its borders (albeit it does not stop it from being misinterpreted in more recent political discourse). Russia was also too weak economically, as well as involved in a military operation in Chechnya, to afford any contestations with Ukraine and potentially with the West. Besides, the Russian Black Fleet was stationed on the peninsula, and Ukraine's membership in NATO and the EU was not even on the horizon. The status quo was a preferred alternative; for the time being.

³⁴⁸ Oliver Stone, op.cit., p. 236. Author was not able to verify the existence of such public poll.

and diplomatic solution in compliance with the Minsk agreement signed in February 2015;³⁴⁹ and accusing Ukraine of not implementing what was agreed.³⁵⁰ It is important to note that while Putin may have held a deep concern for the diaspora, the regions did not offer any particular strategic advantage or long term value to Russia. On the contrary, allowing the situation to escalate, provides Russia and opportunity to point fingers at Ukraine for its heavy-handedness. It also retains an element of volatility in the region which works to Russia's advantage.

It is probable that Russia helped to sustain the conflict, as President Putin reconfirmed, that there was “no Russian army on the territory of Donbas, but there are certain militia formations that are self-sufficient and ready to repel any large-scale actions against Donbas.”³⁵¹ A lot has been written, particularly in the press, regarding the presence of regular Russia's troops in the region, not just militia formations as suggested by President Putin.³⁵² A lot has been said about each party's responsibilities in waging and maintaining “Europe's forgotten war”.³⁵³ From the Author's point of view, the reasons behind direct or indirect support from Moscow are more important; and focuses on why this support does not seem to go further in political terms. President Putin refers to Donetsk and Luhansk regions under rebels control as ‘unrecognised republics’ without disputing Ukraine territorial integrity and

³⁴⁹ Full text of the Minsk agreement, *Financial Times*, (12 February 2015), <https://www.ft.com/content/21b8f98e-b2a5-11e4-b234-00144feab7de>, accessed on 19 June 2018.

³⁵⁰ Russia continues to accuse Kiev in not fulfilling the major part of the agreement, namely implementing a constitutional reform in Ukraine and granting a special constitutional status to the territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions held by separatist formations; Kiev starting a dialogue with the leadership of the regions; their re-integration into Ukraine and holding local elections by the end 2015. In addition, both side accuse each other in failing to implement the withdrawal of all foreign formations, including mercenaries from the territory of Ukraine and disarmament of all illegal groups. See, for example Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview to Russia's periodic newspaper “Argumenti I Fakti” on 29 March 2017; Lavrov's address to the students and academic staff of MGIMO on 1 September 2016; Lavrov's press-conference on 26 January 2016 to note a few. Sergey Lavrov, *We are Polite People. Deliberations on Foreign Policy*, Moskva, Knizhniy Mir, 2018.

³⁵¹ President Putin's news conference, (14 December 2017), online, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59455>, accessed on 14 April 2018.

³⁵² David L. Stern, “War in eastern Ukraine now seems a distant storm to Kiev”, *Washington Post*, 26 June 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/war-in-eastern-ukraine-now-seems-a-distant-storm-to-kyiv/2018/06/26/5390e326-73ff-11e8-805c-4b67019fcfe4_story.html?utm_term=.5af46d0b3397; Owen Matthews, “Does Putin intend to war with Ukraine?”, *The Spectator*, (1 December 2018), <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2018/12/does-putin-intend-to-go-to-war-with-ukraine/>, accessed on 13 April 2019.

³⁵³ Isaac Webb, “Kiev Is Fueling the War Eastern Ukraine, Too”, *Foreign Policy*, (6 February 2017), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/02/06/its-not-just-putin-fueling-war-in-ukraine-trump-donbas/>; “An end to the war in eastern Ukraine looks as far away as ever”, *The Economist*, (11 October 2018), online <https://www.economist.com/europe/2018/10/11/an-end-to-the-war-in-eastern-ukraine-looks-as-far-away-as-ever>, accessed on 15 December 2018; Julian Coman, “On the frontline of Europe's forgotten war in Ukraine”, *The Guardian*, (12 November 2017), online <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/nov/12/ukraine-on-the-front-line-of-europes-forgotten-war>; Owen Matthews, “Does Putin intend to war with Ukraine?”, op.cit.

the fact that Ukraine is responsible for taking key decisions for solving the crisis on its territory.³⁵⁴ In contrast to the Crimea, where core interests multiplied by historic sentiments met the opportune moment, another takeover is unlikely. Three years after the referendum, Russia's Foreign Minister in one of his interviews said that Russia does not make territorial demands on Ukraine.³⁵⁵

As noted above, in the context of Russia's reaction to Ukraine's approximation to the EU, economic relations, particularly in the energy sector, played a significant role in defining relationships between the two countries. These were also the source of contestations manifested in numerous decisions and actions. For example, looking at the patterns of decisions regarding the price of natural gas as well as the tariffs for the export of Ukrainian goods to Russia, it becomes clear that the decisions to increase and subsequent decrease prices were linked to political objectives and often to matters of strategic importance to Russia. Examples of this are the length of Sevastopol lease or using the economic argument as a persuasive measure to change Ukraine's position on the EU Association Agreement. As discussed earlier, Ukraine received large subsidies whereas³⁵⁶ Moldova never received such favours, despite the fact that Russia-Moldova relations were never that contested. The change in pricing policies should, however, be seen in the context of Russia's overall approach. From the beginning of 2006, Russia transitioned to market pricing for its energy materials, a move that was interpreted as an attempt to exercise its political influence, particularly over Ukraine. This interpretation could have proven itself wrong, however subsequent manipulation with prices that continued to decrease or increase depending on the desired outcome, suggested that energy was used for political bargaining. President Putin believed that this transition to market pricing would not disadvantage Russia's political position vis-à-vis its neighbours.

On the contrary, he was convinced that it would help to solve "the tasks and aims of our foreign policy".³⁵⁷ This is an important caveat that explicitly links economic decision to aiming to reinforce the achievement of Russia's foreign policy goals. We can conclude that Gas prices were manipulated as an economic coercion and bargaining tool. President Putin

³⁵⁴ See, for example, Oliver Stone, *op.cit.*, pp. 189-192.

³⁵⁵ Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's interview to Russia's periodic newspaper "Argumenti I Fakti", (29 March 2017); Sergey Lavrov, *op. cit.*, p. 498.

³⁵⁶ To a large extent due to the arrangement with the gas supply from Turkmenistan mentioned earlier.

³⁵⁷ President Putin's annual press conference, (31 January 2006), online <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23412>, accessed on 29 April 2018.

would every time argue that there was nothing wrong with setting Russia-Ukraine's relations in the framework of a market economy. Indeed, Russia has right to increase the prices for the commodity it supplies, thus normalizing its economic relations with Ukraine as any other European nation, but every time, whether it was in 2005, 2008 or any other time, there were political strings attached, repeatedly indicating the role of the central decision-maker.

Lack of consistency in approach and reactive nature of these decisions, for example to Ukraine's 'Orange Revolution', casts doubt on these decisions being solely part of the normalization of Russia's economic relations. Ukraine's example is an antithesis to how Dmitry Trenin described Russia's approach to shaping its external relations, as the process being led by its elite's financial interests and associated denouncement of geopolitics at the expense of economic interests; subordinating the former to the later.³⁵⁸ There is hardly a possibility to negate the presence of geopolitical interests in this case as there is a risk to disproportionally play up its role.³⁵⁹ In fact, both play a significant role and reinforce each other through calculations and pragmatism of the Rational Actor and flexibility of the Incrementalism. Indeed, seemingly specific and relatively small changes noted above remained part of a well-considered big picture of Russia's role in Ukraine (hence Putin's reference linking transit to market prices to solving foreign policy tasks) and represented an example of the blend a rational actor taking an incremental approach in advancing its aims and objectives via series of seemingly disconnected and sporadic decisions such change in tariffs and export prices. In terms of the application of means, capability cannot be separated from context, in fact, it is the latter, as we see above, that creates the impetus to act, provided there is strategic prudence in action. This maps on to Principle 4.

4.5 CONCLUSION

Baseline analysis presented in Chapter 3 revealed that the two foundational models alone are not in a position to help explain Russia's foreign policy decision-making. At the level of 'what' (objectives) there is a prevalence of principles and tenets of Rational Incrementalism

³⁵⁸ Dmitri Trenin, "Russia Redefines Itself and Its Relations with the West", in *Washington Quarterly*, Volume 30, Issue 2, (Spring 2007), pp. 95-105.

³⁵⁹ Most of the existing analysis prescribes Russia's plans for the Eurasian Economic Union to the desire to assert its geopolitical influence in the region. See, for example, "EU vs Eurasian Union: An Emerging Power Struggle?" by *Global Political Policy Watch*, (21 November 2013), online <https://globalpublicpolicywatch.org/2013/11/21/eu-x-urasian-union-an-emerging-power-struggle-part-1/>, accessed on 18 May 2018; Rilka Dragneva and Kataryna Wolczuk (2012), op. cit.

while RAM is also relevant to an extent. At the level of ‘who’ (actors), both RAM and Rational Incrementalism (with the latter’s emphasis on the role of agency) are more representative than the Incrementalism Model. The conclusions from the Ukraine case study are presented below:

Table 6: Summary of the analysis of Ukrainian Case Study

Author’s own table

	Conceptual framework	Functional indicators and degree of mapping to the Principles of the Rational Incrementalism; expressed as high (H), medium (M) and low (L)	
Aims and Objectives (Why and What?)	Setting aims and objectives	<p>Similar to the conclusion in the baseline analysis, decisions are guided by a pre-determined strategic direction. Russia’s aims and objectives in Ukraine remained long-term and pegged to Russia’s pursuit of its regional and global ambitions. The analysis suggests that perceived incremental decisions should be carefully analyzed as these could be part of a larger strategic outlook and not a one-shot opportunistic endeavour.</p> <p>There is evidence in Russia’s action in Ukraine that its choice of instruments of national power and scale of application is carefully moderated and dependent on context. The focused development of its economic instruments as well as the military, suggests that these instruments and dependencies are being developed with purposefulness; one of the objectives being to support policy fulfilment.</p> <p>While Russia’s ability to shape the context is limited, the take-over of the Crimea, as an example of ultimate pay-off for Russia despite the risks, altered the strategic environment, albeit more so at the regional level than the global.</p>	<p>RAM Principle 1, H</p> <p>Principle 1, H</p> <p>Principle 4, M (requires further testing / refinement)</p>
	Aspired changes	<p>Aspired changes in Ukraine are to be seen in the context of changes of a fundamental nature linked to pursuing the aspiration of a great power. They are not time-bound and are moderated by capability and context.</p> <p>The analysis brings to the fore the primacy of pay-offs underpinning decisions in pursuit of strategic gains, notwithstanding the risk factor where core interests and/or objectives are threatened.</p> <p>While aspiring fundamental changes, over a longer period of time, the small changes themselves combine to form change of fundamental nature. The smaller steps – collectively advance the aspired change taking a long-term approach.</p>	<p>Principle 1 and 4, H</p> <p>Principle 4, H (requires further testing / refinement)</p> <p>Principle 1, H</p>

Actors (Who?)	Actors (Including the level of delegation and devolution)	<p>Consistent role of the President as a decision owner within a structure, who sets the main direction and executes overall control over the implementation of these decisions. In this regard, the case study has reinforced the conclusions of the baseline analysis.</p> <p>Majority of decisions can be attributed to the president. The level of engagement of the President in affairs regarding Ukraine remained high, even during the years of limited direct contact with Ukrainian counterparts.</p>	<p>RAM Principle 2, M</p> <p>Principle 2, H</p>
	The role of agency	<p>The role of agency plays a prominent role. There is a link between decisions and actors' values, beliefs, aspirations and experiences. With the dominance of a unitarian approach to decision-making, there is a consistency of views and beliefs that are, in turn, linked to the long-term nature of aims and objectives.</p> <p>There is a prevalence of agency over the structure and over strategy observed in the Russian President's approach to Ukraine.</p>	<p>Principle 2, H</p> <p>Principle 2, H</p> <p>Principle 3, H</p>
Application of Means (How?)		<p>Evidence of considering possible alternatives, however, the chosen action is consistent with aims and objectives even if it can bring an immediate negative impact in other areas or in other relations, such as West reaction to the interruption of gas supply or takeover of Crimea.</p> <p>The causal link between actions and pre-set objectives. Readiness to 'lose' in some areas to maximise gain in pursuit of objectives. The long-term approach in achieving the desired outcome.</p> <p>The application of means is not an act of spontaneous thinking and reckless decisions, but rather a moment of either seizing the opportunity or arriving at a moment of desperation, point of no exit, or a combination of both.</p>	<p>Principle 4, H</p> <p>RAM, Principle 4, H</p> <p>Principle 4, L (needs further refinement)</p>

The case study analysis of Ukraine brought the argument of the benefits of the third model more to the fore.

