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**NAVAL
POSTGRADUATE
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MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**HOLY WAR: HOW PUTIN WEAPONIZED THE
RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**

by

Brandon A. Davis

September 2019

Co-Advisors:

Mikhail Tsyarkin
Anne L. Clunan

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**HOLY WAR: HOW PUTIN WEAPONIZED THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX
CHURCH**

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Lieutenant, United States Navy
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the role of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) as an instrument of Russian soft power in the Putin era. Soft power is a means to attract allies and support for a nation's objectives in foreign policy. Russia has a dwindling number of soft power weapons, with the ROC being one of its most remaining prominent soft power assets. The relationship between the ROC and Kremlin is nuanced, both gaining legitimacy and authority from one another. They share a similar conservative worldview and the narrative of a Russian world, which is seen to be Russia's prominent ideology exported in its perceived near abroad. Investigated in-depth in Ukraine, the ROC's influence has met failure there, demonstrated by the schism between the ROC and the Ukraine Church. This is contrasted by its use in Georgia, where, owing to the warm relationship between the ROC and the Georgian Orthodox Church, influence via the ROC appears to have found a measure of limited success. However, Russia's ability to exert soft power through the ROC appears to be waning overall, particularly after the church schism in Ukraine. Ultimately, the future of the ROC as a mechanism of Russia's soft power remains in doubt.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
CBSS	Council of the Baltic Sea States
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CIS-EMO	Commonwealth of Independent States Election Monitoring Organization
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EU	European Union
FPC	Foreign Policy Concept
FSU	Former Soviet Union
FSCROC	Foundations on the Social Conceptions of the Russian Orthodox Church
GOC	Georgian Orthodox Church
IAO	Inter-Parliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NSC	National Security Concept
NSS	National Security Strategy
OCU	Orthodox Church of Ukraine
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
ROC	Russian Orthodox Church
RT	Russia Today
SPIEF	St. Petersburg International Economic Forum
UAOC	Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church
UOC	Ukrainian Orthodox Church
UOC-KP	Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kiev Patriarchate
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation was left with an ideological void that had previously been filled by communism. In the Putin era, particularly after the Ukrainian Orange Revolution, Russia again saw the need to build its soft power outreach in an attempt to rebuild foreign attraction towards Russia beyond its borders.¹ A key component of this national rebranding has been the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), which synthesizes Russia's historical state and religious messaging.² This thesis seeks to further explore this phenomenon and answer three questions: Is Russia successfully able to use soft power? Does the Russian government utilize the ROC as a source of soft power? If so, has this strategy been successful in gaining influence abroad? In particular, the thesis will analyze the ways in which the ROC may be utilized as a way to gain influence in its perceived "near abroad," or Former Soviet Union (FSU).³ It will question the ability of Russia to wield soft power in the FSU, and whether the ROC can be used as a means to do so, by comparing and contrasting case studies in Ukraine and Georgia.

To do so, it dissects Moscow's constructed narrative of Russia as a civilizational pole that unites the Slavic-Orthodox world, utilizing a sense of Orthodox brotherhood, shared cultural history, and traditional Orthodox beliefs.⁴ Furthermore, it will explore the long-term implications of the ROC as a source of Russian attraction, particularly in light

¹ Valentina Feklyunina, "Soft Power and Identity: Russia, Ukraine and the 'Russian World(s),'", *European Journal of International Relations* 22, no. 4 (2016): 774-796, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1354066115601200>.

² Alicja Curanović, *The Religious Diplomacy of the Russian Federation*, Russia/NIS Center (Paris, France: IFRI, 2012), <https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ifrimr12curanovicreligiousdiplomacyjune2012.pdf>.

³ Daniel P. Payne, "Spiritual Security, the *Russkiy Mir*, and the Russian Orthodox Church: The Influence of the Russian Orthodox Church on Russia's Foreign Policy regarding Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia," in *Traditional Religion and Political Power: Examining the Role of the Church in Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine, and Moldova*, ed. Adam Hug (London: The Foreign Policy Center, 2015), 65, <https://fpc.org.uk/publications/orthodox/>.

⁴ Feklyunina, "Soft Power and Identity."

of the schism created in Orthodoxy as a result of the creation of an independent—autocephalous—Orthodox church in Ukraine.⁵

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The study of Russia’s use of soft power is significant, as it has been argued by scholars that Russia must increasingly focus on the use of soft power, as it sees its ability to project hard power in decline.⁶ Accordingly, to understand Russian foreign policy, one must understand how Russia views and uses soft power. In order to do this, one must understand all of the tools at its disposal, particularly one of its oldest, the ROC.⁷

In fact, the ROC’s relation to Russian power is so significant that Russia went so far as to codify the importance of religion to the Russian government in the Russian National Security Concept (NSC) of 2000, with its call for “spiritual renewal.”⁸ The document stated that Russia faced a dual threat of a “depreciation of spiritual values,” and “cultural-religious expansion into the territory of Russia by other states.”⁹ The document called to fight these threats through the protection of Russian culture and spirituality.¹⁰ Therefore, as the Russian government finds Russian spirituality and the ROC significant enough to include in documents regarding its national security and foreign policy, it bears significance for scholars of Russian security as well.

The situation in the FSU bears particular focus, as the ROC’s potential use as a means of Kremlin influence has ostensibly been observed in the recent conflicts in Georgia and Ukraine. Poignantly, the ROC’s involvement in Ukraine during and after the 2014

⁵ Alexander Zanemonets, “The Church Strikes Back: Moscow Breaks with Constantinople?” *Carnegie Moscow Center*, October 23, 2018, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/77558>.

⁶ Bobo Lo, *Russia and the New World Disorder* (London: Chatham House, 2015).

⁷ Andrew Evans, “Forced Miracles: The Russian Orthodox Church and Postsoviet International Relations,” *Religion, State, and Society* 30, no. 1 (August: 2010) 33-43, DOI: 10.1080/09637490220127611.

⁸ Robert Blitt, “Russia’s “Orthodox” Foreign Policy: The Growing Influence of the Russian Orthodox Church in Shaping Russia’s Policies Abroad,” *University of Pennsylvania Journal of International Law* 33, no. 2 (Winter 2011): 368. <https://scholarship.law.upenn.edu/jil/vol33/>.

⁹ Blitt, 368.

¹⁰ Blitt, 368.

conflict led to a schism in the Orthodox Church, which presents significant geopolitical ramifications for Russian foreign reinforced by the legitimacy of the ROC.¹¹ Yet, the ROC's influence in Georgia has yielded a much different outcome than in Ukraine.¹² As such, it is important to study how the ROC's messaging brought such different results in the two nations, as this could help predict how the ROC can be called upon as a future means of soft power by the Kremlin.

As the ROC appears to be closely linked to the Kremlin and its claims to be a leader in global Orthodoxy, Ukrainian autocephaly seemingly undermines Moscow's Orthodox narrative, and will play an important role in Russia's interaction with other Orthodox nations in years to come.¹³ This may serve to undermine the appeal of the ROC, and by extension Russia, not just in the FSU but around the globe. There are approximately 260 million Orthodox Christians around the world, comprising 12% of the world's Christian believers.¹⁴ While the scope of Orthodox believers around the world may be limited, the schism still threatens the Kremlin's future use of what is potentially one of its few remaining sources of soft power.¹⁵

¹¹ Kornely Kakachia, "Is Georgia's Orthodox Church an Obstacle to European Values?" PONARS Policy Memo 322, June 2014, http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/Pepm_332_Kkachia%20_June%202014.pdf; Alexander Zanemonets, "The Church Strikes Back: Moscow Breaks with Constantinople?" *Carnegie Moscow Center*. October 23, 2018. <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/77558>.

¹² Tamar Chapidze and Andreas Umland, "Complications in Tbilisi's Friendship with Kyiv," Atlantic Council, March 12, 2019, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/complications-in-tbilisi-s-friendship-with-kyiv>.

¹³ Gabby Deutch, "Ukraine's Spiritual Split from Russia Could Trigger a Global Schism," *Atlantic*, October 11, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/10/ukraine-orthodox-church-independence-russia/571333/>.

¹⁴ *Pew Research Center*, "Orthodox Christianity in the 21st Century," November 8, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/08/orthodox-christianity-in-the-21st-century/>.

¹⁵ Alexander Sergunin and Leonid Karabeshkin, "Understanding Russia's Soft Power Strategy," *Politics* 35, no. 3-4 (2015), 347-363, DOI: 10.1111/1467-9256.12109.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review will first present work defining what soft power is, and how it can be effectively used. It will then review conflicting views of Russian soft power and showcase the debate over whether the Kremlin is effectively utilizing its soft power assets. It will proceed to review literature briefly detailing the historical relationship between the church and state in Russia and the Soviet Union to give the reader a broader sense of how this relationship has progressed. Next, it will present works that debate the nature of the relationship between the church and state, and how this coupling between the ROC and Kremlin shapes modern Russian ideology. Finally, it will present literature specific to ROC influence in Ukraine and Georgia to form the basis of the contrasting case studies.

1. Soft Power

Joseph Nye gives useful insight into what soft power is and how it is shown to be used. His work details the means of a nation to assert power in general, or “the ability to affect others to obtain the outcome you want.”¹⁶ This is followed with his definition of national soft power, which does not coerce others to gain support, but rather attracts them by other means.¹⁷ Nations have soft power assets much in the same way they have hard power assets such as tanks and bombs. These assets derive from the values of a nation, as espoused by its culture, policies, and foreign relations.¹⁸ However, these assets are not always helpful and may counterintuitively damage international attraction towards a nation. Not all nations share the same values, and a nation broadcasting a particular set of virtues can be met with derision rather than attraction from nations with contrasting cultures. As such, nations must carefully select the values they broadcast and the message they send through international diplomacy.¹⁹ Soft power in the field of international relations is more important than ever, and must be used in tandem with hard power to

¹⁶ Joseph S. Nye, “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power,” *Annals of the AAPSS* 616 no. 1 (March: 2008), 94, Sage.

¹⁷ Nye, 95.

¹⁸ Nye.

¹⁹ Nye.

achieve national objectives. Nye terms this synthesis of hard and soft power as “smart power,” and asserts that smart power must have the right balance of both hard and soft power to be successfully employed.²⁰

Having detailed what soft power is, it now becomes incumbent to discuss why soft power is important for Russia. Bobo Lo stresses that Russia must find and use soft, rather than hard, power to have continued influence in world affairs. This is demonstrated by the worsening economic condition of Russia, particularly after the 2014 economic sanctions imposed by the West. The Russian economy is heavily reliant on energy and commodity exports, leaving Russia dependent on global markets. The fluctuations present in these markets leave Russia vulnerable to a rapidly changing economic situation, making financing long-term military expeditions unpredictable. Moreover, Lo highlights the decreasing value of military power in the global community. He argues that this may seem counterintuitive based on Russia’s military action in Ukraine, but this action is one of the factors that has led Russia to the realization that ultimately, the use of military power resulted in negative consequences for Russia. This trend globally is demonstrated by the U.S. actions in Iraq and Afghanistan, which shows that military power is not as effective as it once was. Lo concludes that soft power is the only effective means Russia has to achieve its foreign policy goals.²¹

The next group of authors reviewed debate the effectiveness of soft power tools employed by Russia, and how the Russian government views soft power.²² The first argument is presented by Peter Rutland and Andrei Kazantsev. The authors argue that Russian elites have a fundamental misunderstanding of soft power and have employed it in ineffective ways. The article demonstrates that while the Russian government understood the need to develop soft power and made public overtures to its usefulness, it did not understand what soft power truly was and this misunderstanding, intertwined with

²⁰ Nye, 107-108.

²¹ Lo.

²² Sergunin and Karabeshkin; Lo; Peter Rutland and Andrei Kazantsev, “The Limits of Russia’s ‘Soft Power’,” *Journal of Political Power* 9 no. 3 (October: 2016), 395-413, <http://doi.org/10.1080/2158379X.2016.1232287>.

other factors, led to Russia's inability to attract other nations through soft power.²³ Moreover, Russia's soft power use was handicapped from the onset by negative global perceptions. While Russia has many attractive cultural elements of soft power ranging from the classic literature of Tolstoy to their success in the space race and continued success in the hard sciences, there are also many negative perceptions of Russia around the globe.²⁴

Presenting a dissenting view, scholars Alexander Sergunin and Leonid Karabeshkin cautiously conclude that Russia can use soft power effectively by pointing to examples of Russian successes in soft power strategy and potential for future attraction. While the authors do agree that Russia utilizes a skewed view of soft power, they do not see the issue as insurmountable. They point to examples of past successes, particularly in the FSU, which demonstrates that Russian soft power can be effective, and may be used by Russia if employed with the correct understanding of national attraction.²⁵

When discussing soft power, it is important to examine not only particular tools available to a nation, but how they fit into the broader contexts of exportable ideologies. To form the basis for a national ideology, a nation must first know what it represents. The work of Dr. Anne Clunan explores Russia's formation of an identity through aspirational constructivism. She shows Russia's lack of ideology following the dissolution of the USSR, and how Russian elites sought to reform Russia as a great power, with an exportable national identity separate from that of the West and rooted in Russia's historical greatness. She asserts that the need to re-emerge as a great power is rooted in national self-esteem, and the creation of ideology formed from the need to regain Russian self-esteem after the collapse of the Soviet empire.²⁶ Russia's aspirational constructivism of itself as a great power, and need for national self-esteem is evidenced in the thesis through its examination of Russian ideologies and constructed narratives as soft power sources.

²³ Rutland and Kazantsev.

²⁴ Rutland and Kazantsev.

²⁵ Sergunin and Karabeshkin.

²⁶ Anne L. Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence: Aspirations, Identity, and Security Interests* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2009).

Nicu Popescu presents the Russian ideology of “sovereign democracy,” which was crafted and deployed to create attractiveness in the post-Soviet domain.²⁷ He contends that in the wake of the 2004 Ukrainian ‘Orange Revolution,’ Russia realized the need to employ soft power messaging to counter Western influence in its perceived near abroad. Russia viewed the Orange Revolution as occurring due to the attractiveness of Western democratization.²⁸ While Russia offered Ukraine hard power benefits through security and economic benefits, these were not enough to prevail in a war of ideas, leaving Russia to conclude that it suffered from “ideological emptiness.”²⁹ In response, Russia created an exportable ideology of sovereign democracy. Popescu asserts that it is the idea of sovereignty free from Western influence, and a unique form of democracy distinct from Western democracy. Ultimately, the ability to influence via this ideology is limited. Popescu asserts that sovereign democracy attempts to gain support not for a true Russian ideology, but for the Russian government itself. Framed in light of Nye’s “smart power,” Popescu terms it “smart authoritarianism,” which seeks to add a soft power component to the hard power of Russian authority in the region, undermining Russian attractiveness.³⁰

Like Popescu, Valentina Feklyunina also analyzes Russian soft power through a Russian espoused ideology, that of the *Russkiy Mir*, or Russian World, and analyzes its effectiveness through its use in Ukraine. The *Russkiy Mir* draws upon a common past and shared heritage between Russia and its FSU neighbors to craft a narrative from the Kremlin in order to gain attractiveness for its goals. However, the reaction to this messaging was mixed. As Feklyunina describes, Ukrainian society is far from monolithic, and thus there were many forms of self-identity in Ukraine. The message’s diverse audience made it difficult for the narrative to gain real traction in influencing the nation towards Russia. She contrasts this with ways in which Russia was able to deter Ukraine from taking actions, such as its ability to discourage Ukraine from signing a 2013 agreement with the European

²⁷ Nicu Popescu, *Russia’s Soft Power Ambitions*, Policy Brief No. 115 (Center for European Policy Studies: 2006), 1, <http://aei.pitt.edu/11715/1/1388.pdf>.

²⁸ Popescu.

²⁹ Popescu, 1.

³⁰ Nye, 107-108; Popescu, 3.

Union (EU). From this, she concludes that Russia is more successful when countering the soft power influence of others than through soft power attraction of its own.³¹

2. The Russian Orthodox Church as Soft Power Instrument of the Russian State?

Having looked at soft power and its use by Russia, the thesis will investigate the ROC's role as a soft power asset. To explore the ability of the ROC to be a source of Russian soft power in the present day, it is incumbent on the thesis to provide the reader with a sense of how the ROC-Russian state relationship has evolved in the past during Tsarist and Soviet times. Zoe Knox demonstrates this by reviewing the long history of the Orthodox Church in Russia dating back to 988, and how Orthodox Christianity became rooted in the idea of "Russianness." She discusses the Tsarist era narrative of Moscow as the "Third Rome," that formed during this time and is significant to Russian heritage.³² As time progressed, the Tsars began to see the independence of the Church, and its centrality to life in Russia as a threat, and Knox argues this led to church subjugation by the state during the rule of Peter II in 1762 and Catherine the Great from 1762 to 1796. During the reign of Tsar Nicholas II, the resistance from the Church and Russian intelligentsia alike became increasingly louder. This led to greater independence for the Church, which proved, however, to be short-lived.³³

Following the 1917 Russian Revolution and Bolshevik control of the newly formed USSR, there were harsh repressions of the church and clergy. In 1927, to ease tensions, the head of the ROC signaled the church's loyalty to the Soviet regime, in an attempt to assure the church's survival. Throughout the Soviet times, the church was ironically a servant of the atheist regime. Yet, during this time, church dissidents outside of the ROC leadership played a large role in maintaining the legitimacy of Orthodoxy within the Russian society and allowed for religious power outside of state control. The church began to gain greater autonomy during the waning days of Soviet power under General Secretary Mikhail

³¹ Feklyunina.

³² Zoe Knox, *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church: Religion in Russia after Communism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004). Ebook Central Academic.

³³ Knox.

Gorbachev. He allowed for the reemergence and greater autonomy of the ROC, leading the church to seek a prominent role in the new political climate, free from state control. This, she maintains, saw the reemergence of the ROC as part of Russian identity. This reintegration of Orthodoxy in Russia led to it becoming a strong voice during Russia's transition from communism, and the creation of the modern-day Russian state.³⁴

Currently, an array of academic scholarship debates whether the modern ROC possesses autonomy in its relationship with the Kremlin, and the extent in which it is an instrument of Russian soft power.³⁵ A set of scholars maintains that the ROC works at the bidding of the Kremlin. Robert Blitt and Alicja Curanović point to the relationship between Moscow and the ROC as largely synchronized. They maintain the ROC is a reliable asset for the government, lacks autonomy, and relies on the Kremlin to advance its agenda. Blitt points to the Russian NSC of 2000, where it calls for “spiritual renewal,” and expressed concern with a loss of Russian traditional values, as well as cultural and religious expansion into Russia by foreign powers.³⁶ Furthermore, he points to other official documents that cemented the official relationship between church and state in foreign affairs, guiding him to assert that the voice of the ROC is dictated by the Kremlin.³⁷

Alicja Curanović maintains the ROC has very limited autonomy from the state in foreign policy and must not contradict the objectives of Moscow. She states that “in the field of diplomacy, a state is by definition the stronger player. The dominant position of the state is reflected, inter alia, by the fact that when opinions or interests diverge it is a religious institution which adapts to the demands of the secular authority and not vice

³⁴ Knox.

³⁵ Blitt; Curanović; James Mersol, “When Russian Values Go Abroad: The Clash Between Populism and Foreign Policy,” *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 37, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2017): 95-100, ProQuest; Gregory Freeze, “Russian Orthodoxy and Politics in the Putin Era,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, February 9, 2017, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/02/09/russian-orthodoxy-and-politics-in-putin-era-pub-67959>; Irina Papkova, “Russian Orthodox Concordat? Church and State under Medvedev,” *Nationalities Papers* 39 no. 5, (September: 2011), 638-668, DOI: 10.1080/00905992.602394; Nikita Lomagin, “Interest Groups in Russian Foreign Policy: The Invisible Hand of the Russian Orthodox Church,” *International Politics* 49, no. 4 (July 2012): 510, ProQuest.

³⁶ Blitt, 368.

³⁷ Blitt.

versa.”³⁸ Here, she argues the ROC is free to act in the realm of foreign policy, so long as its actions do not conflict with the state’s, effectively relegating it to subservience to the state.³⁹

In contrast, another set of scholars maintain that the church is, in fact autonomous, and its own entity separate from the state.⁴⁰ Nikita Lomagin argues that the ROC acts as a powerful lobby group to push ideas of traditional values upon the Russian government. He sees the visions of the church and Russian government aligned on many issues, but that is not merely a “servant of the state.”⁴¹ Recognizing the considerable influence of the ROC, the government sees it as a means to legitimize Kremlin policy, making the ROC an attractive tool in foreign relations. In particular, he highlights the government’s use of the ROC to restore Russia’s great power status, including the use of soft power and ideology influenced by an autonomous, but like-minded ROC to shape this goal.⁴²

Much in line with Lomagin, Nicolai Petro argues that the ROC has become such a powerful entity its voice cannot be ignored in the arena of foreign policy. The work directly critiques the writings of Blitt and Curanović and argues that the foreign policy agenda of the ROC is not derived from the state, but rather in coalition with the government as an equal partner. Furthermore, his writings argue that the ROC is more than just a political actor. The ROC must be seen also as a religious actor. He writes that if viewed solely within the context of political action scholars lose sight of the ROC’s view of itself primarily as a “supernatural actor.”⁴³ He argues the ROC sees itself as a partner with the Russian government to enact religious driven policy.⁴⁴

³⁸ Curanović, 8.

³⁹ Curanović.

⁴⁰ Mersol; Freeze; Papkova; Lomagin.

⁴¹ Lomagin, 510.

⁴² Lomagin.

⁴³ Nicolai Petro, “The Russian Orthodox Church,” *Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy*, ed. Andrei Tsygankov, (London: Routledge, 2018,) 217-232, 14 of pdf. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3175476.

⁴⁴ Petro.

Gregory Freeze maintains that the ROC and Kremlin must work separately, for either to function efficiently. While Patriarch Kirill and President Putin have many shared interests, “each side serves the core interests of their respective institutions, thereby constricting the support (rhetorical and real) that they provide one another.”⁴⁵ He maintains that Putin must, by nature of Russia being a multi-religious nation, express support for all faiths within Russia, and cannot be overly reliant on the ROC. Moreover, he argues that the Patriarch must maintain legitimacy in the religious world by working separately from the state. He cannot use the state to enforce his religious mandates, as this would diminish his moral authority.⁴⁶ Another author, Irina Papkova cautiously recognizes the independence of the ROC. Like Freeze, she points out that if the ROC and Russian government become too intertwined, the ROC risks an erosion of its legitimacy, making it a less effective instrument for the state in the future.⁴⁷

James Mersol sees the partnership being motivated by the Russian government’s appeal to populism at home rather than seeking soft power abroad. The foreign policy espoused by the Kremlin, and influenced by the ROC, is used to build popular support with the largely Orthodox domestic populace. He claims that the independent ROC’s domestic popularity is appealing to the Kremlin, and accordingly, it has crafted policy in-line with ROC goals and narratives as a way to rally public support. Seventy-two percent of Russians identify as Orthodox, yet that number is disproportionately higher than the number that regularly attend Orthodox services.⁴⁸ Mersol asserts that this demonstrates Russians view the ROC as more than a religious institution, but a cultural one as well, making it a key part of Russian identity. Therefore, he paints Russian policies in line with the ROC as a way for the Kremlin to gain domestic support.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Freeze, 9.

⁴⁶ Freeze.

⁴⁷ Papkova.

⁴⁸ Mersol; *Pew Research Center*, “Russians Return to Religion, but Not to Church,” February 10, 2014, <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/02/10/russians-return-to-religion-but-not-to-church/>.

⁴⁹ Mersol.

3. ROC Influence in Ukraine

Oleksandr Sagan presents the historical background of the ROC's power over Ukraine from 1686 and describes how this relationship evolved into the Soviet era. He details the formation of two Orthodox churches separate from the jurisdiction of Moscow, and why they are so contentious today. He goes into great detail regarding the conflicts between the ROC and other Orthodox churches in Ukraine following the 2014 crisis, and the effect this has had on the ROC's power within Ukraine.⁵⁰

Picking up where Sagan leaves off, the thesis will utilize literature regarding the ROC's lack of effectiveness as a soft power tool in Ukraine following the 2014 crisis and ramifications the schism will have for the ROC and Kremlin.⁵¹ It details the creation of the three major Orthodox churches that dominated much of Ukrainian religious and cultural life following the independence of Ukraine from the USSR, and how the 2014 Ukrainian conflict led to the Ukrainian government to petition the Patriarch of Constantinople for religious freedom from Moscow. Until this time, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), controlled by the ROC, was seen as the only legitimate church in Ukraine.⁵² The granting of autocephaly by the Patriarch of Constantinople to newly formed Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) has splintered Orthodoxy in the country and eroded the monopoly the Kremlin has had over "legitimate" Orthodox belief in Ukraine.⁵³ However, the newly formed church risks being seen as too closely linked to the Ukrainian government, which presents its own hosts of problems.⁵⁴ Moreover, the schism risks retaliation from the ROC

⁵⁰ Oleksandr Sagan, "Orthodoxy in Ukraine: Current State and Problems," in *Traditional Religion and Political Power: Examining the Role of the Church in Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine, and Moldova*, ed. Adam Hug (London: The Foreign Policy Center, 2015), <https://fpc.org.uk/publications/orthodox/>.

⁵¹ Zanemonets.

⁵² Volodymyr Kulyk, "Church and Geopolitics: The Battle Over Ukrainian Autocephaly," Memo 570, (PONARS, 2019). <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/church-and-geopolitics-battle-over-ukrainian-autocephaly>.

⁵³ Alexander Ponomariov, "Ukrainian Church Autocephaly: The Redrawing of the Religious Borders and Political Identities in the Conflict between Ukraine and Russia," *Russian Analytical Digest*, no. 231 (January 2019). <http://www.css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/publications/publication.html/d4812602-643c-43b4-b11c-352b91d527ff>.

⁵⁴ Regina Elsner, "Orthodox Church of Ukraine: Challenges and Risks of a New Beginning," *Russian Analytical Digest*, no. 231 (January 2019). <http://www.css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/publications/publication.html/d4812602-643c-43b4-b11c-352b91d527ff>.

against the new Ukrainian church and presents a future legal battle over the distribution of church properties in Ukraine.⁵⁵

Maxim Artemyev adds to the discussion historical cases of religious schisms, and ways in which the schism, while challenging for the ROC, is not irreconcilable. He contrasts what he says is the view point of other writers, who assert that the schism between the ROC and Constantinople is the worst since 1054, by asserting it is nothing new. He offers advice for ways the ROC can handle the situation, drawing on historical examples.⁵⁶

4. ROC Influence in Georgia

The literature surrounding ROC soft power utilization in Georgia will focus on the Orthodox Church in Georgia, as well as the ROC interactions in the nation. Eka Chitanava begins the literature review of Georgia by detailing the history of Orthodoxy in Georgia and its subjugation to the ROC during Tsarist times, as well as the Soviet era independence of the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC), which provides the foundations for the modern-day relationship between the GOC and ROC. The GOC became an early leader in fighting for Georgian independence against Soviet subjugation, giving it legitimacy and allowed it to become a key part of Georgian culture and national identity during the Soviet period. During the Gorbachev era of greater Soviet openness, the GOC became more vocal during a rise in Georgian nationalism, cementing the symbolic and cultural importance of the GOC in the nation allowing it to rise as one of the most powerful entities within Georgia.⁵⁷ This has given it tremendous trust within the nation, making it ripe for influence from the ROC, as if Moscow could gain the trust of the ROC, it could gain the trust of a large percentage of the Georgian population.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Oleg Sukhov, "Constantinople Recognizes Kyiv Patriarch Filaret as Church Bishop," *Kyiv Post*, October 11, 2018. <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/constantinople-patriarchate-recognizes-kyiv-patriarch-filaret-as-legitimate.html>.

⁵⁶ Maxim Artemyev, "Orthodox Déjà Vu: Ukraine's Church Split is Nothing New," *Carnegie Moscow Center*, October 22, 2018, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/77545>.

⁵⁷ Eka Chitanava, "The Georgian Orthodox Church: National Identity and Political Influence," in *Traditional Religion and Political Power: Examining the Role of the Church in Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine, and Moldova*, ed. Adam Hug (London: The Foreign Policy Center, 2015), <https://fpc.org.uk/publications/orthodox/>.

⁵⁸ Kakachia.

Next, the literature will review the relationship between the GOC, ROC, and the Kremlin following the 2008 conflict in Georgia.⁵⁹ It details the rebukes from the ROC against the violence in Georgia. The Patriarch of Moscow spoke out against bloodshed between two Orthodox nations. The literature analyzes the case as an interesting break from ROC norms, and how the move proved to increase the legitimization of the ROC in the eyes of the GOC.⁶⁰ The relationship between the ROC and GOC began to flourish following the 2008 conflict, and has become a greater source of Russian influence, proving particularly beneficial to Russia in the church schism with Ukraine. Both the GOC and Georgian government have yet to make a statement on the matter, showcasing a limited success of ROC influence achieving favorable outcomes for Moscow. However, this points to influence of the ROC not through genuine attraction, but through coercion and fears of reactionary measures from the ROC.⁶¹ Kornely Kakachia points out that the warm relations between the ROC and GOC, however, may be detrimental in the long term as the Georgian public may turn on the GOC and view it as illegitimate due to its embrace of the Kremlin and ROC. He argues this would isolate the GOC, and ultimately erase any gains the Kremlin has made in the nation via the ROC, undermining the idea of shared values and ideology between the two countries.⁶²

D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

This thesis will seek to answer three main questions when analyzing the role of the ROC in projecting Russian soft power. First, is Russia successfully able to employ soft power? Second, is the ROC being used as source of Russian soft power? Third, is the ROC effective in shaping foreign audiences? To seek greater understanding of these issues, the thesis will evaluate competing explanations to these questions drawn from the literature above.

⁵⁹ Petro; Curanović; Kakachia; Sophia Kishkovsky, “War Splits Orthodox Churches in Russia and Georgia,” *New York Times*, September 5, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/05/world/europe/05iht-church.4.15929452.html>.

⁶⁰ Kishkovsky.

⁶¹ Chapidze and Umland.

⁶² Kakachia.

Regarding the question of Russia's ability to successfully use soft power to attract other nations, the literature divides between skeptics of Russian soft power and optimists regarding Russian soft power. The skeptical argument of the thesis draws on Rutland and Kazantsev to claim that the Russian government fundamentally misunderstands soft power, and in trying to use a flawed version of soft power, it has been counterproductive, and ultimately less attractive as a global partner.⁶³ The Kremlin understands the need for soft power, and has tools of attraction. However, owing to its past, many nations still hold lingering negative perceptions of Russia. It has tried to overcome these deficits in attraction in counterproductive ways, which have largely not been used to create attraction towards Russia, but rather counter the influence of foreign nations in areas Russia seeks to attract.⁶⁴

This skeptical view is further compounded by Russia's willingness to use hard power both through military action, such in Ukraine.⁶⁵ These hard power uses by Russia without true attractive power create a stark imbalance in the smart power dichotomy, as described by Nye.⁶⁶ Thus, Russia is increasingly seen solely as a nation relying on hard power, and therefore reinforcing many of the globe's negative perceptions about Russia, leaving it increasingly isolated, and less able to revert its stance and utilize true soft power. Through the government's misunderstanding of how to effectively use soft power, it will most likely continue to counteract its goals in future attempts.⁶⁷

The optimistic counterargument to this hypothesis of Russia's soft power situation is that Russia does in fact employ legitimate means of soft power, and it is a viable strategy for the nation to pursue.⁶⁸ Through its rich culture, Russian language, ROC, and strong reputation of its major universities, Russia has inherent and legitimate sources of soft power it can exploit. Moreover, through institutions such as the *Russkiy Mir* Foundation, *Rossotrudnichestvo*, and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), Russia is able to use non-

⁶³ Rutland and Kazantsev.

⁶⁴ Rutland and Kazantsev.

⁶⁵ Rutland and Kazantsev.

⁶⁶ Nye.

⁶⁷ Rutland and Kazantsev.

⁶⁸ Sergunin and Karabeshkin.

aggressive means to bolster its attraction. While its hard power use has limited Russian's ability to legitimately employ soft power, prior to the 2014 Ukrainian crisis, it had made recognizable gains in the field of soft power, and it is not improbable it can do so again as time passes. Russia has created for itself hurdles it must overcome to once again broadly use soft power, but it is not impossible for Moscow to surmount these challenges to increase attraction.⁶⁹

The question of whether or not the ROC is a source of Russian soft power leads to the hypothesis that the ROC does serve as a source of attraction for Russia, but only if it continues to be a partner in the relationship with the Kremlin, not simply a handmaiden of the state.⁷⁰ As the ROC is a powerful voice within Russia, the ROC gives the Kremlin access to this legitimacy. It does so not through subjugation of the church, but rather through partnership, otherwise the ROC would lose its legitimacy and become unattractive to the state.⁷¹ The ROC and Kremlin make natural partners as both entities independently share common goals domestically and abroad. Through the partnership, the ROC is better able to broadcast its message and lobby for policy that aligns with its goals, and the ROC provides the state legitimacy, and a constructed history that appeals to Orthodox nations in the FSU, rooted in history and culture. However, the two bodies have not always been synchronized in policy matters.⁷² The situation in Georgia provides an excellent example of this, when the ROC defied the wishes of the Kremlin to acknowledge the independence of the Orthodox churches in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, a decision that was begrudgingly accepted by the Kremlin, demonstrating the autonomy of the ROC.⁷³

The counterargument to this hypothesis is that the ROC is a tool of soft power that has been coopted by the state, which restricts its freedom in foreign affairs. This counterview argues that the relationship is driven solely by the state as an attempt use the ROC as a viable non-state actor to speak on foreign affairs matters where the government

⁶⁹ Sergunin and Karabeshkin.

⁷⁰ Lomagin.

⁷¹ Papkova.

⁷² Lomagin.

⁷³ Petro.

could not legitimately do so. Furthermore, this relationship is driven by the needs of the state in efforts to promote its own narrative of a unique Russian civilization that counters Western influence. This point is supported by the codification of traditional Russian religion and values as a matter of national defense and as a foreign policy agenda.⁷⁴ This argument further maintains that in any state relationship the state must be the dominant partner, thus the ROC must adapt to the demands of the state. While the ROC and Russian government have largely worked in unison thus far, the ROC will increasingly be limited in its ability to offer dissent.⁷⁵

Finally, in answering whether or not the ROC is an effective soft power instrument in shaping foreign audiences in the FSU, the initial hypothesis of this thesis is that both case studies in Ukraine and Georgia demonstrate that the ROC has not been effective in achieving Russian goals through soft power influence.⁷⁶ The implementation of the ROC as a tool of influence to shape Ukrainian audiences has been a failure, creating a church schism between not only Russia and Ukraine, but one that splits Moscow off from its relations with Constantinople and risks alienating the ROC from much of the Orthodox world.⁷⁷ This schism will likely limit the messaging and influence of the ROC, as break with the Patriarch of Constantinople, largely seen as the highest authority in Orthodox Christianity, decreases the ROC's legitimacy as a voice in the Orthodox world.⁷⁸ The case study in Georgia shows that the ROC is able to exert influence over the GOC and Georgian government, but this is seemingly through coercion, not attraction. The GOC and Georgian government have refused to recognize the new autocephalous church in Ukraine. While warm relations between the ROC and GOC exist, and there seem to be elements of genuine attraction, the largest influencer for the GOC and Georgian government's reluctance to acknowledge the Ukrainian church is fear of retribution from Moscow.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Blitt.

⁷⁵ Curanović.

⁷⁶ Chapidze and Umland.

⁷⁷ Zanamonets.

⁷⁸ Zanamonets.

⁷⁹ Chapidze and Umland.

E. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research of this thesis will revolve around scholarly works discussing what soft power is, how Russia uses it, whether or not the ROC is a source of soft power, and if so, how effective it is. It will first demonstrate what soft power is and how it can be employed. This is included as the first piece of the thesis so that the reader is provided with an explanation of the concept in general, what tools soft power entails, and how it is seen to be effective or not.⁸⁰

Next, the thesis will explore Russian identity, ideology, and other tools of soft power. Although the thesis seeks to analyze the ROC in particular as it pertains to soft power, the thesis seeks to give the reader a broader sense of Russia's relation to soft power. It will analyze governmental rhetoric regarding soft power, and instruments of influence Russia has available to it.⁸¹ It will provide a deeper history and background of the relationship between the church and state to give the reader a sense of how the relationship has developed and changed, and how the relationship has progressed to the present day.⁸² It will analyze the debate amongst scholars as to the Church's autonomy from the Kremlin.⁸³ This is important to include in the thesis, because it lays out the relationship between the ROC and Russian government, and how that relationship limits or enhances the ROC's credibility to be used as a means of soft power influence.