From the summary above, it is possible to conclude that the Principles of Rational Incrementalism map strongly in places to the analysis. At the same time, RAM remains present when analysis focused on the long-term nature of aims and objectives and the centralisation of decision-making. However, Russia's lack of a leading role in shaping an environment favourable for the advancement of its aims and objectives, with a limited menu of options available, and limited ability to seize opportunities for action where those emerge, is a clear move away from the classical RAM. Incrementalism does not map to the conclusions of the case study analysis. While this was expected to be the case in the baseline study, the lack of evidence of "muddling through" is quite surprising. The Ukraine case study

helps to bring to the fore the importance of incremental decisions in shaping fundamental achievements.

Russia's approach to decision-making in Ukraine represents an example of a rational actor taking an incremental approach in advancing its aims and objectives via a combination of a series of seemingly disconnected and sporadic decisions (such as changes in tariffs and export prices or the incident in the Kerch Strait) and major changes (such as the take-over of the Crimea). Russia utilises the obtaining environment, aligning with capabilities through the application of contextual opportunism, underpinned by risk and pay-off analysis. All in all, to advance the strategic objectives.

Ukraine's case study reinforced the President's central role in foreign policy decision-making that was highlighted in Chapter 3. It also brought to fore the President's high level of agency in steering Russia's foreign policy towards Ukraine. This process was not only influenced by a long-term view based on, among other things, personal aspirations, motives, beliefs and value system, as well as considered the personal rapport, or lack of it, with Ukrainian counterparts. Combined with a high level of power consolidation, strong agency implied, in Ukraine's case, its prevalence over structure in decision-making, where obtaining the environment remains an influencing factor. The overpowering role of agency in driving strategy also implies the prevalence of strategy over structures.

5 DECISION-MAKING IN RUSSIA'S FOREIGN POLICY – THE CASE OF MOLDOVA

Our people share longstanding traditions of friendship and trust, of spiritual and cultural closeness.³⁶⁰ (President Medvedev in 2010)

Moldova is an important partner of Russia in the region. Unfortunately, we know that the relations between our countries are not the best lately.³⁶¹ (President Putin in 2017)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Russia's relations with Moldova are complex and cannot be defined in simple terms. The two quotes presented above are an illustration of the complexity that is defined by the context and its impact on Russia's own aspirations and objectives that in turn impact its decision-making. Over the years there has been a series of mutually expressed hopes that interstate relationships move towards a new momentum or strategic partnership. Communications in earlier years carried more positive vibes, for example, as expressed in President Putin's telegram to president Voronin on the occasion of his election in 2005:

Relations between Russia and Moldova will develop in a spirit of true constructive and interested cooperation that will enable us to build up genuinely mutually beneficial partnership.³⁶²

As Moldova's dialogue with the EU progressed, in later years a more reserved rhetoric of 'active work together' and 'constructive dialogue' was expressed, as for example, in

³⁶⁰ Congratulations to Acting President of Moldova and Speaker of the Moldovan Parliament Mihai Ghimpu, (27 August 2010), online <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/8756> accessed on 2 May 2018.

³⁶¹ President Putin after the meeting with President Dodon in January 2017.

³⁶² President Putin sent a telegram of congratulations to President Vladimir Voronin following his election as President of the Republic of Moldova, (7 April 2005), online <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/33111>, accessed on 18 April 2018; See, for example, President Putin's birthday message to President Voronin on 25 May 2003, online <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/28688>, accessed on 4 April 2018. President Voronin to President Dmitry Medvedev on the occasion of the Day of Russia on 13 June 2008 noted that "the relationships of friendship, trust and respect which traditionally tied Russia and Moldova constitute a secure basis for the further development of our cooperation which is reciprocally advantageous to the both states", online <http://www.moldova.org/en/voronin-congratulates-medvedev-on-the-occasion-of-the-day-of-russia-126862-eng/>, accessed on 19 April 2018.

President Putin's message to newly elected President Igor Dodon in late 2016.³⁶³ These occasional mutual reassurances remained part of political rhetoric while *de facto* relationships between Chisinau and Moscow remained strained with direct impact on the level of activity, or inactivity, in relations between the two countries.

Since gaining independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the main anchor of Moldova's foreign policy was its neutrality and a course for EU integration. Moldova's EU course is however not equivocal. Moldovan political circles remained divided over the issues enabling Russia to take advantage, giving preferential treatment to political forces whose position to the EU remained less favourable, regardless whether or not these forces were in power or in opposition. By the end of 2018, the rift between the Moldovan President's office and that of the Prime Minister reflects this tension. On the one hand President Igor Dodon is vocally pro-Russian and is also willing to distance the country from the EU, while on the other hand, Prime Minister Pavel Philip takes a rather opposite view. The political elite appears to be distributed across these two camps.³⁶⁴ Over the years there were attempts to reconcile both directions and provide reassurances. For example, shortly before Moldova signed the Association Agreement with the EU, the then Moldova's President, Nicolae Timofti, wrote to his Russian counterpart on the occasion of Putin's birthday:

*Moldova attaches major importance to the development and extension of the friendship and cooperation relations with Russia. I voice hope that, by joint efforts, we will manage to foster the Moldovan-Russian dialogue, giving it a qualitatively new level, for the benefit of our countries and nations.*³⁶⁵

³⁶³ President Putin in his congratulation message to a newly elected President Igor Dodon expressed his hopes for constructive dialogue and active work together to develop Russian-Moldovan relations in accordance with the bilateral Agreement on Friendship and Cooperation, which marks its 15th anniversary at that time, online <http://en.kremlin.ru/catalog/countries/MD/events/53253> accessed on 8 April 2018.

³⁶⁴ This should be considered in the context of president's popularity among the voters. Thus, according to the public poll conducted in early 2018, Dodon leads the list of politicians who enjoy trust of Moldovans – 52,6% of citizens, who expressed trust to any politician, chose him (27,4% do not trust any while 24% were not sure). The next politician in the list, Maya Sandu, the chairperson of a pro-EU PAS (Party of Action and Solidarity) gained 21,6%. The Prime Minister Pavel Filip from a pro-EU Democratic Party of Moldova, is trusted only by 3,1% of respondents.

³⁶⁵ "Moldovan President congratulates Russia counterpart on birthday", (07 October 2014), online <http://www.presedinte.md/eng/presa/presedintele-republicii-moldova-nicolae-timofti-i-a-transmis-un-mesaj-de-felicitare-presedintelui-federatiei-ruse-vladimir-putin-cu-prilejul-zilei-sale-de-nastere>, accessed on 20 April 2018.

Incidentally, the note was sent after Russia imposed restrictions on Moldovan export in late 2013, causing a negative impact on the country's economy, and while some attempts were made to redirect exports and thus reduce dependency on Russia, the latter still remained the largest importer of Moldova's agricultural produce.

Moldova's economic dependency on Russia, as much as Moldova's role in Russia's regional aspirations, very much define the relationships between the two countries and impacted on Russia's approach to decision-making with regard to Moldova. For Russia, Moldova is a very minor economic partner.³⁶⁶ In contrast, for Moldova, Russia remains the second largest importer of its goods, particularly food and agricultural produce. Around 40 per cent of these produce are exported to Russia, making Moldova's economy vulnerable, particularly to any increase in tariffs.³⁶⁷ The fact there are a substantial number of Moldovan workers in Russia also plays an important role as it is often used in the former's foreign policy arguments towards the latter.³⁶⁸ In addition, Russia remains a significant investor in the Moldovan economy.³⁶⁹ Although the trade turnover between the two countries has grown over time, it remains an insignificant fraction of Russia's global trade as well as a destination of its foreign investments. Moldova's economic dependency across various areas including gas, electricity and agricultural produce³⁷⁰ to a large extent defined the type of decisions, namely of a short

³⁶⁶ For example, in 2015 only 0.1% of Russia's imports were coming from Moldova. "Moldova and Russia: between trade relations and economic dependence", report by the Expert-Group, (April 2015), online https://www.expert-grup.org/ro/biblioteca/item/download/1348_10771108a3d22488655de8186fb918 accessed on 21 April 2018.

³⁶⁷ "Meeting with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova Vlad Filat", (12 September 2012), online <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/16467>, accessed on 19 April 2018.

³⁶⁸ See, for example, Tessa Dunlop, "Why Russian wine ban is putting pressure on Moldova", BBC news, 21 November 2013, online <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-24992076>, accessed on 18 April 2018.

³⁶⁹ Different sources provide conflicting information with regard to the level of Russia's investments in Moldova. some reports argue that Russia has always been the major investor in Moldovan economy. See, for example, "Economic Dependence on Russia. What has Moldova Learnt?", *Moldstreet*, 29 March 2018, <https://www.mold-street.com/?go=news&n=7276>, accessed on 5 May 2018. According to these data Russia's direct investments in Moldova's economy mounted to \$716million in 2017, albeit down from \$786million in 2012. However, according to Moldovan official statistics, Russia was surpassed by the Netherlands, Cyprus and Italy in terms of the level of their direct investments in Moldova's economy. Russia was placed the fourth with \$88.2million in 2017, http://www.sua.mfa.md/img/docs/Foreign_Direct_Investments.pdf. The discrepancy in data might be due to the method of calculation. Thus, the National Bank of Moldova suggests that the Russian capital is present in Moldova mainly as debt instrument, rather than company shares or participation in investment funds. <https://www.mold-street.com/?go=news&n=7276>, accessed on 5 May 2018.

³⁷⁰ Over the years Moldova made significant progress in reducing its dependency on trade with Russia, diversifying destinations for its exports and imports particularly through the trade with the EU. However, in some areas these dependencies remain persistent, and Russia pursues the maintaining of status-quo in some areas, for example in energy. Until recently Moldova's sole electricity provider was a Russia-owned company, Inter RAO which is based in Transnistria. While in 2017 a contract was signed with a Ukraine-based provider

terms nature. The analysis of these decisions cannot and should not be detached from Moldova's foreign policy aspirations and how these are viewed providing a context within which Russia's short-term decisions should be viewed and understood. Russia's focus remained on keeping Moldova within Russia's zone of influence and within its economic structures that would in effect maintain Moldova's dependency, particularly in energy and agricultural sectors. For example, Russia resisted Moldova's attempts to diversify the sources of energy provision overturning the agreement signed with a Ukraine-based provider in 2017; the fact that Moldova has accumulated a substantial debt over gas supplies also plays a significant role in providing a momentum behind Moldova's economic dependency decreasing the room for manoeuvring for seeking greater independence from Russia's market with ramifications to other areas, first and foremost agricultural produce.

With Moldova's neutral status and lack of proclaimed interest to become part of a military alliance, the major focus of Russia's foreign policy remained the country's potential integration in the EU and hence leaving Russia's zone of influence. However, Moldova's lack of aspiration to join NATO³⁷¹ and maintaining its relationship through the framework of

following the tender, the Moldovan government later decided to buy 70 per cent of Moldova's electricity from Inter RAO, amid Russian pressure and counter offer that included 10 per cent discount ensuring that Russia remained the dominant, albeit not the sole, electricity provider in Moldova. Following the Moldova-Ukraine's deal Russia's deputy Prime Minister Rogozin led negotiations with Moldova's government to ensure that Russia maintains the stake in electricity provision in Moldova through continuous use of Transnistria-based provider ensuring that the region does not endure multimillion loss in revenues a year.

Gas is an even more persistent area of dependency. It is also an area where a substantial amount of Moldova's debt to Russia has accumulated over the years. In 2017 Moldova's debt to Russia for gas was approximately \$6 billion, of which Transnistria accounted for around 90% of total debt. The region has never paid for gas it received from Russia.

Another area is Moldova's dependency on the export of its agriculture produce, the main consumer of which is Russia. It was continuously revealed how exposed Moldova's developing economy remained to be hit by embargoes that took place over the years. Moldova's economic dependence on remittances from Russia also adds to the overall notion of dependency. Although the number has significantly reduced, from one billion USD in 2013 to just over 400 million dollars in 2018. Russia is still by far the largest source of remittances as a proportion of Moldovan workers there. The figure, despite some decrease, remains substantial, totaling around 500,000.