The thesis will then provide two case studies to demonstrate the past successes or failures of the ROC in shaping foreign audiences. The two case studies used to demonstrate this are Ukraine and Georgia. These case studies were selected because both are former Soviet nations with majority-Orthodox populations.⁸⁴ Moreover, Russia has invaded both

⁸⁰ Nye.

⁸¹ Sergunin and Karabeshkin; Rutland and Kazantsev.

⁸² Knox.

⁸³ Blitt; Lomagin.

⁸⁴ Ani Sarkissian, "Religious Reestablishment in Post-Communist Polities," *Journal of Church and State* 51, no. 3 (2010), 517–551. DOI: 10.1093/jcs/csp096.

nations in the post-Soviet era.⁸⁵ These facts make Georgia and Ukraine the most logical case studies to compare to one another with regard to Russian soft power and the ROC.

F. THESIS OVERVIEW

The second chapter will focus on soft power in general and how Russia uses it in particular. It will begin by framing what soft power is, and tools in which to exert soft power. It will discuss the delineation between hard and soft power, and why economic coercion may be non-military power, but nonetheless, is not soft power. It will touch on how genuine soft power is shown to attract other nations, and how it has been used.⁸⁶

The chapter will continue by discussing ways in which Russian views of its identity and the ideology which springs from aspirational constructivism of Russia as a great power.⁸⁷ Moreover, it will examine the Russian government's understanding of soft power, and what has been stated by the government about soft power, versus ways it has actually been implemented. It will look at the various tools and institutions of Russian soft power, and the results that have come from these means of attraction. Looking at the balance of hard and soft power employed by the Russian government it will seek to analyze whether Russia's use of soft power has worked, or could work in the future, to achieve Russian policy objectives.⁸⁸

The third chapter will center around the ROC, first providing for the reader a historical relationship between church and state through the Tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet eras. It will then look at the ROC's transition from the Soviet to post-Soviet periods and the larger cultural role the church took in the face of freedom from the Soviet regime.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Payne.

⁸⁶ Nye.

⁸⁷ Clunan; Popescu; Feklyunina.

⁸⁸ Sergunin and Karabeshkin; Rutland and Kazantsev; Lo.

⁸⁹ Knox.

The chapter will then proceed to discuss the debate centering on the relationship between the church and state, and the amount of freedom and autonomy held by the ROC.⁹⁰

The fourth chapter will provide the case study analysis of the ROC's influence in Ukraine. It will begin with a brief history of Orthodoxy in Ukraine, and its relationship and historical subjugation by the ROC as well as the formation of the modern Orthodox situation in the nation following the collapse of the Soviet Union.⁹¹ Moreover, it will detail the ROC's failure as a tool of influence following the 2014 invasion of Ukraine, the resulting independence for Orthodoxy in Ukraine, and the recent schism in Orthodoxy because of this independence.⁹²

The fifth chapter will be the case study analyzing the ROC in Georgia. It will delve into the history of the GOC, and Georgia's relations with Russia. It will look at the role of the GOC on society and the levels of trust for in Georgia for the GOC, and why it is an attractive institution for the ROC to work with for influence.⁹³ It will discuss the 2008 invasion of Georgia, and how the relationship between the GOC and ROC progressed through the conflict, and discuss the future of these ties.⁹⁴ Additionally, it will examine how the ROC and Kremlin were able to exploit this relationship and influence the GOC and Georgian government to remain silent on the topic of Ukrainian autocephaly.⁹⁵ The sixth and final chapter will present findings and conclusions for the thesis, as well as present policy recommendations for the United States regarding Russian soft power and the ROC.

⁹⁰ Blitt; Curanović; Mersol; Freeze; Papkova; Lomagin; Igor Torbakov, "The Russian Orthodox Church and Contestations Over History in Contemporary Russia." *Demokratizatsiya* 22, no. 1 (Winter: 2014), 145–170. ProQuest.

⁹¹ Sagan.

⁹² Artemyev.

⁹³ Kakachia; Chitanava.

⁹⁴ Kakachia; Chitanava.

⁹⁵ Chapidze and Umland.

II. SOFT POWER AND ITS USE BY RUSSIA

A. INTRODUCTION

Soft power is one of the primary means nations have to influence other states to achieve favorable outcomes in foreign policy. It creates an attraction towards a nation, getting others to share in a goal, rather than forcing their hand.⁹⁶ More than ever, soft power is vital to nations, because hard power alone is becoming increasingly less useful and counterproductive on a global scale.⁹⁷ Tools of mass influence should be used to achieve policy goals in conjunction with hard power assets in order to achieve an optimal outcome in foreign policy.⁹⁸ This is particularly significant for Russia as it sees its uses of military hard power working against it, such as foreign economic sanctions resulting from the annexation of Crimea. These sanctions reduce Russia's economic capabilities to use financial hard power incentives to induce the actions of other nations. Moreover, the damage to the Russian economy leaves the Kremlin less able to provide funding for its military, further eroding its ability to project hard power.⁹⁹ Russia recognizes the benefits of soft power; however, it seemingly has yet to truly leverage the potential of its soft power tools in a meaningful way to attract neighboring nations to its goals.¹⁰⁰

This thesis will seek to answer the question: is Russia able to successfully use soft power? To do so, this chapter will provide an explanation of what soft power is, and use this understanding as the lens in which to examine Russian tools of soft power in the post-Soviet era. It will then examine Russian national identity and how Russia's perception of itself as a great power influences its soft power actions.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, it will examine what soft power tools Russia possesses and can use for positive influence. Finally, it will analyze Russia's view of soft power, and why the Kremlin is said to have a fundamental

⁹⁶ Nye.

⁹⁷ Lo.

⁹⁸ Nye.

⁹⁹ Lo.

¹⁰⁰ Popescu.

¹⁰¹ Clunan.

misunderstanding of the soft power concept, and how this misunderstanding has arguably served to undermine the potential of Russian soft power assets.¹⁰²

B. WHAT IS SOFT POWER

Beginning a discussion of forms of national power, hard or soft, one must first look at what power is, in general. In its most distilled form power is “the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes you want.”¹⁰³ There three ways in which a nation can exert power: coercion, payments, and attraction. It is this third element, attraction, which forms the basis of a state’s soft power.¹⁰⁴ As described by one of the originator of the concept Dr. Joseph Nye, soft power “co-opts people rather than coerces them.”¹⁰⁵ Soft power is differentiated from elements of hard power because it does not use the carrot and stick dichotomy of payments and coercion, but rather gains inherent attraction to a nation’s goals, and gets other nations to desire the same outcome.¹⁰⁶

How a nation gains this attraction is largely the product of its culture, its politics, and its foreign policy. Public diplomacy, aimed not squarely at a foreign nation’s government, but rather its populace, is a very effective means to gain attraction and is created primarily through a country’s cultural values, and is broadcasted through media and cultural exports. However, measures of public diplomacy can backfire on a nation, as not all countries share the same values. When a nation’s culture offends the sensibilities of another it will incite negative feelings and create opposition, rather than attraction¹⁰⁷. As poignantly stated by Nye, “even the best advertising cannot sell an unpopular product.”¹⁰⁸ As such, it is important for a government to understand the message it is sending to other nations through its attempts at soft power.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰² Sergunin and Karabeshkin.

¹⁰³ Nye, 94.

¹⁰⁴ Nye.

¹⁰⁵ Nye, 95.

¹⁰⁶ Nye.

¹⁰⁷ Nye.

¹⁰⁸ Nye, 102.

¹⁰⁹ Nye.

The ideal way for a nation to gain maximum attraction, however, is neither through hard nor soft power alone, but through a coherent strategy of blending both.¹¹⁰ Nye terms this synthesis of hard and soft power, “smart power.”¹¹¹ A key example of this is the United States’ concentration on hard power and military action following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, leading to a decrease in international prestige for the United States. By failing to take into account global perceptions of its hard power uses, it has actively reduced its soft power influence, making its international diplomacy to combat terrorism more difficult. Hard power and soft power do not exist in isolation. A nation needs both in order to deal efficiently with the modern era of a globe connected continuously through information and communications technologies.¹¹²

C. SOFT POWER’S IMPORTANCE FOR RUSSIA

Russia, in particular must focus on the question of soft power and the attraction it gains through its use. During the Cold War, the USSR had genuine elements of soft power, but it also was able to rely on its uses of hard power to further its foreign policy goals.¹¹³ Yet, while the Soviet Union was able to gain influence in neighboring countries through military exploits and the success of its Stalinist drive to industrialize, the geopolitical playing field has evolved. Just as the U.S. lost international influence due to its military actions in the Middle East, Russia lost significant global standing following its military actions in Ukraine, leading to Western sanctions that impacted the Russian economy and precipitated a decrease in favorable views of Russia globally.¹¹⁴ This is what Dr. Bobo Lo calls the “diminishing value of military might,” making military action largely counterproductive for a nation to achieve its overarching goals without a broad swath of international approval.¹¹⁵ Moreover, the levers of economic influence do not have as much

¹¹⁰ Nye.

¹¹¹ Nye, 107.

¹¹² Nye.

¹¹³ Feklyunina; Lo.

¹¹⁴ Lo; Clark Letterman, “Image of Putin, Russia Suffers Internationally,” *Pew Research Center*, December 6, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2018/12/06/image-of-putin-russia-suffers-internationally/>.

¹¹⁵ Lo, 57.

pull as would be expected. While economic might is vitally important, its reach can only extend so far. As demonstrated by China, many countries wish to trade with it, yet it is argued that these nations may be reluctant to grow too close to Beijing politically.¹¹⁶ Economic influence, like military force, is a component of hard power. In the carrot and stick dichotomy introduced by Nye, economic influence may be seen as a means of coercion and blackmail.¹¹⁷ This can lead to some of the same backlash as the use of military force. Thus, China's economic influence can be seen to limit its soft power attractiveness.¹¹⁸

While the military and economic measures of hard power produce limited results globally, these limits are particularly constraining for Russia. It is isolated in the West, primarily due to its hard power actions. Following the Russian annexation of Crimea, Russia achieved its military objective, yet in terms of grand strategy, faced significant negative consequences. The Ukrainian government is now overtly hostile to Moscow, Kazakhstan and Belarus are fearful of deeper integration with Russia, and NATO has a renewed mission, reinforcing its Eastern borders with Russia.¹¹⁹

Moreover, Putin's military exploits have severely dampened the Russia economy, with capital being moved out of the country due to fears of instability, and a lack of Western investment. The Western sanctions against Russia have been detrimental to its economy, as have the fluctuations in oil prices. With Moscow besieged by economic troubles, it is less able to utilize direct forms of economic influence for other nations, and is less able to finance the military it needs to continue its martial coercion of its neighbors. As such, soft power is the most cost-effective means of influence it has available.¹²⁰ The Kremlin will need to place a greater emphasis on soft power if it is to change its current state of isolation, while at the same time grow its economy and pair larger economic influence with genuine international attraction to gain smart power.

¹¹⁶ Lo.

¹¹⁷ Nye.

¹¹⁸ Lo.

¹¹⁹ Lo.

¹²⁰ Lo.

D. RUSSIA’S NATIONAL IDENTITY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SOFT POWER

As a nation gains influence and attraction through soft power, and a nation’s soft power in large parts extends from its values, it is important for a nation to have a unified understanding of its core values, and what perceptions it desires to showcase globally.¹²¹ For Russia, the question of what its values are did not have a clear-cut answer following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. After the fall of Russia’s espoused Communist ideology, Russia had to create a new national identity from which it could base its interests. To create a new national identity, a nation must search its past and use the pieces of its history that fit the narrative a country desires to embody in an ultimate effort to further national self-esteem. This process can create a national collective identity, from which a country bases its foreign relations and focuses its interests.¹²² This formation process is called “aspirational constructivism” and shapes the way a nation views itself, and the way in which it desires to be viewed by others.¹²³

As notes Anne Clunan, “national identities and interests rest on two pillars, political purpose and international status.”¹²⁴ Political purpose is based in what values and beliefs define a country politically and economically. International status, on the other hand, centers around the defining feature of national identity being based on its perceived international rank, extending from both material factors, such national wealth or military strength, as well as immaterial factors, such as position, respect, and deference a nation believes it should be afforded.¹²⁵

In answering the questions what Russia is and what Russia does, the elites in the nation had to include elements of Russia’s past to construct its path forward. In doing so, they were drawn to Russia’s history as a great power and made that the bedrock upon which they built their new Russian identity, and accordingly, influenced how Russia dealt with

¹²¹ Nye.

¹²² Clunan.

¹²³ Clunan, 3.

¹²⁴ Clunan, 31.

¹²⁵ Clunan.

other nations. In doing so, Russia pursued a national identity based upon national status as opposed to political purpose, despite the realities of post-Soviet Russian weakness when compared to other global powers such as the United States.¹²⁶ This national identity was not created by Putin, he merely mirrored the consensus of other Russian elites who predated his time as President. As early as 1993, this model of great power national identity was largely the agreed upon model, despite more moderate elites drawing attention to Russia's lack of competitiveness in the international sphere. However, while these moderate elites did not succeed in persuading the other elites to select a more pragmatic national identity that fit Russia's actual abilities and strengths, practical reasoning by the elites did prevail in tempering Russia from moving in a direction where its aspirational constructivism far overreached its concrete abilities.¹²⁷

To reach the aspiration of reshaping Russia into a great power once again, the Russian elites view great power status as being built upon three pillars: "military (nuclear) capability; substantial economic might (namely, huge energy resources and appropriate market power); and the existence of a clear ideology which might be attractive beyond the country (soft power)."¹²⁸ It is this last pillar, soft power, that the remainder of the chapter will focus on. It will do so by showing how Russia uses soft power and what tools it has available for influence abroad, as it is a central element of the Russian elites' goal to regain great power status and shapes its national identity and interests.¹²⁹

E. RUSSIAN SOFT POWER TOOLS, PERCEPTIONS, AND USES

After the dissolution of the USSR, Russia did not focus heavily on soft power throughout the 1990s. While recognizing its usefulness in the post-Soviet space, it did little meaningful image projection to bolster the attractiveness of the new Russian Federation. In the early 2000s however, despite Russia's view of itself as a great power in competition

¹²⁶ Clunan.

¹²⁷ Clunan.

¹²⁸ Lomagin, 508.

¹²⁹ Lomagin.

with the West, it pragmatically chose to project itself as a reliable trade and security partner with the West, and a member of European society.¹³⁰

This use of Russia's soft power projection changed, however, following the Ukrainian Orange Revolution in 2004-2005. Russia viewed the election of pro-Western President Viktor Yushchenko as the result of foreign influence from the West.¹³¹ Putin saw the Ukrainian and other color revolutions that had occurred around that time in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, as deliberate actions by the United States to erode Russian influence in the post-Soviet space and further the United States' own influence in the region. As such, Putin's government became determined to expand its own soft power, as well as counter that of the West.¹³² When analyzing twentieth century history, Russian analysts began to see soft power as a major factor in the success of the United States during the Cold War, as even though the Soviet Union had comparable hard power with the U.S., the USSR lacked soft power parity. In fact, some Russian analysts viewed the fall of the USSR as being caused by U.S. soft power influence eroding the stability of the Soviet empire.¹³³ Accordingly, soft power rose to the forefront of Russian foreign policy in order to prevent a similar soft power defeat.¹³⁴

1. Public Information Campaigns

The 2005 launch of the Russia Today (RT) television network was used by the Russian government as a means to project Russian narratives of world affair internationally and counter narratives from Western media.¹³⁵ Additionally, Russia developed soft power projects such as the *Russkiy Mir* Foundation, established in 2007. The foundation was created as a way to spread the study of Russian language and the influence of Russian culture. It has established Russian centers in 39 nations, which promote Russian culture

¹³⁰ Feklyunina; Clunan.

¹³¹ Feklyunina.

¹³² Rutland and Kazantsev.

¹³³ Rutland and Kazantsev.

¹³⁴ Feklyunina; Rutland and Kazantsev.

¹³⁵ Rutland and Kazantsev.

and language. In addition, it gives grants in those countries for projects which form favorable public opinion for Russia. The goals of the *Russkiy Mir* Foundation saw overlap with another organization, *Rossotrudnichestvo* (Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation), created in 2008. *Rossotrudnichestvo* also serves as a soft power project to spread Russia's cultural and economic influence to post-Soviet nations.¹³⁶ In 2010 under President Medvedev, the Russian International Affairs Council and the Gorchakov Foundation were founded to oversee high-level foreign policy debates.¹³⁷ Additionally, the Valdai Discussion Club and the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF) are high-level forums similar to the Davos conference, which hold policy and economic talks, drawing foreign elites to Russia.¹³⁸

However, not all of these tools of soft power have proved productive towards achieving Russian goals. The Russia Today network does not provide clear ideological messaging to attract foreign audiences, as often they cannot tell what Russia's message is. The network produces content that challenges Western capitalism, and constraints on freedoms of speech in the West, while also ridiculing Western political correctness, multiculturalism, and LGBT rights. It shifts back and forth between right- and left-wing ideologies and transparently serves the broader goal of undermining the West. It does not seem to produce coherent messaging, but rather, propaganda. As such, instead of bolstering Russia's international image it seems to have damaged it.¹³⁹

Organizations such as the *Russkiy Mir* Foundation and *Rossotrudnichestvo* have seen limited success in the Former Soviet Union (FSU). Projects that are meant to build

¹³⁶ Sinikukka Saari, "Russia's Post-Orange Revolution Strategies to Increase its Influence in Former Soviet Republics: Public Diplomacy *po russkii*," *Europe-Asia Studies* 66, no. 1 (January 2014): 50-66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2013.864109>.

¹³⁷ Rutland and Kazantsev; Saari; Vasile Rotaru, "Forced Attraction?" *Problems of Post-Communism* 65, no. 1 (2018): 37-48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2016.1276400>.

¹³⁸ Daniel W. Drezner, "Is There Value in Valdai?," *Washington Post*, October 26, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/10/26/is-there-value-in-valdai/>; Holly Ellyatt, "Russia Kicks Off Economic Forum, but its Wealth is on Shaky Ground," *CNBC*, June 6, 2019, <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/06/06/russia-kicks-off-spief-as-the-economy-is-on-shaky-ground.html>.

¹³⁹ Rutland and Kazantsev.

attraction for Russia are seen in FSU nations as not being organic forms of attraction, but organizations that act in service to the Kremlin. They are viewed with skepticism by Russia's neighbors, leading to limits in their influence.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, the Valdai Club and SPIEF are facing questions of legitimacy in light of post-2014 political tensions with the West and a damaged Russian economy owing to sanctions stemming from the 2014 invasion of Ukraine.¹⁴¹ This points to Russian hard power limiting the appeals of its soft power usage.

2. Mega Events

Russia has also attempted to increase its influence internationally through “mega events,” such as hosting the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi and hosting the 2018 World Cup. However, these events were marked by corruption allegations and other negative reports such as the massive cost overruns of the 2014 Olympics, foreign concerns over of the targeting of gay athletes due to recent domestic legislation, lack of security, a doping scandal, and displacement of locals in Sochi to build the infrastructure for the event. The 2014 games coincided with the massive protests against Ukraine's pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich and Russia's subsequent military intervention in Ukraine. This brought a large cloud of negative attention to Russia during an event that was meant to boost its image.¹⁴²

3. Hard Power Undermining the Spread of Soft Power

It was this use of hard power in Ukraine that proved tremendously detrimental to Russia's soft power goals and demonstrated a misunderstanding of what soft power truly is and how to use it effectively. As stated by authors Peter Rutland and Andrei Kazantsev, “the Russian understanding of soft power differed from that to be found in [Joseph] Nye's work, and that it was being used merely as a handmaiden to Russia's hard power.”¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Rotaru.

¹⁴¹ Drezner; Ellyatt.

¹⁴² Rutland and Kazantsev.

¹⁴³ Rutland and Kazantsev, 397.

Further describing how the lack of separation between hard and soft power is a fundamental distortion of Nye's definition, the authors go on to say that "merging soft power activities with hard power goals undermines the plausibility and appeal of the former."¹⁴⁴ The sharp decline of positive attraction for Russia following the 2014 invasion is particularly evident in Ukraine. In 2013, Ukrainian views of Russia were very favorable, albeit regionally divergent. It was found that in Western Ukraine 65% of the populace viewed Russia favorably, while 93% of those in the East held Russia in a favorable light, averaging to 79% nationally. Yet, after the 2014 annexation of Crimea, perception of Russia in Ukraine declined dramatically and it was found that only 52% of Ukrainians viewed Russia positively by mid-2014.¹⁴⁵

The unattractiveness of Russia following the 2014 Crimean annexation is not limited to Ukraine, but rather points to a global trend. A Pew Research poll from 2018 showed that only 34% of international respondents have a favorable view of Russia, and 26% have confidence in Putin. Yet, 42% of respondents regard Russia as more significant on the global stage than it was ten years ago. This data evidences that while the international community may find Russia more important globally due to its hard power use, it correspondingly finds it less attractive.¹⁴⁶ This lends support to the argument that Russia's hard power use is undermining its soft power attraction.

4. Negative Historic Views

Rutland and Kazantsev argue that Russia's use of soft power is not only harmed by its use of hard power, but by its history of authoritarianism.¹⁴⁷ Russian history is not without its bright spots. Russian culture has historically brought much to the world and has much to showcase from its past. In the arena of high culture, it has artistic luminaries such as Lev Tolstoy and Anton Chekov. Moreover, Russia has produced world-changing

¹⁴⁴ Rutland and Kazantsev, 409.

¹⁴⁵ Taras Kuzio, "What do Russians Think of Ukrainians and Vice Versa?" *Atlantic Council*, June 19, 2017, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/what-do-russians-think-of-ukrainians-and-vice-versa>.

¹⁴⁶ Letterman.

¹⁴⁷ Rutland and Kazantsev.

scientific innovations through Mendeleev’s elemental table and its contributions to space exploration through the launch of Sputnik and putting Yuri Gagarin in space. The USSR long touted its defeat of Nazi Germany as a significant contribution to world culture, and in fact, the Russian government continues to do so. However, Rutland and Kazantsev suggest that these elements from Russian history have not translated into Russian influence, as the lingering negative impact of Russia’s past actions continue to dominate global thought of Russia today.¹⁴⁸

Russia is often portrayed, particularly in the West, “as a frightful and dangerous place.”¹⁴⁹ Arguably, since Tsarist times it was defined by pogroms—one of the few Russian words to be incorporated in the English lexicon—exiling to Siberia, and harsh suppressions of rebellions. From the 16th Century into the 20th, skilled writers such as Sigismund Herberstein, the Marquis de Custine, and George Orwell have exposed the world to this view of Russia, and the impression has been argued to remain in the present day.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, while the Soviet Union sought to export the benefits of communism, this was undermined by the oppression of occupied states in the Eastern bloc, hardships and death faced through collectivization, and exiling to the gulags. The perception of Russia fared little better in the 1990s, as Russian President Boris Yeltsin quickly undermined democratic institutions, launched the Chechen War of 1994 to prevent Chechen secession, and did nothing to stop economic collapse, the rapid rise of inequality, and the rise of the Russian mafia and oligarchs. This new Russia quickly shaped global perceptions globally, as this new image of the country spread rapidly through TV and movies.¹⁵¹ As such, Russian soft power has to overcome the hurdles of Russian hard power actions, a fundamental misunderstanding of soft power use by the Russian government, and the hurdles created by historically negative perceptions of Russia that persist around the world.

¹⁴⁸ Rutland and Kazantsev.

¹⁴⁹ Rutland and Kazantsev, 399.

¹⁵⁰ Rutland and Kazantsev.

¹⁵¹ Rutland and Kazantsev.

There is evidence however, which suggests that the legacy of the authoritarian USSR is mixed in the FSU. Polling indicates that a majority of the populations in Russia, Belarus, Moldova, and Armenia view the fall of the Soviet Union negatively. Polling also found that in the FSU nations of Russia, Georgia, Armenia, and Moldova, Joseph Stalin is seen to have played a more positive role in history than Mikhail Gorbachev. This data seemingly indicates that there is nostalgia in some FSU nations for the Soviet past, including the authoritarian Stalin era. However, it should be noted that the sentiments of older people (ages 35 and up) in the FSU lean more towards the Soviet Union, while younger people seem more inclined to view the Soviet Union's fall more positively.¹⁵² This disparity in generational views leaves the future of attraction through the Soviet past uncertain.

5. The Attractiveness of Higher Education

While Russia faces numerous hurdles in its use of soft power, it still has inherent tools that can work to achieve global influence, and in fact, has seen limited soft power successes, at least through the Russian interpretation of soft power. One example of beneficial soft power for Russia is its institutes of higher education.¹⁵³ Academic institutions and exchanges are noted tools to enhance a nation's soft power, as foreign students tend to have positive sentiments for the nations in which they studied.¹⁵⁴ Russian universities remain attractive for foreign students from post-Soviet nations as they provide an excellent education for the region in both sciences and humanities.¹⁵⁵

The Russian education system holds great soft power potential. Through *Rossotrudnichestvo*, Russia is increasing the number of quotas available to students in the FSU as well as dramatically increasing the number of available scholarships for students

¹⁵² David Masci, "In Russia, Nostalgia for Soviet Union and Positive Feelings About Stalin," *Pew Research Center*, June 29, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/06/29/in-russia-nostalgia-for-soviet-union-and-positive-feelings-about-stalin/>.

¹⁵³ Sergunin and Karabeshkin.

¹⁵⁴ Jeanne L. Wilson, "Soft Power: A Comparison of Discourse and Practice in Russia and China," *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 8 (October 2015), 1171-1202, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2015.1078108>.

¹⁵⁵ Sergunin and Karabeshkin.

in these nations. Russia is not limiting its sights on students from the FSU. It is also seeking to increase recruitment of students from the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, many of the top universities in the country have set up partnership programs and academic exchanges with universities in post-Soviet nations, further gaining attraction in the academic sphere and spreading Russian influence to foreign students and academics.¹⁵⁷ However, it should be noted that while Russian universities are attractive regionally, they are not ranked highly globally. A U.S. News report on top global universities finds that Russia's highest ranked university, M.V. Lomonosov Moscow State University ranks only 275th in the world.¹⁵⁸ This will likely serve to limit the appeal of Russian higher education outside of the FSU.

6. City-Based Partnerships

Russian cities have also made gains in promoting Russia's image across its borders, particularly in the near abroad through their efforts of city-based partnerships. Moscow has been at the forefront of soft power project through Russian cities, when the Moscow mayor, in 1999, created the Moscow Foundation for Support of Compatriots, which spread Russian influence mainly in former Soviet nations. It had a scholarship program for students who spoke Russian, and encouraged Russian cultural learning. Moreover, "Houses of Moscow" were set up in neighboring nations to encourage cultural understanding and business cooperation with Russia. Additionally, cities such as St Petersburg, Kaliningrad, and Karelia have been skilled in twinning with European cities and setting up humanitarian programs abroad, as well as encouraging cooperation with Russian speakers or ethnic Russians abroad.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Wilson.

¹⁵⁷ Sergunin and Karabeshkin.

¹⁵⁸ Sergunin; *U.S. News*, "Best Global Universities in Russia," Accessed September 09, 2019, <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-global-universities/russia>.

¹⁵⁹ Sergunin and Karabeshkin.

7. Economic Partnerships and Projects

While these aspects highlight functioning instruments of Russian soft power in the traditional context, the Russian government views soft power more broadly than Nye and his definition. The Russian understanding of the national power dichotomy views hard power as military use, and soft power as non-military means of influence, including economic means. As such, as a means of gaining greater attractiveness, prior to the 2014 Ukrainian invasion, Russia promoted itself as a reliable trade partner through foreign investment, being a steady consumer market for foreign companies, and through energy supply through the Baltic and Nord Stream pipeline systems. Additionally, it spearheaded the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) as a means to bolster its economic strength and further integrate it with partner states.¹⁶⁰ The benefits to Russia through the EEU were not only economic; however, Russia viewed the project as a cultural bloc as well as an economic one, which does fit the more traditional view of soft power as espoused by Nye.¹⁶¹

Furthermore, in the pre-Crimean invasion era, Russia made great strides in developing relations with European nations. One such example was the Russian Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) presidency program. The program occurred between 2012 and 2013, with the aim of promoting Russian soft power to the Baltic states through trade, investment, cultural programs, and personal contacts. Ultimately, while initially promising, the program, like many other attempts at Russian soft power, was undermined by the projection of hard power through the invasion of Crimea.¹⁶²

While these examples demonstrate the Russian misunderstanding of economic tools as a means of soft power use, Russia also demonstrated another misunderstanding of soft power. The Kremlin has shown that it conflates countering and undermining other

¹⁶⁰ Sergunin and Karabeshkin.

¹⁶¹ Andrei Yeliseyev, "The Eurasian Economic Union: Expectations, Challenges, and Achievements," *The German Marshall Fund of the United States*, May 15, 2019, <http://www.gmfus.org/publications/eurasian-economic-union-expectations-challenges-and-achievements>; Nye.

¹⁶² Sergunin and Karabeshkin.

nation's soft power projection as a means of exerting its own soft power.¹⁶³ Rather than inherently expand its own attractiveness through true soft power, many Western analysts view Russia as using "soft" power to undermine sovereignty in post-Soviet states and expand its sphere of influence through economic and political coercion, and thus, its view of soft power often times mirrors the traditional use of hard power.¹⁶⁴

8. Narrative of Sovereign Democracy

An example of this misunderstanding is shown in the case of the Russian narrative of "sovereign democracy." After the 2004 Ukrainian Orange Revolution, Russia saw Western soft power and the ideology of democratization as being a key factor responsible for the event, and thus recognized that it needed its own competing ideology to counter what it saw as Western intrusion in its traditional sphere of influence. The new ideology centered on two core ideas. As stated by Nicu Popescu, "First is the idea of sovereignty. This concept is understood as non-interference from the West...Second, is the idea that Russia has its own set of values. These values are democratic, but they emerge from Russia's unique historical experience, and they are distinct from what the West understands as democracy."¹⁶⁵ Thus, Russia viewed its ideas of democracy as separate from those of the Western nations. As stated by Russia's then-Minister of Defense, "if there is western democracy, there should be an eastern democracy as well."¹⁶⁶ While theoretically similar to democracy in the West, the realities of sovereign democracy proved different: it limits rule of law and protection for underrepresented groups, as well as quells dissent towards the government. In practice, the ideology proved to be a centralized form of managed democracy, and did not include the civil and economic freedoms found in Western democracies.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Popescu.

¹⁶⁴ Popescu.

¹⁶⁵ Popescu, 1.

¹⁶⁶ Popescu, 1.

¹⁶⁷ Popescu.

Sovereign democracy is argued to not act as a means of legitimate attraction for Russia, but rather, it is being used as a tool to undermine and discredit the attractiveness of true democratic governance, and seemingly serves as ideological manipulation to control the appeal of foreign attractiveness. The ideology of sovereign democracy not only acted as an attempt to legitimize the Putin regime as a unique democracy, but was used to spread the system of governance to its neighboring nations.¹⁶⁸

The Kremlin viewed sovereign democracy as a tool to spread “sovereignty” to the near abroad, and spread its form of democracy. Accordingly, NGOs and think-tanks, financed by Russia, emerged in Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan to promote the ideology of sovereign democracy and counter Western influences. Furthermore, Russia established an election monitoring agency in Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) nations called the Commonwealth of Independent States Election Monitoring Organization (CIS-EMO), to oversee elections in the CIS nations. However, the CIS-EMO’s verdicts on elections in those nations often conflicted with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s (OSCE) verdict on those election, suggesting that it was being used as tool to undermine free and fair elections. Ultimately, the ideology of sovereign democracy is deemed by Popescu to not be a source of soft power for Moscow, and instead seems to be used as a tool to counter the real attractiveness of Western democracy.¹⁶⁹

Yet, there appears to be attraction for the ideas of sovereign democracy outside of the FSU. Russia’s push for a non-democratic alternative to liberal democracy seems to be influencing a rise of governments with similar models to sovereign democracy.¹⁷⁰ Viktor Orbán’s Hungary is based in an ideology of illiberal democracy, which seems to mirror Russian sovereign democracy. Orbán’s rhetoric regarding opposition to Western liberalism is strikingly similar to Putin’s, as is his separation of Hungary’s governance from Western

¹⁶⁸ Popescu.

¹⁶⁹ Popescu.

¹⁷⁰ Brian Grodsky, “Russia, Putin Lead the Way in Exploiting Democracy’s Lost Promise,” *The Conversation*, May 22, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/russia-putin-lead-the-way-in-exploiting-democracys-lost-promise-94798>

democracy.¹⁷¹ While Hungary's example is the most brazen in its opposition to liberalism, models of governance aping aspects of sovereign democracy can also be found in Poland and Turkey. Poland is seen to be limiting the power of its judicial branch, and is acting to curb free speech. Under President Recep Erdogan, Turkey has made constitutional changes that appear to enable oppression and authoritarianism in the nation.¹⁷² Moreover, Erdogan is demonstrating that he can find an alternative to NATO partners by strengthening Turkey's relations with Russia.¹⁷³ While Popescu argues that Russia's sovereign democracy is used to stem Western influence in the FSU, the narrative has seemingly created attraction and imitation outside of post-Soviet borders by creating an alternative to Western democracy.¹⁷⁴

9. Narrative of the *Russkiy Mir*

Another example of the Russian understanding of soft power as a tool whose purpose is to counter the influence of other nations and undermine sovereign interests of near abroad nations is the Russian narrative of the *Russkiy Mir*, or Russian World.¹⁷⁵ Subsequent chapters will delve further into how the narrative was used in conjunction with the ROC and how its use was specifically targeted in Ukraine. In this section, it will primarily examine how it is used in a general sense to create a narrative that serves not to attract, but rather, to undermine, the attractiveness of other nations. As with sovereign democracy, the *Russkiy Mir* narrative was born in the wake of the Ukrainian Orange Revolution, and is another soft power initiative to craft an exportable narrative to counter Western values in the near abroad.¹⁷⁶ It does so by emphasizing four points. First, that the Russian World exists naturally and is marked by cultural features across borders. Second, that the nations and peoples in the Russian World have a shared history that binds them, as

¹⁷¹ Aliaksei Kazharski, "Illiberal or Sovereign Democracies: A Game of Adjectives and How Not to Play It," *Visegrad Insight*, April 3, 2019, <https://visegradinsight.eu/illiberal-or-sovereign-democracies/>

¹⁷² Grodsky.

¹⁷³ Henri J. Barkey, "Putin Plays Erdogan Like a Fiddle," *Foreign Policy*, September 3, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/09/03/putin-plays-erdogan-like-a-fiddle-syria/>.

¹⁷⁴ Popescu; Grodsky.

¹⁷⁵ Feklyunina.

¹⁷⁶ Feklyunina; Popescu.

Russian culture grew from its historical origins in Kievan Rus, now Ukraine. Next, a view that while those in the *Russkiy Mir* are tied through a shared culture, language, and history that transcends borders, all nations in the Russian World are tied to Russia in a relationship that places Moscow at the top of the hierarchy with other nations. Finally, that the Russian World is distinct from the Western world, and is a unique civilizational pole with its own set of values, as dictated by Moscow.¹⁷⁷

Through this narrative, Russia sought to attract nations that it saw as falling into the *Russkiy Mir*, however, in actuality, used it to limit foreign influence and place demands on its neighboring nations.¹⁷⁸ Like sovereign democracy, this narrative shows that Russia has a fundamentally different understanding of how to properly implement a narrative of attractiveness.¹⁷⁹ Valentina Feklyunina demonstrates how the *Russkiy Mir* narrative failed to gain actual attractiveness in Ukraine.¹⁸⁰ A tool of national attractiveness must be that, a means to attract a nation. However, Russia used the narrative in Ukraine to discourage its integration into Europe. The narrative seemed dependent on Ukrainian policy, and any policy deemed counter to the objectives of Moscow was seen by the Kremlin as a rejection of the shared heritage between the two nations. The rigidity of the narrative was seen as off-putting by many in Ukraine, according to Feklyunina. The narrative was supposed to convey partnership between the two countries, but with a central pillar of the *Russkiy Mir* asserting that Russia was the dominant partner, it did not allow compromise on divergent national interests, which should be a key point of consensus in any partnership. An example of this was shown when Ukraine attempted to sign an Association Agreement with the EU, and was actively discouraged by Moscow to the point where it refused to renegotiate cheaper gas prices with Ukraine due to the EU agreement. Many in the Ukrainian government had seen benefit in the Russian World narrative, Feklyunina notes. Moscow's actions discouraging them from signing the agreement with the EU, however, led Ukrainian leaders to begin rejecting the narrative as they saw it merely as a tool to coerce

¹⁷⁷ Feklyunina.