On the deal see, for example Anna Maria Touma, "Moldova Energy Deal Raises Concerns of Russian Pressure", 9 June 2017, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/moldova-new-energy-deal-raises-questions-over-russian-pressure-06-08-2017> accessed on 15 May 2018.

EuroAsia Daily, "Russian gas for Moldova: Who will pay the debts?", 13 February 2017, <https://eadaily.com/en/news/2017/02/13/russian-gas-for-moldova-who-will-pay-the-debts>, accessed 15 May 2018.

³⁷¹ Non-membership status of Moldova is also widely supported by citizens, only 19,4% of whom would have supported Moldova's integration and 59,6% would be against. Public opinion poll "Vox Populi" conducted in January 2018 by the Association of Sociologists and Demographers. <https://mresearcher.com/2018/01/asdm-vstuplenie-moldovy-v-nato-podderzhivayut-19-grazhdan-respubliki.html>, accessed on 30 June 2018. Another poll conducted in March 2016 revealed a slightly different picture with 16% potentially voting in favour and 40% against while 24% would not vote at all. Public Opinion Survey, Residents of Moldova (with exception of

the Individual Partnership Plan³⁷² did not automatically imply a warmer reception from Russia as relationships between two countries remained strenuous for most of the period.

One of the major factors that defined relationships between Moldova and Russia was the situation in Transnistria. The relationships are overshadowed by the Russia's *de facto* recognition of the breakaway region³⁷³ manifested in mutual visits and continuous dialogue between Kremlin and the leadership of the self-proclaimed region of Moldova.³⁷⁴ This political dialogue is pursued with full recognition of Chisinau's repeated objections in rhetoric and in deeds – for example forbidding Russia's Deputy Prime Ministry and Kremlin's special representative in Transnistria Dmitry Rogozin's flights to land and cross the territory of Moldova on a number of occasions. Although formally Russia does not recognize Transnistria as an independent state, its continuous political, economic,³⁷⁵ military and diplomatic activities³⁷⁶ in the region are akin to *de facto* recognition and serve as a polarizing factor in relationships between the two countries.³⁷⁷ Eugene Rumer argues that

Transnistria), (March 2016), by Baltic Surveys/The Gallup Organisation, http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/iri_poll_presentation-moldova-march_2016.pdf, accessed on 9 July 2018.

³⁷² A number of ex-Soviet Union republics agreed their Individual Partnership Plans (mechanism launched in 2002) with NATO, including Azerbaijan (first IPAP agreed in May 2005), Armenia (December 2005), Kazakhstan (January 2006). Moldova agreed its first Plan in May 2006. IPAPs are open to countries that have political will and ability to deepen their relationship with NATO. They are not a precondition for next steps towards membership but rather cooperation mechanism routing activities to support domestic reforms in partner countries. See https://www.nato.int/cps/ua/natohq/topics_49290.htm, accessed 18 May 2018.

³⁷³ Self-proclaimed Transnistrian Republic was established in 1990 with the capital in Tiraspol. A brief armed conflict escalated in 1992 when Moldovan government tried to bring Tiraspol under its control. With the intervention of what was defined as Russia's peace keeping force the conflict froze (rather than resolved in uniting Moldova as one country) in July 1992 when the ceasefire agreement was signed. Ever since Russia kept its military presence in the Transnistria region, initially justifying it with the need to safeguard munition left over from the Soviet times.

³⁷⁴ See, for example, "Transnistria leader Vadim Krasnoselski met Russia Deputy PM Dmitry Rogozin at Moscow", <http://www.moldova.org/en/transnistria-leader-vadim-kranoselski-met-russia-deputy-pm-dmitry-rogozin-moscow/> accessed on 1 June 2018; President Yevgeny Shevchuk meets with a Russian Foreign Ministry's delegation headed by State Secretary – Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia Grigory Karasin, 29 March 2016, <http://mfa-pmr.org/en/yxJ>, accessed on 1 June 2019.

³⁷⁵ Transnistria is dependent on direct and indirect subsidies from Russia that constitute more than a half of region's budget. The region depends on gas supplies from Russia - Its debt for Russia's gas is in excess of \$5.5 billion (according to some sources Transnistria has not paid Gazprom for gas imports from 2007, see, for example, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/transnistria>). Alexander Tabachnik, "The Transnistrian Challenge: Why tensions are escalating between Russia and Moldova", LSE blog, 22 August 2017, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2017/08/22/the-transnistrian-challenge-why-tensions-are-escalating-between-russia-and-moldova/> accessed on 4 July 2018.

³⁷⁵ James Greene, ob. cit.

³⁷⁶ Russia has a consulate in Tiraspol.

³⁷⁷ According to 2015 Transnistria's census (conducted separate to Moldova's) there were 161,300 Russians (34%), 156,600 Moldovans (33%), and 126,700 Ukrainians (26.7%). About 6 per cent of Moldova's population identify themselves as Russians according to Census 2014. UNHCR, *World Directory of Minorities and*

“unlike some other frozen conflicts of the post-Soviet era, there appears virtually no likelihood of the conflict becoming unfrozen and hostilities resuming.” Moreover, relationships between Transnistria and the rest of Moldova have been normalised including economic and people-to-people contacts.³⁷⁸ There is a continuous interest in sustaining the elements of contestation, predominantly expressed in political rhetoric, as a way of justifying Russia’s military presence in the region. The situation is continuously referred to by the Russian side as a conflict which implies a certain connotation. Thus, in his meeting with President Dodon Putin noted that:

*...We will do everything needed for the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. (...) we will act as warrants for the previous agreements and the agreements that need to take place so that the problem is solved once and forever, in the interest of all people living in this territory.*³⁷⁹

As in the case of Ukraine, the analysis of this case study will also be built around the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2 and will be structured accordingly. This will allow a more representative comparative analysis across the two cases presented earlier in this research.

The conclusions emerging from the case study analysis will be tested against the baseline findings of the first case study with regard to how they related to the foundational models and Rational Incrementalism. Considering that the period of time covered in this analysis is rather substantial, the author aims to focus the research on major factors of interstate relations and decision related to these factors. These factors are derived from the major aims and objectives of Russia’s foreign policy discussed in Chapter 3.

Indigenous Peoples – Moldova, (2018, 1), <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4954ce5023.html>, accessed on 20 February 2019.

³⁷⁸ Eugene Rumer, “Moldova Between Russia and the West: A Delicate Balance”, Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, (23 May 2017), online <http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/05/23/moldova-between-russia-and-west-delicate-balance-pub-70056>, accessed on 15 April 2018.

³⁷⁹ “Putin Vows Dodon to Solve Transnistria”, (11 October 2017), <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/putin-vows-to-help-moldova-solve-transnistria-10-11-2017>, accessed on 17 April 2018.

5.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

As in case of Ukraine, Russia's aims and objective towards Moldova are not explicitly defined in the official documents analysed in Chapter 3. However, unlike Ukraine, official documents through the years do make a consistent reference to Moldova, albeit only with the special mention to its neutral status and with the continuous reference to the status of Transnistria. This reference, while being made in the context of a peaceful resolution of "Transnistria's problem", adds "respect of sovereignty, territorial unity and neutral status of Moldovan Republic". The latter is particularly important, as an indicator of what Russia's aspirations for Moldova, vis-à-vis its relationships, are with external players, NATO and the EU in particular. The consistent factor remains the emphasis on Moldova's territorial unity. Unlike in case of Ukraine where arguably the Crimea has not been considered as an indivisible part of the country, on Moldova's case the unity is seen within the existing international borders, as Russia does not express any appetite to change the status quo.

Scarce, and yet, constant indication of Russia's tailored aspirations for Moldova should also be seen within a broader context of Russia's view of its position in the world, its ambitions in relations to the CIS as well as to a large extent what is broadly defined as protecting the interests of its diaspora. In addition to tailored and contextual references to Moldova in official documents, political rhetoric provides another valuable input for the analysis. Albeit, Moldova is hardly part of the political rhetoric, particularly by the President that is another indication of Moldova's position in Russia's political agenda sits below Ukraine.

5.2.1 *Setting aims and objectives*

Arguably, sparse references to Moldova in official documents do not imply a lack of direction, rather its implicitness, embedded in related contexts. There are also indirect references that continue to underpin the direction of Russia's foreign policy, namely the CIS and further development of collaboration within the auspices of CIS. These are also related to Russia's position towards the expansion of EU's outreach closer to Russia's borders in the West. There appears an aspiration to view the CIS as a collective entity and an international player; potentially mimicking the EU. Hence, weakening of the integration processes within the CIS is perceived as one of the major external threats to Russia.³⁸⁰ This is a consistent context underpinning the relationships with Moldova, as well as with Ukraine; both should be

³⁸⁰ As outlined in the National Security Concept 2000 and consequent editions of the document.

viewed within this broader dimension. Throughout the years, Russia remained consistent in the aims and objectives of its foreign policy towards Moldova.

However, like in case with Ukraine, Russia's ability to shape the environment to its advantage for the pursuit of its aims and objectives remained limited. It was also more prepared to make concessions and shy away from decisive steps, for example to prevent the signing of the Association Agreement between the EU and Moldova in 2014, as was done in the case of Ukraine. However, it does not imply that the signing of the agreement should be viewed as a loss, instead should be considered as part of the long-term outlook where not all steps are taking a linear approach towards a desired end-state. Re-energised dialogue following the election of a Euro-sceptic President Dodon in the end of 2016³⁸¹, aiming to achieve Moldova's withdrawal from the agreement and turning towards Russia's led Eurasian Union, illustrates this point.

Negative reaction to Moldova's EU vector should be explained through the lens of Russia's Eurasian aspirations. Russia's position was vividly summarised by President Putin saying to his Moldovan counterpart in 2017 that "it needs to be recognized that mutually beneficial ties with Russia deteriorated against the background of attempts to force a closer relationship with the European Union."³⁸² Although clearly summarised in a few words of a public statement, this position was evident in past actions and the decisions that led to them. Putin's statement provides a public announcement at the highest level (to date expressed at a lower level, for example, Russia's Deputy Prime Minister or Ambassador to Moldova) that Moldova's closer ties with the EU have an opposite effect on its ties with Russia. It was clearly demonstrated through a series of incremental decisions such as imposing tariffs or banning Moldova's goods. However, the timing of these decisions also serves as a clear indication of Russia's disapprove of Moldova taking steps towards the EU, be it Action Plan in 2005 or Association Agreement in 2014. The root cause of these decisions, however small they may seem, is plainly explained in the above quote by President Putin. None of them are made sporadically with no link to a bigger aim, quite on the contrary.

³⁸¹ Dodon also opposed the opening of the NATO Liaison Office in Chisinau planned in December 2017.

³⁸² Denis Dyomkin, "In Russia, Moldovan president says he may scrap EU trade pact", Reuters, (17 January 2017), online <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-moldova-eu/in-russia-moldovan-president-says-he-may-scrap-eu-trade-pact-idUSKBN151290>, accessed on 16 April 2018.

Despite the lower level of engagement and the incremental nature of decisions that on their own do not aspire major changes in Moldova (but rather the preservation of status quo); however, it needs to be seen as a contributing factor to broader Russia's ambitions where major change was sought (seeking status as a great power). Objectives towards Moldova did not change and its activities in Moldova remained purposeful which corresponds to features of RAM as well as Principle 1 of Rational Incrementalism. The strategic non-linearity shies away from RAM and brings Russia's approach closer to Rational Incrementalism. Ignoring the big picture, these actions can also be erroneously construed as incrementalism which is not evidenced in Russia's actions.

5.2.2 *Aspired changes*

The ultimate goal is the retention or reinforcement of Moldova's neutral status that is engraved in this country's constitution. Unlike in the case of Ukraine, Moldova did not express aspiration to join a military alliance. The importance of this fact for Russia is evident through persevering references to Moldova's neutral status in strategic documents. It is also evident in support of political forces in Moldova that vocally oppose any kind of approximation to the alliance, however loose it might be. Constant referral to Moldova's neutral status and continuous search for reassurances from the political elite, exposes Russia's vulnerability and lack of trust that underlines Russia's overall approach to NATO, as discussed earlier.