¹⁷⁸ Feklyunina.

¹⁷⁹ Feklyunina; Popescu.

¹⁸⁰ Feklyunina.

rather than attract and not as a tool to gain sovereign partners, but create states subservient to Kremlin interests.¹⁸¹

Moreover, while the Russian World narrative appealed to some in Ukraine, the nation is not monolithic, and thus the populace had differing views on the legitimacy of this narrative. There are sharp ethnic and linguistic differences in that nation, with pronounced regional divergence as well.¹⁸² As of the late-2000s, ethnic Ukrainians in a self-reporting survey accounted for 77.8% of the population, with ethnic Russians making up only 17.3% of the population. Additionally, 35% of those surveyed said they spoke Russian at home, and 43% said they spoke Ukrainian in the home. Twenty percent stated they spoke both. Most of the ethnic Russians and Russian speakers lived in the southeast of Ukraine, showing a stark cultural divide regionally.¹⁸³ This split in cultural identification shows that any narrative based on a shared culture would be hard to wield as an instrument of true soft power.¹⁸⁴

Feklyunina points to Russian World narrative not as a tool of real soft power, but one of coercion with the masking of soft power, as the example regarding Ukraine's Association Agreement with the EU supports. Russia acted not through soft power influence to persuade the nation, but with economic leverage from gas prices. The opposition to this economic "soft" power was highlighted when protests erupted in Ukraine once the government failed to sign the agreement, showing that there was no popular Ukrainian collective identity with or affinity for Russia guiding the decision, merely an official pragmatic response to economic leverage.¹⁸⁵

Another example of the limits of Russian soft power can be seen in Ukraine's attempts to join NATO. Moscow highlighted Ukraine's attempts to enter the NATO alliance as betraying the unity of the Russian World, and was ultimately successful in

¹⁸¹ Feklyunina.

¹⁸² Feklyunina.

¹⁸³ Feklyunina, 785.

¹⁸⁴ Feklyunina.

¹⁸⁵ Feklyunina.

discouraging Kyiv from joining. Due to the power of the narrative and its ostensible coercion, the Ukrainian government abandoned the goal of NATO membership in its 2010 security strategy. However, on the other hand, Russia was unsuccessful in utilizing the *Russkiy Mir* narrative to persuade Ukraine to join its EEU. This further demonstrates that Russia uses its narratives to discourage pro-western policies in the former Soviet republics rather than build genuine attraction.¹⁸⁶

10. Russian Orthodox Church

The Russian Orthodox Church is largely recognized to be a source of genuine soft power attractiveness for Russia. According to a Pew survey, the majority of the population in all Orthodox nations in Central and Eastern Europe—with the exception of Ukraine—view a strong Russia as essential to balance Western influence. Moreover, the majority of the population in these same nations view Russia as a protector. This seemingly points to the influence of Orthodoxy in creating positive attraction for Russia.¹⁸⁷ Further analysis of the Russian Orthodox Church as an element of soft power will take place in subsequent chapters.

F. CONCLUSION

This thesis argues that while Russia has had numerous setbacks in its implementation of soft power, it has seen minor successes as well, and has legitimate tools that it can utilize to grow true attraction to its goals.¹⁸⁸ With this in mind, the answer to whether Russia is able to successfully employ soft power is nuanced. While Russia has largely been unable to use soft power to its advantage in the recent past, that does not mean Russia will not be able to refocus its soft power strategy and use its inherent tools of attraction to its benefit in the future. The observable limitations of Russia's soft power use can be attributed to multiple factors. It is challenged by historical narratives that work in opposition to gaining attractiveness abroad. Furthermore, it is hampered by past misuse of

¹⁸⁶ Feklyunina.

¹⁸⁷ *Pew Research Center*, "Views on Role of Russia in the Region, and the Soviet Union," May 10, 2017, <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/views-on-role-of-russia-in-the-region-and-the-soviet-union/>.

¹⁸⁸ Sergunin and Karabeshkin.

soft power and a fundamental misunderstanding of what it is. However, what undermines Russia's soft power projection more than anything else has been its use of hard power. The Russian invasion of Ukraine severely limited the appeal of Russian attraction.¹⁸⁹

Russia, however, has shown that it can produce attractiveness when it works with other nations, rather than coercing them. Even under Russia's misunderstood view of soft power which includes economic components, there is an element of true soft power. The demonstration of Russia as a reliable trading partner produced benefits for Moscow through energy agreements like the Nord Stream pipeline. Moreover, the creation of the EEU may represent a vehicle of Russian soft power that has both economic and cultural components.¹⁹⁰ While more in line with Nye's views of hard power rather than soft, economic cooperation such as this can be useful in changing perceptions of a nation. In fact, Nye points to a nation's political values and foreign policies as being components of soft power.¹⁹¹ While trade agreements are not strictly examples of soft power, a consistent and sustained demonstration of integration into the global economy would prove useful to changing perceptions of Russia.

An example of Russia's potential for soft power success is the Russian Council of the Baltic Sea States program, which proved hopeful, until it was undercut by the Ukrainian invasion.¹⁹² Moreover, Russia has excellent universities and academic programs in the FSU, which it can emphasize to demonstrate that it places great cultural emphasis on education and the pursuit of learning. Yet, these legitimate tools of soft power are largely drowned out by the hard power actions of the Kremlin that have decreased attraction for the nation. Another example of potential success that led to failure are the mega events that can be used to build the perception of Russia as a modern and open society, welcoming to people around the globe. Yet, these failed to build attraction, particularly in the example of

¹⁸⁹ Rutland and Kazantsev; Letterman; Kuzio.

¹⁹⁰ Sergunin and Karabeshkin.

¹⁹¹ Nye.

¹⁹² Sergunin and Karabeshkin.

the 2014 Olympics, as the games were overshadowed by scandal, and more importantly, the invasion of Ukraine.¹⁹³

When it has attempted to spread ideologies such as sovereign democracy and the *Russkiy Mir*, Moscow's goal of influence through these narratives was found lacking by its intended audiences.¹⁹⁴ Yet, sovereign democracy has seemingly proved attractive outside the FSU in Hungary, Poland, and Turkey. The mirroring of sovereign democracy in these nations suggests the power of the narrative, which seeks to present the Russian model as an attractive form of governance in comparison to Western democracy. This indicates examples the narrative's success in influencing foreign audiences. Yet, in the context of the FSU, soft power narratives such as the *Russkiy Mir* and sovereign democracy were found to be too similar to hard power coercion to gain real attractiveness. Their only successes in the FSU were in deterrence, not attraction.¹⁹⁵

The problem Russia faces is not the tools at its disposal, rather, its understanding of how to use them, and ultimately, its understanding of itself. As Russia's aspiration is to remain a great power, its foreign policy is directly influenced by this understanding.¹⁹⁶ As such, Russia has engaged in soft power projects to compete with the West by any means to remain a great power, which counters its goals. It constructs narratives in reaction to genuine Western soft power with the goal of eroding Western power, rather than creating its own attractiveness.¹⁹⁷ It created RT not to showcase its own values, but espoused conflicting narratives that it thought could frustrate those reported with ideological consistency by Western media outlets.¹⁹⁸ Russian soft power has largely been demonstrated in a reactionary and coercive way, which according to scholars makes it unattractive. Rather it showcases that it is serving as a means to help Russia regain great

¹⁹³ Sergunin and Karabeshkin.

¹⁹⁴ Feklyunina.

¹⁹⁵ Feklyunina.

¹⁹⁶ Clunan.

¹⁹⁷ Feklyunina; Popescu.

¹⁹⁸ Rutland and Kazantsev.

power status under its own terms, which seemingly has only made achieving this goal more unlikely.¹⁹⁹

For Russia to efficiently use the genuine soft power assets it does possess, it would likely need to fundamentally refocus its foreign policy strategy and work to cooperate on more equal terms with nations in its near abroad. It is unlikely to achieve attraction through coercion or domination of neighboring states. Russia should look to the example of the Ukrainian Orange Revolution, which spurred Russia's soft power push to begin with. The ideals of Western democracy proved attractive to the Ukrainian people.²⁰⁰

Russian coercion is unlikely to change this inherent attraction, yet genuine cooperation and steady partnership might help shift foreign views of Russia and lend it attractiveness of its own. As Feklyunina points out, even those Ukrainians who were initially attracted to the idea of the Russian World narrative were repelled by its coercive use by Russia. In light of Russia's forceful actions to deter their government from signing the Association Agreement with the EU, the initial supporters came to see the *Ruskiy Mir* narrative as a mask of legitimacy for Russian domination in Ukraine.²⁰¹ This recalls Nye's statement from earlier in the chapter, "even the best advertising cannot sell an unpopular product."²⁰² For Russia to effectively use soft power, it must use it as a genuine means of attraction, and not as a means to coerce nations or undermine influence from the West. Moreover, it must refrain from the use of hard power, which has been demonstrated to undermine its attractiveness.²⁰³ In showing restraint in hard power, Russia could see greater attraction to the soft power tools it processes, and achieve Nye's vision of smart power.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁹ Rutland and Kazantsev; Rotaru.

²⁰⁰ Feklyunina.

²⁰¹ Feklyunina.

²⁰² Nye, 102.

²⁰³ Kuzio.

²⁰⁴ Nye.

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III. THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE RUSSIAN STATE

A. INTRODUCTION

Moving from a discussion of soft power in general, this chapter will examine the ROC's role as a particular instrument of Russian soft power. The ROC has a long and storied history with the Russian government dating back to the Tsarist era. Orthodoxy is deeply woven into Russian ideas of what it means to be Russian. Moreover, the ROC plays a central role in the *Russkiy Mir* ideology, as well as Moscow's messianic proclamation as the "Third Rome."²⁰⁵ This chapter will seek to answer the question: is the ROC a source of Russian soft power? In doing so it will look at the history of the ROC and the church-state relationship in Russia ranging from the Tsarist era through Soviet times, and how post-Soviet Russian governments and the ROC have helped shape post-Soviet Russia. Thereafter, it will analyze competing arguments as to whether or not the modern ROC maintains autonomy from the Kremlin, and accordingly, has any real foreign influence apart from the government.

The chapter will then synthesize the two arguments to demonstrate that the answer is subtler than a clear-cut answer either way. The ROC's actions are in fact distinct from the Russian government's, but their interests coincide on many fronts. The Kremlin and ROC lend one another legitimacy, and thus the ROC has been used by the Kremlin as a source of Russian soft power. However, the ROC willingly partners with the state to further its own agenda. It is important to note, by becoming too intertwined with the Russian government, the ROC risks an erosion of its legitimacy. This would leave it increasingly to be viewed less as a spiritual and cultural institution in Russia, and more as a governmental body. This scenario would ultimately see the ROC become a less attractive partner for the Kremlin.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ Feklyunina; Curanović; Blitt; Lomagin; Petro; Freeze; Knox.

²⁰⁶ Lomagin; Freeze; Curanović; Torbakov; Papkova; Freeze.

B. HISTORY OF THE ROC AND THE CHURCH-STATE RELATIONSHIP IN RUSSIA

The history of Orthodoxy in Russia dates back to 988, when the Kievan Prince Vladimir renounced his pagan beliefs and accepted the Eastern Orthodox Christian faith and mandated that his subjects be baptized in his new faith. This created the central tie binding the Russian people to the Orthodox faith, which has grown to become a cultural marker of national identity.²⁰⁷ It is important to note that the Russian word for Orthodoxy is *Pravoslavie*, or “true faith.” This seems to suggest that in the Russian language, as Orthodoxy is the true faith, all other faiths become untrue by default.²⁰⁸

The Russian church maintained strong ties with the church in Constantinople, and looked to it to help form its idea of “symphonia, the dual rule of the temporal [worldly] and ecclesiastical leadership.”²⁰⁹ When the Mongols invaded and subjugated the Kievan Rus from 1240-1480, the church became a link to past glories and helped to inspire the Rus to defeat the Mongols. This allowed the Russian church to become more autonomous from the mother church in Constantinople, and created greater domestic legitimacy for the Russian church.²¹⁰

The Orthodox church in Moscow gained greater prestige and a consolidation of power in 1453 when the Turks overtook the city of Constantinople.²¹¹ When the Pope of Rome formally excommunicated the Patriarch of Constantinople in 1054 due to doctrinal reasons, the ensuing schism was viewed by the Slavic peoples as the fall of the ‘First Rome’. The Byzantine loss of Constantinople to the Muslim Turks was then regarded as the fall of the ‘Second Rome’. In the eyes of the Russian people this left Moscow as the legitimate successor to true or Orthodox Christianity, and thus the ‘Third Rome’, a position

²⁰⁷ Knox.

²⁰⁸ Pekka Pesonen, “East or West – The Crucial Question of Russian Culture,” *University of Helsinki*, January 9, 2005, http://www.helsinki.fi/venaja/e-materiaali/mosaiikki/en1/pp1_en.pdf.

²⁰⁹ Knox, 41.

²¹⁰ Knox.

²¹¹ Knox.

it still values and emphasizes today.²¹² Russia began to shape the Third Rome narrative to highlight its special place in world affairs, declaring that it would eventually provide world salvation due to its status as the seat of true Christianity.²¹³

The reign of Peter the Great saw the reduction of the ROC's independence in Russian society, as he viewed it as a backwards institution which prevented his aims of industrialization and Westernization in the empire. Upon the death of Patriarch Adrian in 1700, Peter appointed a patriarch that was more attuned to his vision of Russian Westernization. This subjugation of the church by the Russian state was further amplified by the Ecclesiastical Regulations of 1721, which saw the Patriarchate dissolved and supplanted by a board of Bishops called the Holy Synod. The Holy Synod then was under full control of the government and controlled much in the same manner as other departments of the Russian government. Moreover, during this period, the church's finances were brought under the control of the government and the number of priests and parishes was restricted.²¹⁴

Subsequent periods of tsarist rule, particularly under Peter III and Catherine the Great, saw the ROC's resources dwindle and more complete subjugation by the state. Yet, this period also saw the heightened importance of Orthodoxy to Russian foreign policy. Through wars with the Ottoman Empire, Tsarist Russia came to be seen as the protector of Orthodox Christians in Ottoman territory, particularly for Orthodox believers in the Balkans and the Levant. By taking the formerly Byzantine mantle as the defender of Orthodox believers, the Russian Empire grew as a great power in opposition to the Ottoman Empire, and increased its influence for Orthodox believers outside of its borders.²¹⁵

²¹² Knox; Lomagin.

²¹³ Lomagin.

²¹⁴ Knox.

²¹⁵ Victor Taki, *Limits of Protection: Russia and the Orthodox Coreligionists in the Ottoman Empire*, The Carl Beck Papers in Russia and East European Studies no. 2401 (Pittsburg, PA: Carl Beck, 2015), <https://carlbeckpapers.pitt.edu/ojs/index.php/cbp/article/view/201/211>.

While the defense of Orthodoxy abroad was beneficial to the ROC's role in Russia, domestically, it faced a suppression of its autonomy by the state.²¹⁶ Yet, at the same time, Orthodoxy became more central to state ideology. Developed by Sergei Uvarov, Tsar Nicholas I's minister of education, the concept of "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality," took hold in Russia. This elevated the role of the ROC in an effort to legitimize the rule of Nicholas I and refocused the centrality of Orthodoxy in Russian nationality. Moreover, it emphasized the unique nature of Russia in the world, casting it as unique from Western ideas.²¹⁷ This ideology further validated the Slavophile idea of a unique Russian society which still persists today, and cemented the role of Orthodoxy as a key component of Russian national identification.²¹⁸

During the early twentieth century under Tsar Nicholas II, the Russian intelligentsia, questioning the role of the ROC under imperial control, began to lobby for it to gain independence from what they perceived as subjugation from the state. Following the Russian Empire's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), Tsar Nicholas made many reforms, including greater independence for the ROC. Reforms and liberalization for the ROC were met with praise by the Russian peoples, as they were deeply Orthodox. So much so, that at the time they often would identify as Orthodox over other markers of self-identity.²¹⁹

One of these initial reforms was the creation of a church council which would advocate for further liberalization. However, as Nicholas II feared this would decrease his hold on power, he abolished it before it could meet.²²⁰ The council did eventually convene

²¹⁶ Taki; Knox; Lora Gerd, *Russian Policy in the Orthodox East: The Patriarchate of Constantinople (1878-1914)* (Warsaw/Berlin: De Gruyter Open, 2014), <https://www.degruyter.com/view/product/209761>

²¹⁷ Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, "'Nationality' in the State Ideology during the Reign of Nicholas I," *Russian Review* 19, no. 1 (January 1960), 38-46, JSTOR.

²¹⁸ Riasanovsky; Samuel Coffin, "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality," *Harvard Political Review*, July 24, 2015, <https://harvardpolitics.com/world/orthodoxy-autocracy-and-nationality/>.

²¹⁹ Knox.

²²⁰ Knox.

in 1917 after the Tsarist government was dissolved. The council succeeded in re-establishing the Patriarchate and electing Patriarch Tikhon as the new leader of the ROC.²²¹

This independence for the ROC was short-lived as the Bolsheviks, who came to power that year, implemented harsh restrictions against the Russian church. They did so in order to further their atheist, Marxist ideology, which saw the ROC as a religious counter to communist ideas and a remnant of the imperial regime. The ROC was equally hostile towards the Bolsheviks, with the new patriarch speaking out against the communists. Yet, seeing that the Bolsheviks would retain power, the ROC began to warm to the regime for its own survival. In 1927, it issued a statement declaring loyalty to the Soviet state. This declaration of loyalty did not lead to the end of persecution for the ROC. Prior to 1917, there were approximately 80,000 churches in the Russian empire, including convents and chapels. By 1939, 80,000 priests, nuns, and monks had lost their lives to religious persecution and there were approximately 200-300 functioning churches in the Soviet state. Stalin saw benefits to the ROC's cooperation during WWII, leading to thousands of church reopening, yet the Khrushchev era saw renewed oppression of the church.²²²

A further example of Soviet oppression of the ROC was the Bolshevik creation of a false Orthodox sect in the USSR, meant to challenge the legitimate ROC's power and promote Soviet ideas. This called the Living Church, but was also known as the Renovationist Church. This church espoused loyalty not only for Orthodoxy, but for the communist government and ideology. The reaction from Orthodox believers was largely negative, and led to violent clashes with communist officials who sought to seize property and religious sacraments. The Living Church instituted modernist policies such as allowing services to be held in the vernacular, allowing married priest in to the church, and diminished the importance of traditional symbols and sacraments. These policies were viewed as heretical to most Orthodox believers and ultimately led to the failure of the Soviet-sponsored church.²²³

²²¹ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "Russian Orthodox Church," Accessed August 30, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Russian-Orthodox-Church>.

²²² Knox.

²²³ Knox.

The situation for the ROC changed significantly under the administration of Mikhail Gorbachev, in light of his policy of *glasnost*, or openness. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) began allowing more Orthodox ideology into instruments of mass culture and propaganda, such as literature and cinema. Moreover, Gorbachev and other CPSU officials began attending religious events, marking a return to a closer relationship between the ROC and the state. One such event was the 1,000th anniversary celebration of Prince Vladimir's acceptance of Christianity. As part of the celebration, Gorbachev met with the Patriarch and other ROC members, marking the first time the leader of the USSR had met with the leader of the ROC since Stalin had done so to garner church support during WWII.²²⁴

Gorbachev's justification for increasing Orthodox freedoms under the communist regime were two-fold. First, he saw Orthodox adherents as beneficial to the cause of communism, and sought to co-opt them to become better integrated into the USSR to help him support a revitalization of the Soviet state. Second, as the USSR was rife with alcoholism, drug usage, crime, and other negative social factors, Gorbachev sought to utilize Orthodox morality to better improve moral standards and build a renewed sense of unity, which he saw as lacking in the Soviet Union. Moreover, a more pragmatic reason for Gorbachev giving greater freedom to the ROC was to strengthen his hold on power. At the time, it was estimated that there were 50 million Orthodox believers in the USSR. Importantly, counter to the stereotype that most of these believers were elderly women, much of the Orthodox adherents were young, and urban intelligentsia who had turned to the ROC as an alternative to what they saw as failing communist ideology.²²⁵

Gorbachev's liberalization of religion in the USSR led to a renewed sense of cultural and national heritage in Russia. The renewed legitimacy of the Orthodox faith allowed many to reconceptualize what a unique Russian culture meant, as the ROC had long been historically intertwined with Russian identity.²²⁶ As stated by Zoe Knox, "the

²²⁴ Knox.

²²⁵ Knox.

²²⁶ Knox.

policy of *glasnost*’ therefore restored Orthodoxy’s position at the fore of Russian national identity and the nation’s cultural consciousness.”²²⁷ This reinvigoration of Orthodox belief tied to Russian identity allowed the ROC to return to a more active role in Russian society and publicly advocate for social policies such as a renewed focus on social reforms, peace, and environmental protection, in a search for relevance in a society which for so long had not heard the voice of the ROC. This demonstrated that the ROC had regained a political voice in Soviet, and later Russian, society, and could work through governmental leadership to help further change in the nation. Having regained prominence in society, and being a marker of Russian identity and historical continuity, the ROC would act as a major player in defining Russia’s future in its post-Soviet transition.²²⁸

The message of the ROC was met by a receptive audience in the newly independent Russian state. Following the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the number of Russians who identified as Orthodox was just 31%, the number of Russians who identified as Orthodox shot up to a meteoric 72% by 2008.²²⁹ The rise was so dramatic that, according to a 2011 Ipsos survey, Russia has risen to become the most religious country in Europe.²³⁰ Interestingly, this rise in Orthodox identity has not coincided with a rise in church attendance. The number of those who attended church services at least monthly was just 2% in 1991, but rose to only 7% in 2008.²³¹ This phenomenon is what sociologist Grace Davie terms “believing without belonging.”²³² This staggering difference between Russians who identify as Orthodox and those who actually attend Orthodox services in Russia demonstrates the unifying cultural and social power of the ROC in modern-day Russian.²³³ It should be noted that Orthodoxy is not the only religion in Russia that plays

²²⁷ Knox, 58.

²²⁸ Knox.

²²⁹ *Pew Research Center*, “Russians Return to Religion.”

²³⁰ Petro.

²³¹ *Pew Research Center*, “Russians Return to Religion.”

²³² Freeze.

²³³ Coyer, “The (Un)Holy Alliance: Vladimir Putin, the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian Exceptionalism,” *Forbes*, May 21, 2015, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/paulcoyer/2015/05/21/unholy-alliance-vladimir-putin-and-the-russian-orthodox-church/#3a332ef227d5>.

a major role. The three other “traditional” religions in Russia are Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism. Like the ROC, these religions enjoy a privileged place in Russian society and maintain levels of support from the state.²³⁴

C. THE ROC AS A KREMLIN-CONTROLLED ENTITY

Following the *glasnost*’ period during the Gorbachev era, and the fall of the Soviet state, there have been competing theories on the ROC’s role in relation to the Kremlin and Russian soft power in the post-Soviet period.²³⁵ To determine the role played by the ROC in Russia’s soft power strategy, this section will examine the evidence surrounding the claim that the ROC is largely being used by the Russian government to further its policy agenda. It will do so by examining the role the ROC plays in religious diplomacy, the codification of Orthodox spirituality into Russian foreign policy and security doctrines, and the ROC’s part in helping the Kremlin to legitimize and reinforce the *Russkiy Mir* narrative discussed in the previous chapter.²³⁶

1. Religious Diplomacy of the ROC

Religious diplomacy is the activities of a state which use a religious institution or factors as a tool of national foreign policy.²³⁷ Alicia Curanović asserts that “religious institutions (actors) and religious ideas, symbols, etc. are treated in this context foremost as assets, which can be used in order to achieve political goals.”²³⁸ In this relationship, even when the two entities seem to engage in mutually beneficial partnership, a state is inherently the stronger partner, as when in the realm of foreign policy divergent interests emerge, the religious institutions must bow to state authority, and not the other way around. The ROC has been granted a special and privileged place in modern day Russia, and enjoys many protections by the Kremlin; however, this is not without costs. Highlighting the state’s dominance in the power relation between church and state, the Russian government

²³⁴ Curanović, 9.

²³⁵ Blitt; Curanović; Torbakov;” Mersol; Freeze; Lomagin; Petro.

²³⁶ Curanović; Blitt; Feklyunina.

²³⁷ Curanović.

²³⁸ Curanović, 7.

demands loyalty from the ROC in return.²³⁹ Accordingly, if the ROC does not lend its loyalty to Putin's government, the privileges it enjoys can be withdrawn at any time, effectively giving the ROC a state-sponsored "license to preach."²⁴⁰ The same expectations of the state-church relationship apply, to a lesser degree to Russia's three other traditional religions as well.²⁴¹

In the sphere of foreign policy, the ROC is unique because it has a span of authority reaching beyond Russian borders, linking the modern ROC to its imperial past.²⁴² The Patriarchate of Moscow holds administrative and theological authority over Orthodox churches in most former-Soviet nations including, until 2018, in Ukraine. Georgia and Armenia have long had independent patriarchates. The Russian Patriarchate maintains Russian Orthodox churches across the globe.²⁴³ Moreover, the ROC has its own Department of External Relations, which is highly influential in the Church. So much so, in fact, that its former head, then-Metropolitan Kirill, was selected as the Patriarch of Moscow in 2009.²⁴⁴

The Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs has gone so far as to declare his support for the ROC participating in Russian foreign policy, and is eager to strengthen the historical bonds between the church and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). This relationship has matured to the point where the ROC has begun to be seen as representative of the Russian state.²⁴⁵ This has been exemplified by the construction of Russian Orthodox churches in Cuba, North Korea, and Iceland as a means to further strengthen relations with Moscow. These instances show that the ROC has moved passed the realm of spiritual actor on the global stage, but a state-sponsored political one as well as it had become so closely intertwined with the Kremlin. However, it is important to bear in mind, that while the ROC

²³⁹ Curanović.

²⁴⁰ Curanović, 10.

²⁴¹ Curanović.

²⁴² Curanović; Taki.

²⁴³ Curanović; Ponomariov.

²⁴⁴ Papkova.

²⁴⁵ Curanović.

has made significant strides in furthering its foreign policy legitimacy, this is sanctioned by the Kremlin in return for the ROC's loyalty and close association to the government.²⁴⁶

2. Codification of the Church-State Relationship

The current relationship between the Kremlin and the ROC is so close that it has in fact been codified in Russian governmental policy, suggesting that the ROC has been officially recognized and co-opted as a security and foreign policy asset by the Kremlin. The first instance of this codification in the church-state relationship was seen in the Russian National Security Concept (NSC) of 2000. The NSC was unique as it framed the necessity of Russian "spiritual renewal" as a component of national security. While ostensibly maintaining a constitutional separation of church and state, Putin seemingly began breaking down this constitutional norm and reinserted religion into government policy. The document stated that Russia was faced with the threat of decreasing spiritual morality, as well as the insertion of foreign cultures and religion into Russian borders. To combat this, the document asserted the need for protection of Russia's spiritual and moral institutions, and to oppose the negative influence seen from non-Russian religions.²⁴⁷ Robert Blitt points out "although the NSC invoked the generic term "spirituality," in substance the policy objective intended the restoration of Orthodoxy specifically, and to a much lesser degree Russia's other 'traditional faiths.'"²⁴⁸ This governmental protection of Orthodoxy in Russia was of course welcomed by the ROC, but points to the nature of the church's enshrinement into Russian state policy.²⁴⁹

The presidency of Dmitry Medvedev was no less willing to incorporate religion and spirituality into Russian doctrine, as shown by his 2008 National Security Strategy (NSS). In particular, this document explicitly stated the need to combat foreign religious influences, which could damage unity within Russian political and social life. The NSS further called for the need to promote security through the development of the Russian

²⁴⁶ Curanović.

²⁴⁷ Blitt.

²⁴⁸ Blitt, 368.

²⁴⁹ Blitt.

populace which inherently includes spiritual development in association with the ROC. Moreover, the NSS included provisions which called for greater cooperation and dialogue with religious and civil institutions.²⁵⁰ These provisions were manifested in 2009 when the ROC and Putin's United Russia party, in relation to Russian development, declared they must "jointly decide...what their common values are and what modernization tasks must be accomplished."²⁵¹ The United Russia party further went on to state that "Russian modernization should be based on the Orthodox faith."²⁵²

These inclusionary elements allowing the ROC to act as an instrument of influence in national policy were not solely limited to domestic affairs, but were codified in Russian foreign policy as well. Russia's Foreign Policy Concept (FPC) of 2008 stated that it was incumbent on the Kremlin to engage with the ROC and other traditional Russian faiths to reinforce Russian security internationally. The document further asserts the necessity to create a larger role for religion in foreign policy, in order to facilitate Russia's interaction with diverse global cultures and civilizations. To further this point, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov stressed the MOFA's need to continue a close relation with the ROC. He emphasized the historical link between the ROC and Russian foreign affairs, as well as the ROC's role in shaping Russian nationality and culture.²⁵³ Alexander Avdeev, the Russian Minister of Culture, further emphasized the government's reliance on the ROC by asserting "Russian culture will flourish and remain the center of the national idea only if it will be in very close dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church, if it is connected with the understanding that the spiritual and historical value are both sacred values."²⁵⁴ Further demonstrating the entrenchment of the relationship is the existence of working councils between the MOFA and ROC aimed at further integrating the ROC into Russian foreign policy activities.²⁵⁵ Due to these working groups, Lavrov stated that the ROC has

²⁵⁰ Blitt.

²⁵¹ Blitt, 372.

²⁵² Blitt.

²⁵³ Blitt.

²⁵⁴ Blitt, 375.

²⁵⁵ Blitt.

become a “huge mainstay of government actions in this [foreign affairs] sector.”²⁵⁶ These working groups are leading to further assistance from the ROC in shaping the MOFA’s foreign policy narrative and promoting “traditional” Russian values internationally.²⁵⁷ As Blitt asserts, “the Church’s past and future actions are coordinated (and possibly modified) based on implications for—and advantages to—Russia’s “secular” foreign policy.”²⁵⁸

3. The *Russkiy Mir* and the ROC

The case of the *Russkiy Mir* ideology is also salient in this analysis, as it highlights a narrative espoused by the ROC being used as by the government as a tool of foreign policy.²⁵⁹ While the previous chapter discussed the narrative and its use in general, when discussing the ROC and state relationship it is imperative to examine the role the ROC played in developing the narrative for exportation by the Kremlin as a soft power instrument. The first of four pillars upon which the narrative is based stresses that Russia is a naturally existing civilization. The narrative extends just beyond the borders of Russia and encompasses all those who share Russian history and culture, including language, a shared past, and of course, Orthodoxy Christianity. In particular, both Patriarch Kirill and President Putin view Ukraine and Belarus as the key nations upon which the narrative is meant to appeal to. Patriarch Kirill in 2009 stated that as Ukraine and Belarus form the lands upon which the ancient Rus arose, they are the core of the perceived *Russkiy Mir*. Putin reiterated this in 2013 in a particularly religious context by highlighting importance of Orthodoxy in uniting the two countries with Russia through shared religious bonds.²⁶⁰

The second pillar of the ideology states that the construction of the Russian world is built on a single interpretation of a shared history among “Russian peoples.” This interpretation is not defined by national borders, but rather historic and cultural ones. While the narrative maintains that Russia seeks to respect the borders of present-day nation states,

²⁵⁶ Blitt, 381.

²⁵⁷ Blitt.

²⁵⁸ Blitt, 382.

²⁵⁹ Feklyunina.

²⁶⁰ Feklyunina.

in actuality, the government views those in the Russian world outside of Russia as Russians. To emphasize this, Putin asserted that Russians and Ukrainians were ‘one people’ due to their shared culture and history. The ROC maintains this same view with Patriarch Kirill similarly stating that spiritually, Russians and Ukrainians were one people.²⁶¹

The third pillar rests on Russia being the hierarchical head of the *Russkiy Mir*. While ostensibly the ROC seeks to be inclusive of other nations within the perceived Russian world as being equal partners, in practice, this is not the case, as evidenced by the contentious battle staged by the ROC over authority of Orthodoxy in Ukraine, which will be detailed in length in the subsequent chapter.²⁶² This view of Russia as the head of the Russian world is supported by the government as well. The quasi-governmental *Russkiy Mir* Foundation went so far as to state on their website that the “Russian world is the world of Russia.”²⁶³ The foundation highlighted Russia as the main component of the ideology, and all other members were included based on their connection to Russia.²⁶⁴

The final component of the ideology emphasizes the uniqueness of Russian culture and civilization in the world, and in particular, its distinctness from the West.²⁶⁵ This harkens back to the Third Rome narrative, in which Russia considers itself a distinct, and in many ways, superior culture to others around the world.²⁶⁶ The Patriarch has spoken out against those who wish to incorporate foreign elements into Russian culture and the Russian world, calling them false ideas. The ROC and Kremlin have crafted a narrative that counters ideas of Western governance and morality, and instead, highlights the glory

²⁶¹ Feklyunina.

²⁶² Feklyunina; Ponomariov.

²⁶³ Feklyunina, 784.

²⁶⁴ Feklyunina.

²⁶⁵ Feklyunina.

²⁶⁶ Lomagin; Andrei Tsygankov, “Crafting the State-Civilization: Vladimir Putin’s Turn to Distinct Values,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 63 (2016): 146-158, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2015.1113884>.

of Russia's past as evidence for the legitimacy of the conservative and religious-based Russian model.²⁶⁷

4. Challenge to the Unipolar Order from the Kremlin and ROC

Emphasizing the uniqueness of the Russian civilization and the Russian world is not only important for the ROC and Russia to gain influence in the near abroad through the *Russkiy Mir* ideology, but also in their shared global foreign policy strategy. Both Moscow and the ROC seek to erode the unipolar world led by the U.S. and embraced by Western nations. The ROC sees the U.S. ideology as corrosive to its traditional, conservative values and fear it will have a destabilizing effect on Russian morals.²⁶⁸ The Russian government seeks to reemerge as a great power, and thus challenge the U.S.'s global hegemony.²⁶⁹ Thus, both entities see multipolarity as a means to combat the U.S.'s global dominance and balance world power. The Kremlin has used this as an opportunity to utilize the ROC to achieve these ends and has incorporated the ROC as a means to promote and legitimize Russian civilization as unique, and apart from Western society. As such, the ROC has called on non-Western powers such as China and India to create an "alliance of traditional civilizations," to rise up and unite with Russia against the West to preserve their traditional values and cultures against Westernization.²⁷⁰

D. THE ROC AS AN AUTONOMOUS ACTOR

Having examined these arguments pointing to the conclusion that the ROC is a handmaiden of the Russian state, it can become easy to think that the ROC has morphed into a quasi-governmental body, and its relationship with the Kremlin no longer allows it to act as an independent entity beyond the constraints of Putin's dictates. However, a counterargument exists: while the ROC and the government have shared values and close cooperation in the realm of foreign policy and soft power projection, the ROC is an

²⁶⁷ Torbakov.

²⁶⁸ Curanović.

²⁶⁹ Lomagin.

²⁷⁰ Curanović, 18.

independent actor choosing to engage with the Kremlin in a mutually beneficial manner.²⁷¹ The ROC has historically self-identified as a worldly institution as well as a spiritual one, and thus its role in symphony with the government is not evidence of it being coopted by the Kremlin, rather, it is acting as it historically has, pursuing its worldly goals via the Russian state.²⁷² While being relied upon by the state to further its foreign policy goals and construct a national narrative, it does so willingly, and as a co-equal partner. The ROC needs the Kremlin to further its worldly ambition; however, the Kremlin needs the ROC to bolster its own legitimacy and foreign policy. The church is a vastly popular entity in Russia and a source of national and cultural identity. As such, it is able to lobby and work with, not at the behest of, the government to help shape and aid in furthering Russia's soft power goals.²⁷³

1. Worldly Mission of the ROC

Dating back to the Tsarist era, the ROC has maintained a worldly mission in addition to its spiritual one and “emphasized the duty to engage this-worldly problems—that is, worry about this life, not just the afterlife.”²⁷⁴ Beginning in the 19th century, the ROC embraced a path that sought not just to ensure religious salvation for believers, but to try and bring salvation to the world itself. In a similar vein, the modern ROC is attempting to bring the same ideology into the 20th Century. Devised by then-Metropolitan Krill, the Foundations of the Social Conceptions of the Russian Orthodox Church (FSCROC) from 2000 emphasized the worldly responsibilities of the ROC to insert itself into global affairs as they pertained to the church. Furthermore, the FSCROC spells out the need to work with the government on issues of shared interests, but rejects state control over the church. Moreover, it asserted the precedence of religious authority over state authority if state law infringes on Orthodox morality. If this occurs, the document asserts that it is incumbent on the church to engage in peaceful resistance. This text demonstrates that while the ROC

²⁷¹ Freeze; Petro; Lomagin; Mersol.