For the reasons outlined above, ensuring Moldova's non-affiliation with the EU at the level of Association Agreement was also crucial. On the other hand, the aspired change was to bring it into the Eurasian Economic Union (and its various evolutionary stages) as well as other CIS projects aimed at strengthening and advancing the idea behind the union, as reflected in various strategic documents examined in Chapter 2. However, in relation to potential integration of Moldova into Russia's championed economic union, its position has been considerably less active in comparison to Ukraine. This is despite some increased political activities by Russian politicians as Moldova was progressing towards signing of the Association Agreement with the EU, albeit predominantly expressed at rhetorical level and communicated by Dmitry Rogozin who remained the most prominent public figure representing Russia's position towards Moldova (while President remained by far less visible). For example, Rogozin said in 2013 that Moldova "would lose Transnistria, if it

continues moving toward the EU".³⁸³ No such threat was pushed to fruition despite the rhetoric, however it did not imply that Russia would turn away, allowing Moldova to slip out of the zone of influence. Neither sharp rhetoric, nor sanctions had a desired effect but apart from these incremental steps Russia did not make any serious attempts at a time to prevent the Association Agreement from being signed, albeit it did not imply turning away from its long-term aspirations that concerned Moldova as well.

Like in case of Ukraine, Russia's negative position was underpinned by political and economic reasons and by the sense of exclusion from the negotiation process. As emphasised by the Russian President and other officials, it was an expectation that all three parties concerned, EU, Moldova and Russia, should have been involved in the coordination process related to the Association Agreement, first and foremost due to the economic reasons and the alleged vulnerability of the Russian market.³⁸⁴ This position spoke directly to the political forces in Moldova who were in opposition to the agreement, particularly at the expense of relationships with Russia. The division among political elites in Moldova transcends to the public opinion, albeit over the years it tended to side with those political forces that advocate closer links with Russia, thus like in the case of Ukraine, giving sense of legitimacy to how Russia approaches its relations with Moldova.³⁸⁵ Russia was able to utilise these internal divisions and frequent political instability to back forces favourable to Moldova's pro-Russia's course, both at national and regional levels. While Russia was not ready or willing to put as much effort as it did in the case of Ukraine prior to the Association Agreement, it was interested in maintaining the internal divisions in Moldova in relations to the EU for future strategic gains.

³⁸³ Alexander J. Motyl, "Russia's Revisionist Claims on Ukraine and Moldova", in *World Affairs*, (11 October 2013), online <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/blog/alexander-j-motyl/russia's-revisionist-claims-ukraine-and-moldova> accessed on 11 July 2018.

³⁸⁴ See, for example a joint press conference of Presidents Putin and Dodon on 17 January 2017, online <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53744/videos> accessed on 16 January 2018.

³⁸⁵ According to public polls taken in Moldova over the last four years, i.e. after the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU, the popularity of the pro-Russian Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (considered a successor of the Communist Party) has been consistently growing, reaching in some latest polls 50% mark of potential votes. It received 20.5% actual votes during the Parliamentary elections in November 2014. Its popularity would then appear to be considerably higher than any pro-EU party. For example, see the results of the public opinion poll conducted in April 2018 by the Association of Sociologists and Demographers. The Results of this poll are only applicable to the districts that will be voting using party lists (not in single-member constituencies), <http://www.infotag.md/reports/776861/>, accessed on 25 June 2018.

Move towards the EU also potentially implied another change that was not desired by Russia, namely the eventuality of resolution of situation with the status of Transnistria and that of Russia's military personnel in the region. Yet, Russia has little interest in changing the current status of Transnistria. The legalization of its military presence in Moldova and Transnistria's veto over the main decisions of the Moldovan parliament are the key preconditions of an acceptable settlement.³⁸⁶ An example of this is Russia's lack of reaction to President Vladimir Voronin's efforts to offer possible options to Moscow for resolving issue with the status of Transnistria (in the lead to 2008 talks).³⁸⁷ The proposal was ignored by Moscow amid the main factor – it required Russia to withdraw its military personnel from Moldova. Over the years Russia has been continuously defying calls from both Moldova and the international community for withdrawal of its military contingent from the region,³⁸⁸ even though there is appears to be no reason (as per Rumer's argument above) for keeping force on foreign territory and sustaining associated costs. The projection of potential escalation of conflict amid peacekeepers' departure is highly hypothetical and yet it is the main official argument being used.

The lack of appetite for change was also evident in Russia's consistent position towards non-recognition of Transnistria despite clear call from the leadership of the region backed by the public vote. Thus, in the 2006 referendum in Transnistria, 98% voted for independence and potential future integration with Russia. Despite what could be interpreted as a clear signal for action and could have been used in a similar way as the result of the referendum in

³⁸⁶ Andrei Popov, "Moldova Pushed for Transnistrian Settlement", Radio Free Europe, (27 July 2008), https://www.rferl.org/a/Moldova_Pushes_For_Transdnierster_Settlement/1186551.html, accessed on 15 April 2018.

³⁸⁷ The central part of the proposal was to secure an agreement with Moscow to withdraw its armed forces from Moldova in exchange of a series of trade-offs, including Moldova reconfirming its neutral status, demilitarizing the country, and unconditionally recognizing Russia's property rights in Transnistria (which accounts for up to 80 percent of the region's industrial potential). Another key element in the proposal included granting broad autonomous status for Transnistria; a clear division of competences between Chisinau and Tiraspol; functional central institutions; and proportional representation of Transnistria in the Moldovan parliament. The last point is crucial insofar as it envisaged holding the March 2009 elections to the Moldovan parliament jointly with Transnistria. As a separate electoral district, the region would be entitled to a quota of deputies proportional to its share of Moldova's total population (estimated at 13 percent), or even higher. On the later see Andrei Popov, "Moldova Pushed for Transnistrian Settlement", Radio Free Europe, (27 July 2008), online https://www.rferl.org/a/Moldova_Pushes_For_Transdnierster_Settlement/1186551.html, accessed on 15 April 2018.

³⁸⁸ One of the latest confirmation of continuous Russia's position was expressed by Deputy Foreign Minister Georgy Karasin in Tiraspol on 22 March 2018, "Russia's position on Transnistria unchanged", Eurasia Daily, (22 March 2018), online <https://eadaily.com/en/news/2018/03/22/russias-position-on-peacekeepers-in-transnistria-unchanged> accessed on 7 July 2018.

Crimea, Russia reassured the EU that it respected Moldova's territorial integrity and did not make any steps to pressure Chisinau to recognise the results of the referendum.³⁸⁹ This choice of restraint possibly illustrates the lack of core value associated with Transnistria, as opposed to the Crimea. Transnistria was also not included in the list of break-away regions recognized by Russia following the war with Georgia in August 2008, namely Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This decision indicates that Transnistria, as part of Moldova with continuous Russia's military presence, has value for a number of reasons, not least to continue its destabilising factor in Moldova's pursuit to build relationships with the West, and particularly, the EU. Although this potentially destabilising factor did not affect EU's decision to sign Association Agreement with Moldova in 2014, proving the measures to be counterproductive vis-à-vis the amount of efforts and costs for Russia. And yet, the contingent remained in the region with no sign of withdrawal at any time (at the time of writing this research), inadvertently exposing other possible strategic considerations.

There is a place for an argument that Russia's presence in Transnistria is not so much about keeping certain level of instability in Moldova but equality, if not more, about Ukraine and Kiev's concerns over the military stronghold in Transnistria possessing threat to country's national security, by virtue of proximity.³⁹⁰ The strategic meaning of this presence was particularly reinforced by the annexation of Crimea making Ukraine vulnerable from at least three sides, from the East, South and South West. All regions boarder with the significant centralization of ethnic Russians and/or Russian-speaker population³⁹¹ that may be perceived as an additional destabilising factor, provided there is an intent from Russia's side. Following the annexation of Crimea, some experts and publicists rushed to the conclusion that it was just the beginning of series of steps by Russia. Transnistria was often named as the next grab.³⁹² This did not happen, despite a second request from the region to follow the Crimean

³⁸⁹ From Paula Lehtomaki's (President-in-Office of the Council) statement to the European Parliament, debate on Moldova (Transnistria) , Georgia (South Ossetia), (25 October 2006), online <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20061025+ITEM-011+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=RO>, accessed on 9 July 2018.

³⁹⁰ Alexander Tabachnik, "The Transnistrian Challenge: Why tensions are escalating between Russia and Moldova", LSE blog, 22 August 2017, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2017/08/22/the-transnistrian-challenge-why-tensions-are-escalating-between-russia-and-moldova/> accessed on 4 July 2018

³⁹¹ According to 2001 Census 17.3% of Ukrainian population identified themselves as ethnic Russians. Next Census is planned in 2020, <http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/>. This percentage is considerably higher in the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk (38.2 and 39 per cent respectively) and Crimea (58.3 per cent)

³⁹² For example, Aleksandr Zhelenin, "Next Step – Transnistria?" (in Russian), 18 March 2014, <http://www.rosbalt.ru/world/2014/03/18/1245532.html> accessed 15 June 2018; Andrew Gardner, "Russia to annex Transnistria?", in European Voice, 19 March 2014, <https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-to-annex->

example. Following the annexation, the speaker of the Transnistrian Parliament sought support from his counterpart at the Duma, however Russia's restraint suggests that there was no intention for it to go in to Transnistria, contrary to Western expert opinion. There is of course the argument to explain this on technical grounds; obstacles related to absence of a joint border and sea access and hence easy access to the region. Also, perhaps Russia's inability to sustain its presence through military means, should that come to pass. The rationality of choice was to abstain, resisting an inexpensive golden opportunity.

In case of Moldova, Russia took a relatively passive approach to the realisation of aspired changes than in Ukraine, predominantly focusing on maintaining the status quo. Even its approach to Moldova's progress towards the Association Agreement remained rather passive at a time and was limited to selective application of economic coercion and political rhetoric. Re-energised dialogue with Moldova after the election of the President Dodon is an example of exploiting opportunities that advance prevailing strategy when the pay-offs outset the risks within the given environment. The context of re-engagement suggests that Russia exploited the opportunity when it deemed to be strategically prudent, and not before. This maps to Principle 4 of Rational Incrementalism. The emphasis on preserving the status quo and not seeking major changes, instead opting for incremental decisions, suggests that RAM is not in a position to help explain Russia's approach beyond the long-term nature of aims and objectives. Incrementalism, on the other hand, brings to the fore the role of small changes that are predominantly directed to preserve the status quo. However, it fails to link the incremental changes to the strategic outlook. Additionally, using only Incrementalism to view Russia, runs the risk of an analyst losing sight of interconnectedness of these apparently disparate opportunistic activities. As such, both foundational models, do not provide an adequate ground to help explain Russia's approach in Moldova.

5.3 ACTORS AND DECISION OWNER

As discussed in previous two Chapters, it is the President who plays the dominant role in foreign policy decision-making in Russia. While the role of other actors is more recognised in strategic documents, this remained at the level of informing, rather than influencing,

[transnistria/](#), accessed on 7 July 2018; After Crimea: is Gagauzia next? <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/03/gagauzia-russia-list-150318052557225.html> accessed on 20 March 2018.

decisions and carrying responsibilities for their implementation. At the same time, the role of the President, as the chief decision-maker, was reinforced, particularly in the latest editions of the key strategic documents. The Presidents' position was vividly illustrated in the case of Ukraine, where they continued to be directly involved in various levels of decisions. Direct interactions with Ukraine's leadership was predominantly led by the President (with some exceptions, particularly during the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev). Moldova's case is rather different with regard to direct involvement at a presidential level. While the principles of decision-making responsibilities and ownership remaining consistent, the direct interactions were noticeably delegated to the level of government. It was manifested in the role of the Deputy Prime Minister with special responsibilities for Transnistria and, for example, through irregular visits and meetings at the level of the foreign ministers and representatives of Russia's legislative. In Moldova's case, the President, regardless of who was the post-holder, did not play a public role during most of the temporal bounds of this research.

High level interactions have been sparse.³⁹³ For example, during his presidency, Dmitry Medvedev visited Moldova once, on 9 October 2009 to take part in the CIS meeting and not in a bilateral capacity.³⁹⁴ Although Medvedev met with the leader of the Democratic Party Marian Lupu and acting president Mahai Ghimpu, this should be seen as part of usual protocol. Notably, President Voronin was the only head of state, albeit by then outgoing as general elections were imminent, Medvedev did not have a one-to-one meeting with during the CIS summit in Moscow, in July 2009. During his first round of presidency, Putin followed a similar approach – to have occasional bilateral meetings with Moldovan counterpart during multilateral gathering, for example, the CIS meeting in Minsk in November 2008, when Putin met President Voronin.