²⁷² Freeze.

²⁷³ Petro Lomagin; Mersol.

²⁷⁴ Freeze.

involves itself in worldly affairs, it does so to further the aims of the church as it always has, not at the behest of the Russian government, and will focus on issues which the ROC deems need to be addressed. Putin and the ROC share many common goals, and in accordance with the FSCROC, and the ROC's tradition of pursuing worldly change for what it sees as the good of the world, the ROC will act with the government to achieve these goals; however, it does so out of its own interests, not the beckoning of the Kremlin.²⁷⁵

2. Public Confidence in the ROC

As noted earlier in this chapter, the ROC is an immensely respected institution in Russia, with 72% of Russians identifying themselves as Orthodox.²⁷⁶ While most of these Orthodox Russians are not returning to church pews, they are returning to the ROC and its influence nonetheless. A 2013 ROMIR survey states that the ROC maintains a 66% approval rating, even higher than Putin's 63% approval at the time.²⁷⁷ Moreover, a Levada survey from 2016 shows approval for Patriarch Kirill himself is even higher, rising from 66% approval in 2013 to 71% approval in 2016.²⁷⁸ This has led some analysts, such as James Mersol, to argue that the ROC's actions are not being driven by the Kremlin, but rather the Kremlin desires support from the ROC as a trusted institution to further bolster legitimacy for the Putin regime.²⁷⁹ In this scenario, the ROC is inherently autonomous, as the government seeks to utilize the Church to boost support for the government and ROC-inspired foreign policy actions are just a means to further a populist movement domestically.²⁸⁰ However, 2016 polling data from the Levada center seemingly indicates that the majority of the Russian public does not wish for the ROC to influence government decisions, and that government officials should not be influenced by religion. It appears as

²⁷⁵ Freeze.

²⁷⁶ *Pew Research Center*, "Russians Return to Religion."

²⁷⁷ Freeze.

²⁷⁸ *Levada Center*, "Church and State," February 19, 2016, <http://www.levada.ru/2016/02/19/tserkov-i-gosudarstvo-2/>.

²⁷⁹ Mersol.

²⁸⁰ Mersol.

though the Russian populace is comfortable with current levels of church-state cooperation, as 56% of respondents indicated that the level of influence from religion in politics is where it should be.²⁸¹ This seemingly points to a more nuanced argument. While most Russians culturally identify as Orthodox, and there is institutional trust in the ROC, the Russian people seemingly do not wish to see an increased political role for the Church.²⁸²

3. ROC-Kremlin Mutual Collaboration

Yet, the level of respect held by the ROC and the Patriarch in Russian society enables the ROC to play a role in Russian society and politics. Rather than being subjugated to the state, the legitimacy deriving from its public trust allows it to act as a partner with the Kremlin to further its worldly objectives and to lobby the government to pursue its objectives.²⁸³ As such, Patriarch Kirill has laid out his vision of the future of the church-state relationship with the ROC as an independent actor working with the government. First, he calls for an erosion of the separation of the church and state, and rather for there to be a “separation of spheres of competencies.”²⁸⁴ Next, he seeks cooperation between the two entities in areas of mutual benefit. Third, he seeks to have the church be more assertive and work with the government to co-author policy which creates “a healthy spiritual and moral social climate, social peace and solidarity.”²⁸⁵ This vision for the ROC seemingly aligns with the majority of the population’s view as the appropriate role of the Church in society.²⁸⁶

To this end, the Patriarch in a 2009 address to the Russian Civil Services Academy provided a long and detailed list of areas in which the ROC collaborates with the state, including: combatting drug addiction and alcoholism, providing care for prisoners, overcoming intolerance, opposing extremism globally, helping to mediate international

²⁸¹ *Levada Center*, “Church,” May 4, 2016, <https://www.levada.ru/en/2016/04/05/church/>.

²⁸² Mersol; *Levada Center*, “Church.”

²⁸³ Lomagin; Petro.

²⁸⁴ Petro, 4.

²⁸⁵ Petro, 4.

²⁸⁶ Petro; *Levada Center* “Church.”

conflicts, and promoting religious dialogue both within Russia and abroad.²⁸⁷ Furthermore, the Patriarch stated that the ROC wanted to facilitate Russian foreign policy through:

Improving the situation of Orthodox churches around the globe; improving contacts with Russians living abroad; expanding the dialogue of religious communities in Russia with state structures and international organizations; [and] promoting a positive image of Russia, its history, culture, and religion abroad.²⁸⁸

The assistance to the Russian government by the ROC is clearly welcomed and being utilized; however, it is important to note that Kirill's address demonstrates that while the ROC has been utilized by the state in foreign policy, again, it does so of its own accord in order to pursue its goals.²⁸⁹

The real-world manifestations of the ROC's influence over the Russian government can be seen both domestically and internationally. It has begun to shape principles and norms for policy makers in Russia through its calls for a renewed focus on "moral health," leading to the practical disappearance of "commercially profitable programmes for adults on TV," as well as vast governmental support for the Patriarch's measures to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS.²⁹⁰ These point to the increased role of the ROC to advocate their objectives and influence policy change.²⁹¹ Moreover, rather than being used by the Kremlin to further its soft power objectives, as a legitimate arbiter of Russian culture and morality in Russia, the ROC is in fact able to influence the direction of long-term Russian foreign-strategy.²⁹² The ROC largely is in agreement with Putin's assertion that "the collapse of the Soviet Union was the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe" of the 20th Century."²⁹³ Accordingly, it has sought the reintegration of the "Russian world" since the fall of the USSR and has lobbied the government for reintegration of the traditional sphere of Russian

²⁸⁷ Petro.

²⁸⁸ Petro, 5.

²⁸⁹ Petro.

²⁹⁰ Lomagin, 508.

²⁹¹ Lomagin.

²⁹² Petro.

²⁹³ Lomagin, 500.

culture.²⁹⁴ In this light, the narrative of the *Russkiy Mir* can be viewed not as a narrative espoused by the Kremlin with the assistance of the ROC, but rather as the ROC influencing the Russian state to further its inherent foreign policy interest, which prove mutually beneficial to both actors.²⁹⁵

It is important to note that it was the ROC, not the Kremlin which took the lead in developing this narrative. Part of its reason for doing so was to see Russia reunited with the nations which it views as the cultural and spiritual core of the Russian Orthodox world, but part of the reason was due to pragmatic interests of the church as well. After the fall of the USSR and the formation of new nation-states, the majority of ROC parishes were located outside of Russia. As such, part of the push for the *Russkiy Mir* narrative was for the ROC to regain unity with its churches which lay outside its national borders. Cooperation with the state in pursuing this narrative not only gave the state a useful foreign policy narrative, but was a vehicle for the ROC's attempt to regain "spiritual unity" with churches which historically had been within its political borders.²⁹⁶ The willingness of the Russian government to implement ROC-driven policy has been so strong, in fact, that it led Nikita Lomagin to state that, "an untrained observer can conclude that those who serve the Russian state are at the same time God's servants."²⁹⁷

4. Preservation of ROC Autonomy

Lomagin argues against the assertion that the ROC is subjugated by the state and states that "the ROC has managed to preserve its significant independence from the state. This gives the ROC a unique chance to correct faults committed by the Kremlin at home and abroad and to serve as a mediator in case crises emerge."²⁹⁸ The autonomy of the ROC in the instance of a crisis was demonstrated following the 2008 conflict in Georgia. This

²⁹⁴ Lomagin.

²⁹⁵ Petro.

²⁹⁶ Petro.

²⁹⁷ Lomagin, 508.

²⁹⁸ Lomagin, 512.

will be covered further in-depth in chapter 5, but of note in this context is the ROC's deliberate defiance of the Kremlin's wishes.

The willingness to break with the Kremlin exemplifies that while the ROC and the state are often in concordance, the ROC has a large measure of autonomy, and is willing to make key actions in pursuit of its own interests over the government's desires.²⁹⁹ This independence in the face of Kremlin policy further demonstrates the fact that the ROC has a dualistic nature and cannot be examined as a merely political actor.³⁰⁰ When examining the ROC's role it is important to bear in mind that it is still very much a spiritual actor, granting it a unique position in Russian society and politics.³⁰¹ The FSCROC points to this, and signifies that it intercedes politically when it is of benefit to the church in pursuing its spiritual mission.³⁰² As the ROC views itself as both a spiritual and political actor, its motivations in influencing Russian policy are not out of state control, but out of its desires to fulfill its ecclesiastical goals, and will defy the state when necessary to achieve these goals.³⁰³

E. CONCLUSION

The preceding analysis provides evidence that shows that the ROC is indeed a source of Russian soft power. However, the evidence also convincingly demonstrates that the ROC maintains a large degree of autonomy from the Kremlin. Furthermore, it works domestically and internationally to further its own initiatives, rather than acting solely in the interest of the state. However, it often does so through the state, as the interests of the two bodies regularly overlap.³⁰⁴ While Curanović argues that a religious actor must always be subordinate to the state in foreign policy actions, neither the church nor state exists in a

²⁹⁹ Lomagin.

³⁰⁰ Lomagin; Petro.

³⁰¹ Petro.

³⁰² Freeze.

³⁰³ Petro.

³⁰⁴ Mersol; Freeze; Lomagin; Petro; Curanović.

vacuum, and this assertion should not be seen as binary and equated with subjugation of the religious actor to the government.³⁰⁵

On the one hand, as the ROC has widespread respect domestically and confers legitimacy upon the government and its actions through their good relations. On the other hand, as the government is the entity that can best help the ROC further its goals domestically and abroad, it cooperates with the Kremlin to further its “this-worldly” policies and to maintain its privileged position in Russian society.³⁰⁶ Accordingly, it is difficult to view the ROC as subjugated to the will of the state, particularly as its actions pertain to foreign policy.³⁰⁷ This will be explored further in next two chapters, which will evaluate the extent to which the ROC follows the Kremlin’s directions in relations with Ukraine and Georgia.

The relationship between the ROC and Russian government should be thought of as one where there is significant cooperation between the two entities on overlapping foreign power objectives. In this relationship, each actor can utilize the other to further its influence and reach. However, in this partnership the state is inherently the senior partner.³⁰⁸ While the junior partner in the political sphere, the ROC has shown the ability to be a significant initiator and lobbyist of many state actions and narratives. This is evidenced by the ROC’s influence for cultural partnerships to create a multipolar world, and the ROC-led *Russkiy Mir* narrative. This narrative is used by the ROC and Kremlin in an attempt to reintegrate countries traditionally within Russia’s sphere of influence, culturally and politically.³⁰⁹

The political relationship between the Church and state, while beneficial and seemingly useful to both parties, is fragile. The ROC lends moral and cultural credibility to the Kremlin. Yet, the more intertwined it becomes with the government, the

³⁰⁵ Curanović.

³⁰⁶ Mersol; Petro.

³⁰⁷ Lomagin.

³⁰⁸ Curanović.

³⁰⁹ Petro.

more it risks its credibility. Should the church become less legitimate as a religious body in the eyes of the international and national community, it will become less useful as a partner to the Russian state. This leaves the church and state in a catch-22 scenario, where the further entrenched the ROC becomes with the Kremlin to pursue its goals, the less it may be able to actually accomplish those goals. In the same vein, the more the Kremlin relies on the ROC as a source of soft power, the less powerful it may seem when the Church parts ways with it.³¹⁰ The real-world manifestations of this complex relationship, and a more detailed exploration of the ROC's use as a vehicle of Russian soft power in the near abroad, are the subject of the following two chapters. These chapters will explore the ROC's varying utility a source a governmental soft power in Ukraine (chapter 4), and in Georgia (chapter 5).

³¹⁰ Torbakov.

IV. THE ROLE OF THE ROC IN UKRAINE

A. INTRODUCTION

The study of the Russian Orthodox Church’s influence in Ukraine is particularly relevant to the question of the ROC’s use as a means of Russian soft power, because it is one of the most striking examples of its overt use during the Putin era. It has been explicitly cited as a means of Russian influence by Ukrainian political leaders, and Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko went so far as to make it a political goal to ensure Ukraine gained Orthodox independence—autocephaly—from Moscow, a goal which he viewed as a matter of national security.³¹¹ When viewed in this context, it is clear that the Russian Church is seen by Ukrainian leaders as a tool of Russian power. However, recalling Joseph Nye’s definition of soft power from chapter 2 as “getting others to want the outcomes that you want—[it] co-opts people rather than coerces them,” it becomes evident that the attempts by Russia to wield soft power via the ROC in Ukraine have largely been unsuccessful.³¹² To expand on this assertion, this chapter will detail the role that Ukraine plays in the Kremlin and ROC constructed narrative of the *Russkiy Mir*, the history of Orthodoxy in Ukraine, and the recent ruling by the Patriarch of Constantinople on Ukrainian autocephaly, as well as its implications for the ROC and its future as a means of Russian influence. The cut-off point for this analysis will be the end of the Poroshenko administration. Due to Poroshenko’s recent loss in the 2019 presidential elections to Volodymyr Zelensky, the situation as it pertains to the ROC’s influence in Ukraine may be subject to change under the new administration.³¹³

³¹¹ Mansur Mirovalev, “In Battle between Russia and Ukraine, Even God is in Dispute,” *LA Times*, May 29, 2018, <http://www.latimes.com/world/europe/la-fg-ukraine-russia-church-20180529-story.html>.

³¹² Nye, 95.

³¹³ Andrew Higgins and Iuliia Mendel, “Ukraine Election: Volodymyr Zelensky, TV Comedian, Trounces President,” *New York Times*, April 21, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/21/world/europe/Volodymyr-Zelensky-ukraine-elections.html>.

B. UKRAINE AND THE *RUSSKIY MIR*

Central to Putin’s soft power through the ROC is the idea of the “Russian world.” Since the Tsarist era, the ROC has been closely linked to Russian identity and the idea of what it means to be Russian. The church and the state were closely intertwined, mutually benefitting one another. The ROC serves as the cultural link between the fallen city of Constantinople and Moscow, leading Moscow to identify itself as the “Third Rome”—the third seat of Orthodox Christianity—and this plays into Russia’s narrative as a great civilization and the protector of Orthodox belief.³¹⁴ The narrative of a Russian world, however, while using Orthodoxy as a key link, extends far beyond just religious considerations, and ties the perceived Russian community to the Kremlin via a shared culture and history. As described by Valentina Feklyunina, it rests on four pillars repeatedly emphasized by the Kremlin in an attempt to create an attractive, unifying identity with FSU nations. First, the Russian world is “imagined as a naturally existing civilizational community,” based on a cultural, rather than ethnic, identity centered on the Russian language, Orthodoxy, and uniquely Russian culture.³¹⁵ Second, it draws upon a common past, deriving from Kievan Rus, with Kiev now the capital of present-day Ukraine. Third, the narrative centers on Russia’s dominant relationship in regard to the other members of the Russian World. Finally, it espouses a shared “state-society relationship” distinct from the Western world, granting it a status as a unique and independent civilization.³¹⁶ This distinct civilization is particularly relevant to the case of Ukraine, as Russian leaders see it as being core to the *Russkiy Mir*, particularly through the shared Orthodox heritage.

The head of the ROC, Patriarch Kirill, spoke to the central nature of Ukraine in this narrative in 2009, when stating that the “core of the Russian world are Russia, Ukraine, [and] Belarus,” as these are the three present-day nations that arose on the lands of the medieval Rus.³¹⁷ President Putin mirrored these views in 2013, expounding the importance of Orthodoxy in the Russian world by stating his intention of “uniting Russia, Ukraine, and

³¹⁴ Petro.

³¹⁵ Feklyunina, 783.

³¹⁶ Feklyunina, 783-784.

³¹⁷ Feklyunina, 783.

Belarus through strong bonds of brotherhood.”³¹⁸ However, while these peoples may have shared bonds, they are now distinct nations with their own individual interests and diverging experiences. This fact, however, has been accorded little recognition by either Putin or Kirill, as they have both proceeded to couple Ukrainians and Russians through their constructed narrative, publicly alluding to their beliefs that Russians and Ukrainians continued to be “one people.”³¹⁹

In trying to create this worldview based on a perceived shared ideology, the Kremlin, coupled with efforts from the ROC, is trying to use this worldview as a means to lure Ukraine away from Western influences, and keep it within Russia’s civilizational sphere. In doing so, it is echoing Soviet efforts to attract nations through an exportable ideology.³²⁰ However, to do so requires Ukraine to share in this belief in the Russian world, and the shared ideology based in cultural and religious ties. Yet, Ukraine is not monolithic, and this attempt has seemingly failed to attract a large swath of Ukrainians to Kremlin ideas.

While many Russian leaders see Ukrainians as one people with Russia, Ukrainians do not. As noted by Feklyunina, this is reflected by the contrast of perception and reality in two key areas of shared culture in the *Russkiy Mir* narrative: language and Orthodoxy.³²¹ Ukraine is not “one people” within its own borders, much less in a shared community with the Russian world.³²² In the domain of language, Ukrainian is now the official state language, as enshrined by the Ukrainian constitution. Moreover, by 2001, nearly 85% of ethnic Ukrainians identified Ukrainian, and not Russian, as their native language. However, the Russian language is still widely supported in regions such as Crimea and Donbass, with up to 67% there supporting Russian being given an “official second language” status while

³¹⁸ Feklyunina, 783.

³¹⁹ Feklyunina, 784.

³²⁰ Alexander Bogomolov and Oleksandr Lytvynenko, “A Ghost in the Mirror: Russian Soft Power in Ukraine,” REP RSP BP 2012/01 (London: Chatham House, 2012), 15.

³²¹ Feklyunina.