Bilateral interactions at the top level with Moldova intensified as it approached the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU in November 2014; albeit this level of intensity remained incompatible with Ukraine. For example, the then prime ministers of two countries,

³⁹³ Including irregular nature of meetings of Moldova-Russia's intergovernmental economic cooperation commission. For example, there was over 2.5 years' gap between the meeting in November 2012 and June 2015 demonstrating the tension between two countries at the same time as Moldova was negotiating its association agreement with the EU. Meetings of the commission resumed and so did more frequent meetings at higher political level.

³⁹⁴ President Medvedev's visit to Moldova, (9 October, 2009), online <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/trips/5707>, 15 September 2018.

Dmitry Medvedev and Vlad Filat met in May 2014 for the first time in almost three years, although this occurred on the side-lines of the CIS meeting but, is nonetheless, a departure from previous practice. More regular meetings followed, also on the fringes of CIS meetings. There was a strain of negative reaction and warnings coming from Russia's senior officials in advance of signing but the political rhetoric was not accompanied by the equivalent level of activities and no serious attempts were made in order to prevent it at the time. There was no direct involvement of the Russian President, at least not publicly, opposite to the active public role President Putin played in the case of Ukraine. Instead, rhetoric ensued through governmental and diplomatic channels. For example, Russia's ambassador to Moldova at the time, Farit Mukhametshin, conveyed a message just before the Association agreement, noting:

*We therefore inform, and we tell the Moldovan authorities that when they choose a European path, there will be changes and so they should be aware and prepare for some future adjustments.*³⁹⁵

While direct engagement with Moldova's officials and the communication of Russia's position was notably devolved from the presidential to a lower level within the government, with regards to the decision owner, Russia followed the pattern of the unitary decision-making approach of the RAM and Rational Incrementalism. Other agencies were publicly referred to as decision-makers in some areas with relation to Moldova; for example, The Russian Federal Service for Veterinary Surveillance, Rosselkhoznadsor. The fact that their decisions followed other politically charged events, such as those leading to and in the aftermath of the EU Association Agreement or declaration of Russian Deputy Minister persona non grata in 2017, diminishes their agency in decision-making and instead reinforces the centralised nature of decision-making. The messages remained consistent to those with the aims and objectives being endorsed at presidential level. At the same time, Russia's approach to Moldova in terms of actors involved, has a more diversified nature than the one in Ukraine. One can observe a higher level of devolution to other levels of power, albeit within the limits of the overarching strategy rather than as independent decision agents. Perhaps, this is only the sign of the level of less strategic importance for the President at a

³⁹⁵ Tessa Dunlop, "Why Russian wine ban is putting pressure on Moldova", BBC news, 21 November 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-24992076>, accessed on 18 April 2018.

particular point of time.³⁹⁶ This is where the analysis departs further away from RAM and closer to Principle 2 of Rational Incrementalism.

5.3.1 *The role of agency*

In a rare public remark in relations to Moldova, President Medvedev noted in 2010: “our people share longstanding traditions of friendship and trust, of spiritual and cultural closeness.”³⁹⁷ This was, however, a diplomatic nod, congratulating the Acting President Mihai Ghimpu. The decisions made earlier, for example, on tariff increase or ban on certain Moldovan goods, do not speak in favour of friendship and trust but rather pragmatism and calculations in advancing aims and objectives. It goes hand in hand with President Putin’s rationality-based approach to foreign policy, noted in 2007, where actions are measured against the extent to which they advance Russia’s interests.

Decisions made in relations to Moldova, as in relations to Ukraine, should be viewed in the context of the assessment of the past and aspirations for the future. In both agency plays an important role. The past, according to President Putin, was dramatic, with the collapse of the Soviet Union being assessed as a tragedy; albeit with the emphasis on Russian people who remained outside Russia’s new borders. This view is supported by the majority of the respondents in Moldova, according to public opinion polls; notably that these numbers are higher than in Ukraine.³⁹⁸ The view coming from the Moldovan public can be perceived as

³⁹⁶ The last remark is notable due to the increased direct involvement of the President’s after the end of 2016, following the election of President Dodon, when the prospect of achieving objective regarding Moldova’s relationships with the EU became more feasible and gained more traction at the highest political circles in Russia. Kremlin’s endorsement of Dodon was evident from the beginning of his presidency manifested in Rogozin’s visit to Chisinau a day after Dodon’s inauguration. This, in its turn, is an indication of the role of the changing context and maximising its benefits, as oppose to changing the context to advance the interests, and hence indicate the departure from the first model towards the third model that recognises the constraints put to actors by the context. “Moldovan President meets Russian deputy premier”, (24 December 2016), online <http://www.presedinte.md/eng/comunicate-de-presa/igor-dodon-s-a-intilnit-cu-dmitri-rogozin>, accessed on 19 June 2018.

³⁹⁷ Congratulations to Acting President of Moldova and Speaker of the Moldovan Parliament Mihai Ghimpu, (27 August 2010), online <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/8756> accessed on 2 May 2018.

³⁹⁸ In four separate polls conducted between June 2014 and March 2016 on average about 55 per cent thought that the dissolution of the Soviet Union was a bad thing. Only 29 per cent (and that in March 2016) thought it was a good thing; Public Opinion Survey, Residents of Moldova (with exception of Transnistria), (March 2016), by Baltic Surveys/The Gallup Organisation, http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/iri_poll_presentation-moldova-march_2016.pdf, accessed on 9 July 2018. Even greater number expressed this view in a survey conducted between June 2015 and July 2016 when on average 70 per cent Moldovans believed the dissolution of the Soviet Union was bad thing, higher than in Russia (69 per cent); David Masci, “In Russia, nostalgia for Soviet Union and positive feelings about Stalin”, *Pew Research Centre*, (29 June 2017), online <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/06/29/in-russia-nostalgia-for-soviet-union-and-positive-feelings-about-stalin/>, accessed on 20 September 2018.

legitimising factor contributing to the success of the pursuit of Russia's interests in Moldova and yet Russia remained notably less active and less engaged with Moldova over the years. The level of engagement, albeit remaining at a low level in general, fluctuated, depending on who was holding the office at Chisinau and their position towards Russia and the EU and the effect on Russia's broader interests. There was also a tendency to include opposition or minority parties in discussions, particularly when the course taken by a government or a leading party within a coalition was less acceptable by Kremlin. For example, President Medvedev's meeting with the leader of the Democratic Party Marian Lupu, former speaker of the Parliament and a defector from the Communist party, shortly after 2009 elections. Notably, that was a party that received relatively low number of votes and seats than other parties in the government coalition. Lupu, nevertheless, became a president a year later, in December 2010. Even more notable was the meeting between president Putin and the leader of PSRM Igor Dodon and the former Prime Minister Zinaida Grechany in November 2015. Rather remarkable is the fact that President Putin discussed 'the current state of bilateral relations and prospects for their development' with the leader of the Party, PSRM that then did not yet run independently in the general elections. Albeit, its leader, Dodon, became Moldova's president a year later. These kind of meetings, as other meetings and over the years, were not only part of the strategic communication and messaging to elected governments and heads of state in Chisinau about Russia's position and preferences, as the official Chisinau for the best part of the temporary bounds of the research remained constrained towards Russia. These and other publicly communicated meetings and celebratory note exchanges also served as a public reminder about the closeness between the Russian and Moldovan people and their national interest upon which it was hoped the 'friendly and sincere relations' will be built.³⁹⁹ Yet, Russia's embargoes and export bans

In Ukraine 35% of respondents expressed their regret about the collapse of the Soviet Union, *Sputnik News*, "Over third of Ukrainians regret the collapse of the Soviet Union", (5 October 2016), online <https://sputniknews.com/europe/201610061046041758-ukrainians-regret-soviet-collapse/> accessed on 9 July 2018.

Despite the rather frosty political and economic relations between the two countries, 64% of respondents saw Russia as Moldova's best economic partner, while 59% as the greatest political partner. A proportion of these respondents look both ways, 57% and 55% respectively considered it to be the EU. On the question of seeing Russia as both political and economic threat, 30% shared this view while 22% saw the EU as a political and economic threat. It is worth adding that public view in Chisinau (as oppose to nationwide view, except Transnistria) was more favourable towards economic and political cooperation with the EU (68% and 66% respectively) than Russia (59% and 49% respectively), while 38% considered Russia to be an economic threat and 39% - political threat.

³⁹⁹ "Dmitry Medvedev met with leader of the Democratic Party of Moldova Marian Lupu, (9 October 2009), online <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/5700>, accessed on 19 April 2018.

continued to be applied on a regular basis while mutual reassurances at rhetoric level continued. These mutual reassurances and expressed hopes had little impact or actual improvement in relationship. Thus, a few years later after Medvedev's meeting with Lupu, during a rare meeting between the head of governments, the then Moldovan Prime Minister Vlad Filat pointed at strained relationship between the two countries, saying to his Russian counterpart, Dmitry Medvedev, that he hoped that "our relations, especially our personal relationship, will be friendly, which will help us solve the problems we face."⁴⁰⁰ It did not have a desired effect though, particularly in the context of Moldova's progress towards the Association Agreement with the EU. Instead, President Putin was quoted saying in 2017 that "It needs to be recognized that mutually beneficial ties with Russia deteriorated against the background of attempts to force a closer relationship with the European Union."⁴⁰¹ This approach is reflected not only in rhetoric but also in decisions. A closer analysis of this statement clearly indicates Putin's admission that closer relations with the EU implies negative relations with Russia and decisions such as imposing tariffs is a tangible illustration of this placing Moldova's leadership in to an 'either/or' choice, particularly in economic terms.

As in case of Ukraine, views held at a decision-making level in Russia on immediate and more distanced historic events, fuelled Russia's objectives towards Moldova. Despite more devolved nature of actors involved in Russia's foreign policy in Moldova, there is no evidence to suggest there is contestation in those beliefs grouped around factors that influence decision-making. This is explained by the centralised role of a decision-maker with their strong views about key events, such as collapse of the Soviet Union, the role of the CIS and Eurasian Economic Union in the process of Russia's power consolidation in the region and view of the EU as a natural rival to this process. While the President was visibly more detached from Russia's engagement with Moldova, the decisions remained consistent with President's position in relation to the above key factors. These key factors, in which agency plays an important role, continued to shape Russia's approach through the series of incremental decisions with the strategic outlook that in turn, was shaped with personal values and beliefs at their core.

⁴⁰⁰ "Dmitry Medvedev meets with Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova Vladimir Filat", the transcript of the beginning of the meeting", (30 May 2012), online <http://government.ru/en/news/5402/>, accessed on 19 April 2018.

⁴⁰¹ Denis Dyomkin, "In Russia, Moldovan president says he may scrap EU trade pact", op.cit.

The centralization of power in decision-making addressed one of the key concepts of RAM and maps partially to Principle 2 of Rational Incrementalism. However, the agency, which in the above analysis dominates structures, is absent in RAM and is contained in Principle 2 of Rational Incrementalism.

5.4 APPLICATIONS OF MEANS – IMPLEMENTATION

Over the course of years there are a number of examples to illustrate the connection between low-level decisions leading to comparatively small changes. These decisions, predominantly in the areas of trade and economics, are linked to strategic outlook. Russia consistently resorted to exercising its economic power to indicate its displeasure of Moldova's course toward European integration. In early 2006, following the establishment of the Action Plan between EU and Moldova,⁴⁰² Russia suspended imports of Moldovan wine, one of the country's main export items, on health and sanitation grounds.⁴⁰³ The ban was further extended and only partially lifted in 2007 despite Moldova's hope of its total elimination. Considering that about 80-90% of all Moldovan wine exports were to Russia, the impact on the industry and the economy as a whole was significant. The ban inflicted over \$180 million loss during the first nine months in 2006. The same year Russia increased the price for its natural gas and Moldova became one of the affected countries. Moldova is an example of Russia's diverse approach in gas pricing in relations to its neighbours indicating that there are other motives than just economic ones. This is evidenced in the fact that while Moldova faced the increase in natural gas prices, Transnistria continued to receive subsidies from Russia amid its special status that Russia did not have intentions to change. It is also worth adding that after the increase Ukraine was still paying \$15 less per 1,000 cubic meters than

⁴⁰² The EU Moldova Action Plan was published in 2005, It laid out the strategic objectives of the cooperation between Moldova and the EU, covering a three-year timeframe. It aimed to provide practical support to Moldova in pursuing its European aspirations.

⁴⁰³ The same measures were taken against Georgian wine. C.J. Chivers, "A 'Wine Blockade' Against Georgia and Moldova", *The New York Times*, (6 April 2006), online <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/06/world/europe/06russia.html>; see also https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/moldova_enp_ap_final_en.pdf; "Russia wine move draws protests", BBC news, 30 March 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4860454.stm>; "Moldova: Counting Losses as Russian Wine Ban Lingers", Radio Free Europe, (4 April 2007), online <https://www.rferl.org/a/1075697.html>, accessed on 17 April 2018.

Moldova,⁴⁰⁴ albeit the disparity between the two decreased from \$35 to \$15.⁴⁰⁵ Despite the increase, both countries were still paying considerably lower prices than other European consumers. The increase took place at the time when a number of post-Soviet countries signed action plans with the EU; signalling that the timing was a deliberate choice to demonstrate the consequences for choosing a different path considered incompatible with Russia's own integration projects. It is important to note that these relatively insignificant actions for Russia are significant for Moldova, given the size of its economy and its dependency. Mintzberg's idea of reading patterns in a stream of action to make sense of aspirations remained evident in the case of Moldova, as it was in Ukraine.

The EU-Moldova Action Plan also spoke about reinforcing the dialogue between Moldova and the EU regarding Transnistria status. The later remained a constant reminder of tension between Moscow and Chisinau and the former used it when trying to achieve desired outcomes. As Moldova pushed yet again for Transnistria solution in 2008, Russia indicated that it might be willing to support these efforts. However, in exchange for Moldova reaffirming that it would not aspire to join NATO, which would in any case be contradictory to Moldova's neutral status engraved in the Article 11 of the country's 1994 constitution.⁴⁰⁶

Russia also demanded that Moldova would leave the Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development, known in short as GUAM named to reflect its membership that includes Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova.⁴⁰⁷ Sharp reaction to Moldova's part in

⁴⁰⁴ As part of renegotiating prices with a number of ex-Soviet Union republics, Russia increased natural gas prices for Moldova from \$80 per 1,000 cubic meters to \$110 (after the price increase Ukraine was paying \$95, double its previous price). Initial offer of \$160 was rejected by Moldova causing the cut of supply by Russia. "Moldova agrees Russian gas deal", BBC news, 17 January 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/4620844.stm>, accessed 18 April 2018.

⁴⁰⁵ "Moldova agrees Russian gas deal", BBC news, (17 January 2006), op.cit.

"Economic Dependence on Russia. What has Moldova Learnt?", *Moldstreet*, (29 March 2018), online <https://www.mold-street.com/?go=news&n=7276> accessed on 5 May 2018; See, for example, Tessa Dunlop, op.cit.

⁴⁰⁶ In Moldova's Constitutions, Article 11 does not only refer to Moldova's neutrality but also to not permitting the stationing of any foreign military troops on its territory. The status of neutrality has always been welcomed by Russia. Reference to this are consistently noted in Russian strategic documents, while the second part of Article 11 remained consistently ignored. Text of the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova (in Russian), came in force on 27 August 1994, online <http://lex.justice.md/viewdoc.php?action=view&view=doc&id=311496&lang=2> accessed on 10 April 2018.

⁴⁰⁷ For example, during his visit to Chisinau, the chairman and Russia's State Duma's CIS Committee Andrei Ostrovsky said "We hope that Moldova will leave GUAM. We think that Moldova's leadership – unlike leaders in Georgia and Ukraine – are acting in the interests of their own people. A majority of Moldovans are opposed to their county joining the North Atlantic alliance". "Moldova: Back in The Kremlin's Shadow", Radio Free Europe, (31 May 2008), online <https://www.rferl.org/a/1144526.html>, accessed on 15 April 2018.

GUAM could be due to a number of factors. First, it was seen as a challenge, if not an alternative, to the enhanced regional integration led by Russia within and beyond the CIS, bringing in a more pluralistic model of regional integration. Second, as a potential route for diverting the status of Moldova's permanent neutrality with security being one of the areas of activities; albeit with the focus on combatting terrorism and crime, however in June 2007 GUAM member states agreed to form a 500-personnel joint peacekeeping force aiming to battle separatism causing Russia's criticism. Thirdly due to the fact that two members of the organisation (Georgia and Ukraine) were seeking membership in NATO and this association made Russia worry about the perceived connection between NATO and GUAM.⁴⁰⁸ Russia's concerns were addressed through rhetoric and did not materialise in substantial actions. Arguably, while potentially a nuisance to Russia, GUAM was not viewed as a substantial threat to Russia's interests, hence limited actions on Russia's part.

With regard to neutrality and military alliances, no major steps have been taken and the focus remained on reserving the status quo has as a reflection of a continuous feature of Russia's approach to Moldova. This is evident in the absence of noticeable decisions. Instead focusing on ensuring the sustainability ongoing attempts to prevent Moldova's actions, or punish unwanted actions, a series of lower level decisions ensue, indicating a small appetite for significant steps. The approach changes when a more favourable obtaining environment presents an opportunity to act. Change of the internal dynamics in Moldova in late 2016 presented such opportunity. It was in this instance that the Russian President himself started investing time and effort to revert, rather than prevent, the loss inflicted by Moldova's signing of the Association Agreement with the EU two years earlier.

Acknowledging public discourse is rather important in the context of the actions that followed. Such discourse may not serve as an indicator of actual beliefs and values of a decision-maker (particularly the one in another country), it can nevertheless be an indicator of accrued synergies where the two discourses have shared elements. As we saw in the case of Ukraine, there is a clear pattern between the dynamics of relationship between Moscow and Chisinau and public opinion in Moldova. For example, analysis of public opinion leads to the conclusion that sanctions may not have been only designed to hit the economy but cause a negative impact on public opinion among Moldovans towards the EU; a proxy

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

association with worsening economic conditions, albeit among other things also through Russia's 'justifiable' sanctions. The act of punishment created an opportunity to influence public opinion laying foundation for when it may matter; i.e. the opportunity to reverse Moldova's course, presents itself. Despite tensions between Chisinau and Moscow and series of sanctions hitting Moldova's economy through the years, the outcome was that more people continued favouring the Eurasian Economic Union over the EU. In early 2018, 41.2% of citizens would have voted for joining the Eurasian Economic Union while 35.6% for joining the EU.⁴⁰⁹ This trend can be observed across a longer period of time, particularly following the 2014 corruption crises related to the misappropriation of the EU funds.⁴¹⁰ This serves as an example of not only exploiting the economic dependencies but capitalising on the overall public mood of disengagement from the mainstream political course caused by a long-standing political instability in Moldova, particularly during the period following 2008 Parliamentary elections up until the end of temporal boundary of this research. The political split, as far as the country's international aspirations are concerned, also fuelled the situation that was further deepened following the first direct presidential election in 2016. Most significantly, the agenda of the winning candidate included a withdrawal from the Association Agreement and enjoyed wide public support.⁴¹¹ It is not to say that Russia's approach with sanctions created the internal dynamics and public moods, but it was able to tune into favourable context through effective strategic communications. Moldovans' attitudes towards Russia are also flavoured by historic, and to a large extent cultural, links

⁴⁰⁹ Public opinion poll conducted in April 2018 by the Association of Sociologists and Demographers, online <http://www.infotag.md/reports/776861/>. Only marginally different results (well within the margins of statistical error) were obtained in the public poll conducted by the same organisation in January 2018 when 42,5% citizens of Moldova would have voted for country's integration in the Eurasian Union and nearly 37,6% would have voted for joining the EU. It is worth adding that respondents in Chisinau are usually more favourable towards the EU than the nationwide results reveal. Thus in 2016 56% were willing to join the EU and 32% the Eurasian Union, online <https://mresearcher.com/2018/01/asdm-65-grazhdan-moldovy-ne-dovolny-ekonomicheskoy-situatsiej-v-strane.html>, accessed on 25 June 2018.

⁴¹⁰ See, for example, Public Opinion Survey, Residents of Moldova (with exception of Transnistria), March 2016, by Baltic Surveys/The Gallup Organisation, http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/iri_poll_presentation-moldova-march_2016.pdf accessed on 9 July 2018.

⁴¹¹ This split manifested itself vividly during the first direct presidential elections on 30 October 2016. Igor Dodon, whose political platform is built on opposing the Association Agreement with the EU and tightening links with Russia, was elected with 52.11 per cent votes. His main opponent, candidate Maia Sandu from the pro-EU party of Action and Solidarity received 47.89 per cent votes. Dodon became president on 23 December 2016; his first foreign trip was to Russia. This division between the Government and the President is also reflected in equal measure among the people who, as polls indicate, assesses relations with Russia as good (41%) and bad (40%). Ibid., For comparison 45% assessed relations with Ukraine as being good, while 20% as bad (26% defined it as neither good nor bad); 55% assessed relations with the EU as good and 20% as bad

and the factor of ‘known’, such as ties with Russia as opposed to the ‘unknown’ or less familiar as in case of the EU.⁴¹²

Russia sought more allies in support of the Eurasian Economic Union and Moldova had the potential to punch above its weight. With loss of Ukraine, Moldova’s participation gained additional weightage. Ensuring pro-Russian sentiments became essential for the success of this objective. It is not just the central government that is important in this regard but also regions, particularly with substantial segments of the population remaining sympathetic to Russia. The widely reported support to pro-Russia’s candidates during the legislative elections in the autonomous region of Gagauzia in 2016 is an example of how Russia pushed this agenda.⁴¹³ It follows a similar path to that observed during election of Governor in the region in 2015. Collective impact of this ‘people’s perspective’ is: weakening Chisinau’s position in the region, arguably strengthening Russia’s position in the pursuit of discouraging Moldova’s ties with the EU, and at the same time advancing Moldova’s ties with the Eurasian Economic Union.

In the context of the negotiations on the Association Agreement with the EU, the capitalisation on the regional split also became quite apparent. In a referendum held in the region on 2 February 2014, over 98 per cent of Gagauzian population expressed their support to the Eurasian Economic Union.⁴¹⁴ This did not prevent Moldova’s signing of the

⁴¹² According to the public opinion poll “Vox Populi” conducted in Moldova in January 2018 only 16% of Moldovans supports the ban on Russia’s news media. Moldova’s Parliament repeatedly initiated the law on countering ‘foreign propaganda’ forbidding broadcasting news and analytical programmes with political content that were produced in countries that have not ratified European convention on trans-border broadcasting. President Dodon has declined ratification of Parliament’s proposed law causing a disagreement between the President and the Parliament. Following the decision of the Constitutional Court that the Speaker of the Parliament can approve the law, it was finally promulgated on 10 January 2018. <https://mresearcher.com/2018/01/asdm-lish-16-grazhdan-podderzhivayut-zapret-v-moldove-rossijskih-novostnyh-smi.html> , accessed on 30 June 2018.

⁴¹³ Mihai Popsoi, “Legislative Election in Gagauzia: The Autonomous Region Turns its Back on Moldova Again”, Jamestown Foundation, (7 December 2016), online <https://jamestown.org/program/75538/>, accessed on 30 August 2018.

⁴¹⁴ Three questions were posed during the referendum: one related to Russia-led Custom Union, another to the European Union integration; and the question on Gagauzia’s right to secede from Moldova. With a turnout of over 70 percent, the Gagauzian voters overwhelmingly chose membership in the Customs Union over membership in the EU—98.4 percent supported joining the Customs Union, and 97.2 percent were against integration with Europe. Moreover, 98.9 percent of voters expressed Gagauzia’s right to secede from Moldova. The referendum was regarded as non-constitutional by Chisinau. Dimitry Mizarari, “The Gagauz Referendum in Moldova: A Russian Political Weapon?”, Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 11 Issue: 23, The Jamestown Foundation, (5 February 2014), online <https://jamestown.org/program/the-gagauz-referendum-in-moldova-a-russian-political-weapon/> accessed on 31 August 2018; “Gagauzia rejects closer EU for Moldova”, <https://www.rferl.org/a/moldova-gagauz-referendum-counting/25251251.html> accessed on 31 August 2018.

Association Agreement, but it did help the region to avoid the sanctions imposed by Russia following the signature.⁴¹⁵ This example serves as a testimony of the meaning and intentions of the sanctions, as both Transnistria and Gagauzia escape these while others less favourable to Moscow were affected. Sanctions were clearly used as an instrument of coercion, persuasion or incentives and not due to economic or market dictates. Frequent resort to sanctions is a continuous indication of limited alternatives that the environment presented to Moscow. It also demonstrates resort to tested patterns in decision-making. Small in their application but designed to achieve greater change, as per the prescription of the Rational Incrementalism. Approach to Gagauzia is also an illustrative example of gradual approach to change. The impact of the region on Moldova's pursuit towards closer ties with the EU is modest. However, aggregating small victories (and occasional losses as well), gradually advances Russia's objective of turning Moldova away from the EU. Considering the position of the president and attitudes of the majority of the population in other parts of the country, as opposed to the central government, this pursuit is likely to continue.

This opportunistic approach is the reflection of a strong presence of Rational Incrementalism, and in the context of this discussion Principle 4 in particular, in Russia's decision-making and with the decisions being led by aims and objectives.

5.5 CONCLUSION

The case study of Russia's foreign policy decision-making in Moldova reinforced the conclusions of the previous two chapters regarding the benefit of the third model. As in the case of Ukraine, findings from the data analysis indicate that principles of Rational Incrementalism map across all three major categories of analysis. At the same time, RAM remained relevant, to an extent, in both objective setting and actor/decision owner categories. Utility of Incrementalism remained limited to operational level decisions. Application of low level decisions that made strategic contributions can easily be overlooked when viewed through the Incremental approach. As such, the model does not provide sufficient basis for analysing Russian decision-making, due to the model's lack of attention to a long-term view.

The conclusions from the Moldova case study are presented below:

⁴¹⁵ Robert Schwartz, Vitalie Calugareanu, "Gagauzia: a new stumbling block for Moldova", (23 March 2015), <https://www.dw.com/en/gagauzia-a-new-stumbling-block-for-moldova/a-18333303> accessed on 30 August 2018.

Table 7: Summary of the analysis of Moldovan Case Study

(Author's own table)

	Conceptual framework	Functional indicators and degree of mapping to the Principles of the Rational Incrementalism; expressed as high (H), medium (M) and low (L)	
Aims and Objectives (Why?)	Setting aims and objectives	<p>Similarly, to the conclusions in the previous two Chapters, it is evident that decisions, however small they are, are guided by long-term aims and objectives that are not subject to regular reviews. These need to be seen as part of the broader aspirations of Russia's foreign policy and Moldova's role in it (through CIS, EEC, and EU's role in the region). Moldova's case reinforces the argument that incremental decisions should be carefully analyzed as these could be part of a larger strategic outlook and not a one-shot decision.</p>	RAM Principle 1, H
		<p>Causal link between aims and objectives and decisions, both fundamental and incremental. Relatively passive approach to decision-making with the preference to maintaining a status quo, i.e. minimizing change in Moldova's context. However, this approach should be viewed as part of Russia's regional and global aspirations that presuppose considerable changes, are not time bound and are moderated by capability and context.</p>	Principle 1, H Principle 4, H
		<p>Like in the case of Ukraine, the choice of instruments of national power is moderated, dependent on context. However, the major emphasis is made on the economic (e.g. tariffs and bans) and political instruments (e.g. regional elections). The applications of these instruments is part of a long view.</p>	Principle 1, H
	Aspired changes	Changes are predominantly sought through incremental steps which are however linked to long-term aims and objectives. Readiness to take a long-term approach to making change happen. Readiness to set back as part of the process moving forward under changed circumstances (example of the EU Association Agreement).	Principle 1 and 4, H
Actors (Who?)	Actors	Although considerably less public than in Ukraine, the role of the President as decision owner within structure is consistent, setting the main directions and executing overall control over the implementation of these decisions. Moldova's case study has reinforced the conclusions of the previous analysis.	RAM Principle 2, H
	Role of agency	The role of agency plays a prominent role. There is a link between decisions and actors' values, beliefs, aspirations and experiences. With the dominance of a unitarian approach to decision-making, there is a consistency of views and beliefs that are linked to the long-term nature of aims and objectives.	Principle 2, H Principle 3, H

Application of Means (How?)	Emphasis on incremental changes, if at all, at a time or preservation of <i>status quo</i> , such as in case of Transnistria. Tendency to follow a pattern in chosen actions, such as tariffs and bans. However, incremental changes are not detached from the overall strategy; instead they become part of the strategy.	Principle 4, H
	Limited number of alternatives is considered, instead we see reoccurring patterns, predominantly reactive in nature (such as tariffs, import bans from Moldova etc.). Even small pay-offs (and low risk) at the time in their accumulation and through long-term approach, are designed to bring about a desired outcome.	Principle 4, H (requires further refinement)
	Limited ability to shape the environment, instead a tendency to utilize the obtaining environment that creates opportunities to advance prevailing strategy. Inactions should be viewed as part of risks and pay-off analysis within emerging contexts, and not as a divergent from the overall strategy. Readiness to bear temporary 'loss' or retreat to maximize gain through exploiting opportunities of changing context in pursuit of objectives in the longer-term. For example, not trying to prevent Moldova signing the association agreement with the EU, then attempting to cancel the agreement following the election of President Dodon.	Principle 4, H

Looking through the prism of consistency and long-term outlook of Russia's foreign policy and the way Moldova features in it (as part of the CIS and Eurasian Economic Union, non-allied state and out of bound for the EU), RAM offers a useful framework for analysis. Russia's consistent resort to incremental steps, such as sanctions or other economically coercive activities designed to harm the economy of Moldova, are a continuous indication of limited application of instruments of power. Russia repeatedly applied the tested patterns that over time became a distinct strategy (using Mintzberg's analogy) of Russia's approach to Moldova. This link of incremental decisions to overall strategy also demonstrates the limitation of the Incremental Model in explaining Russia's approach. These patterns are small in their application and give an impression of lower level decision-making but their timing and context indicate that they are designed to achieve greater change over a longer period of time. Keeping Moldova economically dependent, particularly in the energy and agricultural sectors, remained part of Russia's strategy. Sanctions were used to hurt the government but also send a message to the general public and were combined with effective strategic communications. All in all, the combination of these factors and their consistency are in line with the prescription of the Rational Incrementalism. While foundational models are in a position to offer useful insights on the aspects of the above, they fall short of explaining the totality of Russia's approach.

Russian presidents over the years remained hardly visible figures in relations with Moldova, however, this lack of public display of presidential engagement did not diminish the presidents' role in decision-making, instead it reinforces their centralised nature. The impression of decisions being delegated to a lower level, were context driven and linked to strategy, indicating centralised control over strategic issues. The shift that took place after 2016 with the changing context within Moldova, brought the President to the fore with his vision for Moldova being directly conveyed and reinforced. This illustrates the point of how role of agency and structure in decision-making is balanced by the obtaining environment.

Although with a lower weightage due to geopolitical and geo-economics constrains, Russia held significant aspirations towards Moldova in its regional integration processes. However, its ability to shape the context to pursue these aspirations remained limited. Instead, as in the case of Ukraine, the role of context persisted, such as the outcome of the Presidential election or opportunities related to capitalising on regional differences. It made decision-making towards Moldova merely reactive and opportunistic in response to the obtaining environment. Due to the incremental nature of actions, risks remained low allowing even small pay-offs to accumulate over time into long-term strategic gains.

6 CONCLUSION

Decision-making in Russia's foreign policy remains enigmatic in scholarship and practice. To unravel this, Russia's decision-making was viewed through the prism of two foundational models, namely Rational Actor Model and Incrementalism; however, their utility was found to be limited. This qualitative research used Grounded Theory approach to generate an exploratory version of Rational Incrementalism. The model, underpinned by five key principles, was further refined using case study analysis. Through the prism of Rational Incrementalism, this research demonstrated that Russia's foreign policy-decision making retains a long-term purposefulness and that its incremental decisions are guided by a farsightedness with allowances for emergent contexts that require quick actions, underpinned by risk and pay-off analysis (defined by the author as contextual opportunism).

This research had two-fold objectives; on an empirical level it aimed to contribute to knowledge on Russia's foreign policy decision-making, and on a conceptual plane, to contribute to theoretical development that underpins academic research on decision-making in foreign policy. Several foreign policy decision-making models were identified in the literature, however, two foundational models stood out. These are Allison and Zelikow's Rational Actor Model and Lindblom's Incremental decision-making model. The former is based on the supposition that actors are rational entities that ground their decisions on systematic consideration of alternatives. The object being to achieve an ultimate pre-considered goal, typically aspiring major change. The second model by Lindblom positions decision making as a process of small steps in the 'right' direction where means and ends are not distinct and the end-goal is not pre-set; what Lindblom described as "muddling through" towards a better future. Lindblom premises on the idea that the future unknowable and hence long-term planning may be useful but secures no practical purpose. First model is associated with unitary decision-making, while the second with pluralistic or distributed decision-making. Derivatives of these models, including hybrid versions were examined; however, the two foundational models remain foundational.

The author positioned the research on the thesis that Russia's foreign policy cannot be explained through the foundational models. While both provide a useful framework to draw upon, their limitations and attempts to reconcile them through synthetic approaches, discussed in Chapter 2, inspired the author to suggest a new conceptual framework for analysis. The key consideration were 'what' decisions are made, 'why' and by 'whom', what

is the approach to applying these decisions and is there a pattern, and with it, predictability, within the fluid context of international relations? How consistently does Russia's decision-making map on to existing theories; and whether contemporary theoretical frameworks are limited in explaining contextual opportunism? These general questions informed the formulation of the hypothesis that Russia's foreign policy decisions-making in Ukraine and Moldova represent a third model, distinct from blending of existing theoretical models, namely Allison's RAM and Lindblom's Incrementalism. The model, termed as 'Rational Incrementalism', resulted. The model, while inspired by the foundational models, and their critique, drew on additional indicators to help navigate foreign policy decision analysis in a more nuanced way. Critiques of the foundational models and their derivatives pointed to three areas that needed greater consideration and were either missing or less prominent in the models. These were: role of agency, capability and context, and relationship between strategy and structure. Advancing aspects of the foundational models and incorporating those three areas led to the development of a set of principles that underpin the exploratory version of Rational Incrementalism, the 'third model' proposed by the author. These principles are summarised below (for a more complete discussion see Chapter 2.3 and Figure 4):

Principle 1: Aims and Objectives. Decisions are selectively emergent, guided by a predetermined strategic direction. How far a direction can be rationally travelled (ends) is moderated by capabilities and context.

Principle 2: Agency versus Structure. Role of agency and structure in decision-making is balanced by the type of actor within the obtaining environment.

Principle 3: Strategy and Structure. Agency may innovate, disregard or create structures to drive strategy.

Principle 4: Capability and Context. Opportunities that advance prevailing strategy are exploited after due consideration for prevailing risks and long-term payoffs.

The principles, initially derived from the gaps identified in decision models in general and the two foundational models in particular, informed the development of Rational Incrementalism, as presented in Chapter 2. The indicators also derived from literature, were based on 'why', 'what', 'who' and 'how' of decision analysis, setting the parameters for the empirical part of the research. The empirical part, case studies of Ukraine and Moldova, drew on these indicators to test the foundational models against Rational Incrementalism. Triage of the

official documents, political rhetoric, scholarship in the field and grey literature of relevance to the decision-making, provided a baseline for the empirical research, against which the findings of the case studies were measured. The comparative analysis of findings of two case studies, appreciating differences and commonalities of their individual contexts, was also conducted in order to identify a possibility for any generalisations and to inform any future research recommendations. The process of testing Rational Incrementalism and its underpinning principles produced new data that was then used to further inform the development of the model.

Table 7 summaries major findings from the baseline and case study analyses. In each case, the analysis was conducted in three major categories through systematic application of indicators developed for each: aims and objectives (what?), decision owner(s) (who?), application of means (how?).

Table 8: Summary of conclusions through application of analytical framework

(Author’s own table) H (high), M (medium) and L (low) where H is most corresponding with the indicators of respective models and L is the least corresponding.

Cases	Categories and Indicators	Findings	RAM	Incrementalism	Rational Incrementalism
		Examples of findings in each of the categories of analysis mapped against corresponding indicators presented in Chapter 2			
Baseline	Aims and Objectives	Evidence of consistency of aims and objectives and aspired changes in strategic documents; however, research substantiates their moderation over time as a response to the obtaining environment and capabilities to pursue these over time. President Putin: “Russia’s Foreign Policy is determined by ... long-term interests and by tendencies in global development” (Chapter 3.2).	H	L	P4, H, P1, M
		Combination of fundamental and incremental decisions to advance aims and objectives. Perceived incremental decisions should be carefully analysed as these could be part of a larger strategic outlook and not a one-shot opportunistic endeavour (Chapter 3.2.1).	L	L	P1, H
		Context plays a significant role; ability to shape it is limited, instead paving the way for contextual opportunism (Chapter 3.2.2).	L	L	P4, H

	Actors and agency	Centralised model of decision-making with the President's role, as a chief decision-maker, reinforced in the strategic documents. While some elements of pluralisation can be observed, these are clearly at the level of inputs that may or may not be taken into account at the level of decision (Chapter 3.3.1).	H	L	P2, M
		President's long standing views on major geopolitical developments and regional and global aspirations inform approach to objectives setting; Putin's vision of Russia as a leader in the world (2012) (Chapter 3.3.2).	L	L	P2, H
		Calculated and yet flexible approach to foreign policy. Putin, drawing parallels with judo implying conceding in case it eventually leads to a victory (Chapter 3.3.2).	M	M	P4, H
	Application of means	Extracting agency through structures, illustrated through of continued strengthening of the presidential institution that is seen as a core of a strong state, while adjusting rules to allow for the continuity of power (Chapter 3.4).	L	L	P3, L
		Flexible approach linking to context and capability is reflected through Putin's "feeling the moment, along with the ability to recognise an opponent's strengths and weaknesses, as one of the key factors in striving for the best results." Recognition of the importance of a quick action within emerging and changing contexts indicated towards contextual opportunism as an approach (Chapter 3.4).	L	L	P4, M
	Case Study 1 – Ukraine	Aims and Objectives	Russia's aims and objectives in Ukraine remained long-term and should be viewed within the context of Russia's pursuit of its regional and global ambitions (Chapter 4.2.1).	H	L
Both fundamental and incremental decisions are to be seen through the prism of long view pointing towards a common direction. Due considerations need to be given to small scale decisions and their link to strategic outlook. Choices are actions, with due consideration of risks and pay-offs, are moderated by context and the available instruments of power (Chapter 4.2.1).			L	L	P1, H
Fundamental decisions are made when both pay-offs and risks of non-action are high, speaking directly to core interests. Even if short-term risks of action are considered to be high, this does not serve as a deterrent. In this sense there is a primacy of pay-offs over risks of action (Chapter 4.2.2).			L	L	P4, M
Short-term and long-term gains and occasional losses are directed towards approximation of aspirations. While aspiring fundamental changes, over a longer period of time the small changes themselves combine to form change of fundamental nature. The smaller steps – collectively advance the aspired change taking a long-term approach (Chapter 4.2.2).			L	L	P1, H
Actors and Agency		Centralisation of decision-making with President playing a core and public role. Other actors remain marginal, implementers, or messengers rather than decision owners. Once President Putin's power consolidation process reached comparatively higher degree, he exercised high level of agency in steering Russian politics in general and foreign policy in particular (Chapter 4.3.1).	H	L	P1, H

		President's strong view on the place of Ukraine in a new global order (UN General Assembly, 2015) combined with Russia's aspirations for a status of a great power and role of Ukraine in structures that are designed to facilitate its achievement, as well as potential obstacles in the process (Chapter 4.3.2).	L	L	P2, H
		Case of Crimea as an example of action underpinned by strong beliefs (agency) and core strategic interests expressed through power to act (key to agency) when recognising "a position of no exit". Links to the pay-off analysis argument above (Chapter 4.3.1).	L	L	P2, H P3, H
	Application of Means	Putin's "feel the moment... to strive for the best results" combined with the long view and the role of the broader context and the obtaining environment points towards strategic 'contextual opportunism' as an approach of choice. Instruments of power are chosen appropriately to the environment (Chapter 4.4).	L	L	P4, H
		Application of means is not an act of spontaneous thinking and reckless decisions, it was a moment of either ceasing the opportunity or arriving to a moment of desperation or a combination of both – Crimea is a case in point (Chapter 4.4).	L	L	P4, H
		Capability is not separable from the context; the latter creates impetus to act, provided there is strategic prudence in the action (Chapter 4.4).	L	L	P4, H
	Aims and Objectives	Decisions are guided by long-term aims and objectives. Prevalence of incremental decisions is linked to strategic outlook and strategic non-linearity. Choice of instruments of national power is moderated, depending on context (Chapter 5.2.1). Comparison of Ukraine and Moldova case studies is useful in terms of applicability of the model to seemingly different cases. The former is a combination of foundation and incremental decisions, while the latter is a prevalence of incremental decisions.	H	L	P1 H
		An apparently passive approach to the realisation of aspired changes, predominantly focusing on maintaining the status quo. Needs to be seen in the context of broader Russia's aspirations at regional and global levels (Chapter 5.2.2).	L	L	P1, H
	Actors and Agency	The role of the President as decision-owner is consistent. Impression of devolution of power due to low visibility of the President is not substantiated (Chapter 5.3).	H	L	P2, M
		With the dominance of unitarian approach to decision-making there is a consistency of views and beliefs that are turn linked to the long-term nature of aims and objectives. Agency plays a prominent role utilising structures within the obtaining environment (Chapter 5.3.1).	L	L	P2, H P3, H
	Application of Means	Incremental changes as part of the strategy; reoccurring pattern of approaches. Accumulation of small pay-offs that, through long-term approach, are designed to bring desired outcome (Chapter 5.4).	L	L	P4, H

	Tendency to utilise the obtaining environment that creates opportunities to advance prevailing strategy. Inactions or retreats are part of risks and pay-off analysis within emerging contexts and part of the long-view approach (Chapter 5.4).	L	L	P3, H P4, H
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The summary, derived from the table above, is presented in Table 8. Each category within an individual case needs to be viewed separately before viewing the summary based on calculation across the case studies.

Table 9: Summary of Comparison of Indicators across the three models

Cases	Categories and Indicators	RAM			Incrementalism			Rational Incrementalism		
		H	M	L	H	M	L	H	M	L
Baseline	Aims and Objectives	1		2			3	2	1	
	Actors and Agency	1	1	1			3	2	1	
	Application of Means			2			2		1	1
Case study 1 Ukraine	Aims and Objectives	1		3			4	2	2	
	Actors and Agency	1		2			3	3		
	Application of Means			3			3	3		
Case study 2 Moldova	Aims and Objectives	1		1			2	2		
	Actors and Agency	1		1			2	2		
	Application of Means			2			2	2		
Summary		6	1	8			24	18	5	1

From the above summary, it is evident that the hypothesis holds; moreover, the data show that the third model is distinct from a simple blend of the foundational models. The evidence from the baseline and the case studies indicates that Russia's foreign policy decisions-making is more closely described by Rational Incrementalism and is distinct from the foundational models or their blended variants.

Incrementalism appears to be least suited to explaining Russia's decision-making allaying suspicions of Russian foreign policy as 'muddling through'. RAM, while having a presence, particularly in some categories of analysis, reveal its shortcomings, first and foremost due to its fixated normative approach to decision-making. Recognition of the importance of a quick action within emerging and changing contexts indicated towards contextual opportunism as an approach to advance strategic objectives.

Rational Incrementalism in its conceptual form, as presented in Chapter 2, also demonstrated some shortfalls where the data and analysis also pointed to further grounding the model and

refining its principles. The analysis revealed disparities between the two cases; however, a clear pattern in decision analysis emerged when viewed through the Rational Incrementalism Model, providing comparable conclusions across the two cases following the consistent application of indicators. What also emerges is the diminished role of structures but the increased role of agency in decision-making; this was particularly facilitated by centralisation and accumulation of power by the President multiplied by power continuity. This, among other nuances identified, is another significant departure from the foundational models that focus on structures alone and justifies Rational Incrementalism as a separate model. The case studies demonstrated that the conceptual model of Rational Incrementalism presented in Chapter 2 requires refinement following data analysis. This approach is methodologically underpinned by the application of Grounded Theory in this research. The refined principles and the model is presented below:

Principle 1: Aims and Objectives. Decisions are selectively emergent, guided by a predetermined strategic direction. How far a direction can be rationally travelled (ends) is moderated by capabilities and context.

Principle 2: Agency and Structure. Role of agency and structure in decision-making is balanced by the type of actor within the obtaining environment. Agency will play a more profound role in systems where leadership comes from a narrow group or even a single person at the top; the more hierarchical structures are, the more dominant role agency will obtain. Decision analysis must take into account the degree to which agency prevails. When high degree of agency exhibited by an actor, historical patterns in decision making become less relevant and the agency's perspective becomes more dominant.

Principle 3: Strategy and Structure. Agency, if dominant over structures, may innovate, disregard or create structures to drive strategy. Indeed, it may also choose to work within structures for practical or political reasons. Conversely, where agency is diminished, structures may dominate strategy.

Principle 4: Capability and Context. Opportunities that advance existential strategy are exploited after due consideration for prevailing risks and long-term payoffs. The decision-maker exploits opportunity when strategically prudent in a given context and obtaining environment.

Principle 5: Strategy Adapts to Protect Core Interests. Recognition of Core Interests that sit beyond moderation is critical in decision analysis. An actor is inclined to greater risk-taking and propensity for action when inaction threatens a nation’s vital and core interests.

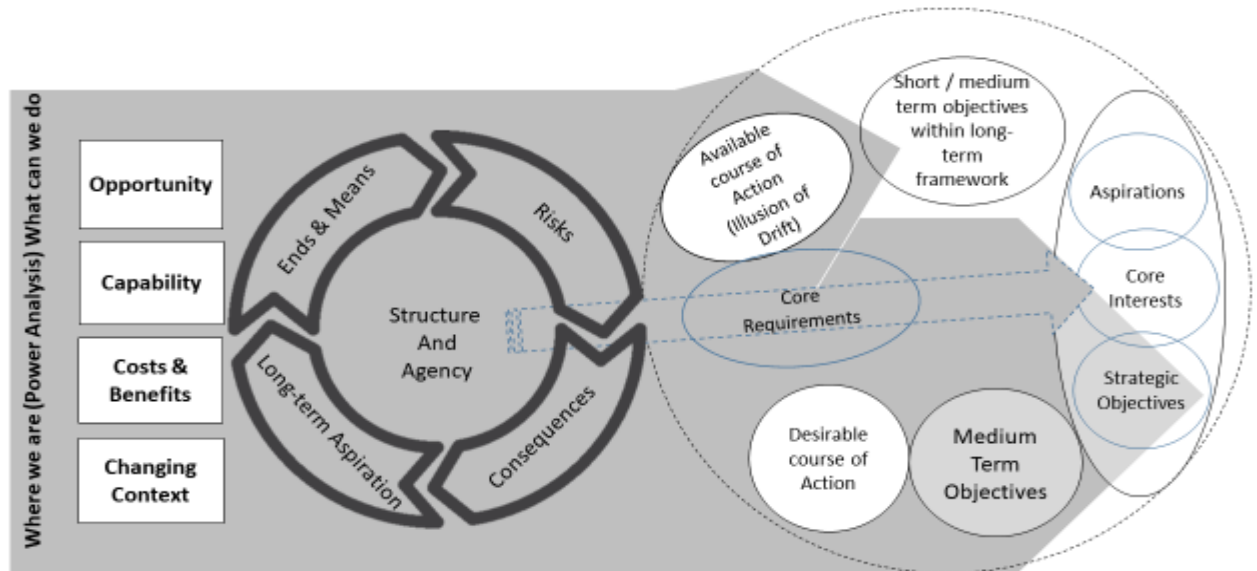


Figure 5: Rational Incrementalism

Author’s diagram

The model is drawn from the hypothesis and further tested through the case studies. This model advances the analytical framework developed in Chapter 2 (Figure 4). The nuances are the role of the non-linearity in context (which is volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous, VUCA, H.F.Barber). Pursuit or defence of core interests impulse lateral direct actions. The model also approaches the strategic possibilities in short term (muddling through) decision, the examining of alternatives, making choices and considering possible consequences. Because of the strategic nature of what may appear to be impulses of agency, the probability of such departures as being strategic remains high. Strategy as a pattern in a stream of actions as opposed to viewing individual decisions and their immediate and apparent consequences/outcomes. Increased role of Agency diminishes the role of Structures in decision-making and vice versa. In addition, analysis demonstrated the primacy of pay-offs over the risks of actions, particularly when core interests are at stake. Rational Incrementalism remains an exploratory model and therefore further research is needed to validate and advance its development.

Through the application of Rational Incrementalism Model, the author demonstrates that Russia retained purposefulness and long-term view while recognising the importance of quick actions within emerging and changing contexts indicating *contextual opportunism* as an approach. This is far from the incremental extreme of ‘muddling through’, but suggests a careful understanding of the strategic environment and the will to exploit opportunities in a utilitarian way without compromising the long term direction.

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