³²² Bogomolov and Lytvynenko.

the national average was only 30%.³²³ The greater use of Ukrainian was perceived as a slight by Russia, as it was seen as a threat to Russia’s constructed narrative. Then Russian President Dmitry Medvedev sharply rebuked his Ukrainian counterpart for what he saw as Ukrainian “displacement of the Russian language from social life, science, education, culture, mass media and jurisprudence.”³²⁴

However, as the government of Ukraine took steps to reinstitute a greater focus on the Russian language, it was met with ire by many in Ukraine. In 2010, the Ukrainian Minister of Education and Science issued a statement that secondary schools were to reinstitute Russian as the primary language of instruction (with parental approval), as well as institute Russian language and literature courses, in an effort to draw young Ukrainians closer to Russian culture. This was met with sharp denunciations and backlash, as well as student protests, as this was felt to be an encroachment on Ukraine’s culture.³²⁵ As well as language differences in Ukraine hampering Russia’s soft power influence through the “shared culture” of the *Russkiy Mir*, there is a strong disconnect between Russian perceptions of Ukraine’s unity with Russia through the ROC, and religious realities in the nation.

C. ORTHODOXY IN UKRAINE

Orthodoxy has historically been a key component of social order in Ukraine, spanning back to the days of Kievan Rus and the baptism of Prince Vladimir in 988.³²⁶ Its links can be traced directly from Constantinople, and Orthodoxy is a key part of Russia’s shared identity with Ukraine.³²⁷ With the annexation of Ukrainian territories by Tsarist-era Russia, the Kiev Metropolis of the Constantinople Patriarchate was moved under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Moscow in 1686. This created the historical basis for the

³²³ Bogomolov and Lytvynenko, 10.

³²⁴ Bogomolov and Lytvynenko, 11.

³²⁵ Bogomolov and Lytvynenko, 11

³²⁶ Elsner, 9.

³²⁷ Adam Hug, “Introduction: The Shifting Balance between Church and State,” in *Traditional Religion and Political Power: Examining the Role of the Church in Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine, and Moldova*. Edited by Adam Hug (London: The Foreign Policy Center, 2015). <https://fpc.org.uk/publications/orthodox/>.

Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), with the Orthodox leader in Kiev being directly subordinate to the Patriarch of Moscow.³²⁸

This situation continued into Soviet times. However, following the Soviet Union's dissolution, many Orthodox believers in Ukraine demanded secession from Moscow to obtain a fully independent Ukrainian church. The Moscow Patriarch, however, refused, as this would make a newly autocephalous Ukrainian church larger than the ROC at the time. Moreover, the Patriarch feared that this would create a domino effect, with other Orthodox churches under Moscow's control in the newly independent republics of Moldova, Kazakhstan, and Belarus seeking independence as well. The Metropolitan of the UOC at the time, Metropolitan Filaret, was removed from his position, and he went on to form a new Orthodox church in Ukraine with his followers who believed in autocephaly for the church in Ukraine. He then merged his church with the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC), which was recreated in Ukraine in 1989, following an existence only within the Ukrainian diaspora. This officially became the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kiev Patriarchate (UOC-KP) in 1992. However, in 1993, after internal infighting, the UAOC broke from the UOC-KP and once again acted independently.³²⁹

This left three Orthodox churches in Ukraine. However, until recently, the only officially recognized church by the ROC and other Orthodox leaders, including the Patriarch of Constantinople—the unofficial leader of global Orthodoxy—was the UOC. However, as religion plays more than just a spiritual, but also a cultural role in people's lives, Ukrainians began to identify with the UOC-KP on a nationalistic level. By 2011, 31% of Ukrainians belonged to the UOC-KP, as opposed to 26% belonging to the “officially recognized” UOC.³³⁰ To put this into perspective, according to a 2013 estimate by the CIA world Factbook, approximately two-thirds of the Ukrainian population identifies as Orthodox Christians.³³¹ The Ukrainian desire for cultural and religious

³²⁸ Sagan.

³²⁹ Sagan.

³³⁰ Kulyk, 2.

³³¹ CIA, “Ukraine,” The World Fact Book, accessed July 14, 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/up.html>.

independence from Moscow was heightened following the invasion of Crimea and separatist fighting in Eastern Ukraine, with a 2018 survey showing that support for Orthodoxy in Ukraine being linked to the ROC had dropped to just 9%.³³² However, what is interesting is that recent opinion polling by the Levada Center shows that as of February 2019, 57% of the population still has overall positive views of Russia, while 27% hold negative views, and 17% find it hard to say. When contrasted with results from September 2012, 83% held positive views, 11% had negative views, and 6% found it hard to say.³³³ This data shows that while Ukrainian views of Russia did in fact drop during this time period, it did not drop to levels that would be expected when viewing the large drop in support for Ukrainian Orthodoxy being linked to the ROC. This suggests that the Ukrainian views on Russia may largely be disconnected from the religion, and thus it can be argued that Russian soft power may have little actual influence from the ROC to the average Ukrainian.

A key part of the growing backlash against the ROC was due to its actions during the 2014 conflict, and largely a rejection of cultural identification with Russia. During the Russian military incursion into Ukraine, the UOC became what author Oleksandr Sagan called “almost the channel for the new Russian Federation ideology—‘the Russian World.’”³³⁴ He details how UOC priests had given support to separatist movements in Ukraine, as well as espousing ideological support for the idea of the *Russkiy Mir* and discrediting measures taken by Ukraine to end the conflict. As there was no public condemnation of the Russian actions in Crimea by the UOC, this was taken by the populace as tacit support for the occupation. Moreover, the UOC Metropolitan of Simferopol and Crimea actively cooperated with Russian authorities following the invasion, and had supported priests blessing Russian soldiers and equipment.³³⁵ It was evident that the UOC’s

³³² Kulyk, “Church and Geopolitics,” 3.

³³³ *Levada Center*, “Russia-Ukraine Relations,” March 28, 2019, <https://www.levada.ru/en/2019/03/28/russia-ukraine-relations-4/>.

³³⁴ Sagan, 19.

³³⁵ Sagan.

actions in Ukraine were more than just spiritual, and served to achieve a broader cultural goal of strategically messaging the Russian invasion as favorable.

It is clear that both the ROC and the Kremlin view the actions in Ukraine, both militarily and religiously, as playing into their broader construct of the *Russkiy Mir*. Patriarch Kirill has stated that “ethnic Russians anywhere, from Kazakhstan to California, are ‘ethnic Orthodox Christians’ whose rights must be protected by Moscow’s spiritual and secular rulers.”³³⁶ This sentiment by the head of the ROC is not far from the justification President Putin used for the 2014 incursion in Ukraine. Putin authorized the seizure of Crimea as “necessary to protect Russian citizens.”³³⁷ While the people of Crimea were not Russian citizens, many were Russian speakers and ethnic Russians, and in effect, what both Putin and the ROC would see as part of the Russian world.³³⁸ Furthermore, Putin justified the pro-Russian separatism in Eastern Ukraine as “steps to ‘consolidate the Russian world’.”³³⁹ In view of the language used by both the church and the state, the large part that the ROC is playing in the conflict in Ukraine is obvious. The battle there has become so intertwined with religion that Metropolitan Onufri, who heads the UOC, spoke out against Kiev’s attacks on pro-Russian separatists, and called the separatists “brothers in faith.”³⁴⁰

To Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, the battle for independent Orthodoxy in Ukraine was a high priority. After coming to power in 2014, he recognized the pro-Russian rhetoric from Metropolitan Onufri, and called the battle for Ukrainian Orthodox independence “a matter of national security in this hybrid war, because the Kremlin sees the Russian Church as one of the main tools of influencing Ukraine.”³⁴¹ He later stressed

³³⁶ Mirovalev.

³³⁷ *BBC*, “Ukraine Crisis: Does Russia Have a Case?” March 5, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26415508>.

³³⁸ *BBC*.

³³⁹ Mirovalev.

³⁴⁰ Mirovalev.

³⁴¹ Mirovalev.

the importance of gaining independence for Ukrainian Orthodoxy from Moscow in no uncertain terms, saying:

The question of the Tomos [a decree of independence granted by the Patriarch of Constantinople] and autocephaly goes far beyond church life. It is the question of our independence. It is the question of our Ukrainian national security. It is the question of our Ukrainian statehood. It is the question of our whole world's geopolitics.³⁴²

It is explicit that the Ukrainian government sees the ROC as a tool of Russian soft power. It is an instrument that exerts soft power not as a means to attract Ukraine to the Russian sphere of influence, but rather, it is being used by Russia as a means to coerce Ukraine, and limit its self-determination.

In April 2018, in an effort to gain religious autonomy and legitimacy for a united Ukrainian church, Poroshenko reached out to the Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, to recognize “an independent and unified Ukrainian Orthodox Church.”³⁴³ This of course drew sharp rebukes from both the Kremlin and the ROC, as it would severely undermine the Russian concept of Orthodox unity and the shared beliefs of Russians and Ukrainians. A Kremlin spokesperson reacted by saying that Russia “will hardly support and hardly welcome actions aimed at splitting the church.”³⁴⁴ Metropolitan Hilarion, Chairman of the ROC's Department for External Relations, also released a response saying that “Such plans and ideas only benefit enemies of the Church.”³⁴⁵ Patriarch Philaret, the leader of the UOC-KP, responded by saying their statements were “signs of despair and powerlessness.”³⁴⁶ In saying this, Philaret appears to have been right.

A unified and autonomous Ukrainian church opposed to Moscow has dramatic implications for Russia and the ROC. Following the 2014 conflict, the UOC began rapidly losing members in Ukraine, as many Ukrainians saw it simply as a tool of the Kremlin and

³⁴² Ponomariov.

³⁴³ Mirovalev.

³⁴⁴ Mirovalev.

³⁴⁵ Mirovalev.

³⁴⁶ Mirovalev.

began flocking to the UOC-KP and UAOC. A united Ukrainian Orthodox Church independent from Moscow would not only severely affect the Orthodox constituency answerable to Moscow, but make the Ukrainian Church a significant power in Orthodoxy, one vehemently opposed to Moscow. This left the ROC and the Kremlin in a precarious position, as Orthodox Ukrainians gaining independence from Moscow would tarnish Russia's reputation as an Orthodox power, and would shrink the influence and moral legitimacy it wields via the ROC.³⁴⁷

On September 7, 2018, Constantinople Patriarch Bartholomew dispatched two envoys to Ukraine in preparation to declare the independence of the Ukrainian Church. This move suggested that the decision had already been made, and not yet officially announced. The next day Metropolitan Hilarion issued a statement saying that if the Kiev Patriarch was recognized “we will have no choice but to sever relations with Constantinople.”³⁴⁸ Patriarch Kirill was quoted as saying that an independent Ukrainian church would be “an all-Orthodox catastrophe.”³⁴⁹ However, more than an Orthodox catastrophe for the ROC, this also struck a large political blow at the heart of the Kremlin's construction of Ukraine being a key component to the Russian world narrative. President Poroshenko expressed this when he expounded that Ukrainian religious independence would be another marker of Ukrainian independence from Moscow. This can be seen as independence politically and culturally.³⁵⁰ He went on to assert that an independent Ukrainian church would mark “the fall of the Third Rome as the oldest conceptual request of Moscow for the world hegemony.”³⁵¹

³⁴⁷ Paul Coyer, “Putin's Holy War and the Disintegration of the Russian World,” *Forbes*, June 4, 2015, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/paulcoyer/2015/06/04/putins-holy-war-and-the-disintegration-of-the-russian-world/#12098825285b>.

³⁴⁸ *AFP and AP*, “Russian Orthodox Church Threatens Retaliation Against Istanbul-based Patriarch,” *Radio Free Europe*, September 8, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russian-orthodox-church-threatens-retaliation-against-istanbul-based-patriarch/29479797.html>.

³⁴⁹ *AFP and AP*.

³⁵⁰ Ponomariov, 3.

³⁵¹ Ponomariov, 3.

On October 11, 2018, the Patriarch of Constantinople released a statement that he would “proceed to grant autocephaly to the Church of Ukraine.”³⁵² This revoked the Act of 1686, which had placed the Kiev Metropolitanate under the control of the ROC. Furthermore, he officially recognized the legitimacy of the previously unrecognized leaders of the UOC-KP and UAOC, and lifted an excommunication that had been placed against them.³⁵³ This decision was key to proceed forward in the creation of a fully independent and united Ukrainian church. It is striking to note that Patriarch Bartholomew also argued that his actions were a means that “protects the individuality and identity of the Ukrainian people.”³⁵⁴ This evidences the acknowledgement from Patriarch Bartholomew that religious independence in Ukraine is indeed as much a cultural decision as a religious one.

In response, it was announced by Metropolitan Hilarion that the ROC would officially sever ties with Constantinople on October 15, 2018.³⁵⁵ This schism in the church risks the legitimacy of the ROC in the Orthodox community, and may drive the Constantinople-loyal Orthodox Churches to become more liberal in a push to differentiate themselves from the ROC. The Kremlin voiced its displeasure over the news, with a spokesperson for President Putin stating that “Russia will protect the interests of the faithful in Ukraine if the historic split leads to illegal action or violence.”³⁵⁶ Needless to say, there is great tension in the split, and the issue of how to divide church property remains a strong point of contention.³⁵⁷

On December 15, 2018, leaders of the UOC-KP and UAOC, along with President Poroshenko and representatives from Constantinople, met to create a new, united church

³⁵² Ecumenical Patriarchate, “Announcement (11/10/2018)” (Official Announcement, Istanbul: Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate, 2018), <https://www.patriarchate.org/-/communiq-1>.

³⁵³ Ponomariov.

³⁵⁴ Ponomariov, 3.

³⁵⁵ *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, “Russian Orthodox Church Breaks Ties with the Constantinople Patriarchate,” October 15, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russian-orthodox-church-to-break-with-patriarchate-of-constantinople/29545003.html>.

³⁵⁶ *Radio Free Liberty/Radio Europe*.

³⁵⁷ Sukhov.

called the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU). They selected a relatively young and unknown cleric, Primate Epiphanii, to be the head of OCU, and declared that he would be styled as Metropolitan of Kiev and All Ukraine.³⁵⁸ To complete the process of independence, a delegation from the OCU went to Istanbul to meet with Patriarch Bartholomew for the official signing of autocephaly Tomos.³⁵⁹

D. CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

President Poroshenko introduced the new OCU Metropolitan to the Ukrainian people, explicitly marking the political implications of church autocephaly, after the formation of the new church and the selection of Epiphanii as its leader. Moreover, he attended the signing of the Tomos in Istanbul. There is fear that this inherent politicization of the OCU will leave it intrinsically linked with the Ukrainian government, and will place the new church in a questionable light as largely an instrument of Ukrainian culture, rather than as a religious institution. The political dialogue surrounding the church may lead to skepticism among many Ukrainians. As with Russia's use of the ROC and UOC as cultural means of influence, many may see the Ukrainian government as the hand that controls the OCU, leading to its diminished authority and credibility.³⁶⁰

While there was strong support for an independent church, there has not been a large convergence of believers or parishes from the UOC to the OCU.³⁶¹ By late January 2019, only 200 of the roughly 12,000 UOC parishes had transitioned to align with the OCU.³⁶² This, however, has been attributed to legal complications with the transfer of UOC churches having to be approved by that church's local bishop.³⁶³ This was further exacerbated by pressure on priests from the UOC hierarchy.³⁶⁴ However, regardless of the

³⁵⁸ Ponomariov.

³⁵⁹ Elsner.

³⁶⁰ Elsner.

³⁶¹ Elsner.

³⁶² Kulyk, 5.

³⁶³ Sagan.

³⁶⁴ Kulyk.

causation, with two major and largely conflicting Orthodox churches in the nation, it is incumbent on both churches, as well as the Ukrainian and Russian governments, to create an environment in which it is safe and acceptable for believers to choose their own affiliation if either church or government is to maintain legitimacy and seek to one day reconcile.³⁶⁵

Some authors have speculated on the nature of the split and see a way forward for unity between the ROC and the newly independent OCU. It is recommended that, as opposed to trying to seek a dominant role over Orthodoxy in Ukraine, the ROC should step back and avoid further complicating the matter. This advice extends not just through the church but in Russian-Ukrainian relations as a whole. Author Alexander Zanemonets recommends a scenario such as Great Britain eventually working with America and accepting U.S. independence. While states may “perceive themselves as one,” they can separate, but repair ties under new terms.³⁶⁶

There are grounds for hope that the situation will be resolved in time. The case of the church split in Greece following Greek independence from the Ottoman Empire is a striking example. In this instance, a newly independent Greece in 1833 formed a new Greek Orthodox Church independent from the direct authority of the Patriarch of Constantinople. Despite the conflict, a settlement was reached in 1850, bringing peace to the two churches. Moreover, a similar situation occurred with the Bulgarian church declaring independence in 1872, and recognition of the autocephalous Greek church was granted by Constantinople in 1945.³⁶⁷

Rather than trying to attempt reconciliation in this manner following the Ukrainian church’s independence, and work towards the ostensible goal of brotherhood in Orthodoxy as espoused by the *Russkiy Mir* narrative, Russia and the ROC seem to be taking action to make a return to fraternal relations unlikely. In February 2019, the OCU, which had been officiating in the Cathedral of Vladimir and Olga located in Crimea, was ordered to leave,

³⁶⁵ Elsner.

³⁶⁶ Zanemonets.

³⁶⁷ Artyemyev.

and informed that the church would be seized by the Ministry of Property and Land Relations. This was seen as a means of retribution against the OCU.³⁶⁸ This can be understood as an act to reassert Russia's control of Crimea, acknowledging the central role that religion plays in cultural identification, and as a way to ensure that Crimea, culturally, is firmly out of the control of Ukraine. Moreover, this may be the first salvo in a battle over church property, which is viewed as a difficult and complex legal challenge.³⁶⁹

E. CONCLUSION

Soft power, as described by Nye, is “attraction that makes others want what you want.”³⁷⁰ However, the case study of the ROC and the ideology of the Russian world in Ukraine is proving to have the opposite effect. Rather than use what the Kremlin sees as the “oneness” of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples as a means to draw them closer into the Russian sphere of influence, it has revealed the stark cultural differences in the self-identification of the two nations. It has seemingly pushed Ukraine further away, and revealed the ROC to be an explicit tool of Russian soft power, rather than a solely religious entity, undermining its credibility and future for influence and shared ideology in Ukraine, and elsewhere.³⁷¹ Moreover, owing to the split with Constantinople, the ROC is further isolated in the Orthodox world, similar to Russia's isolation from the West due to the sanctions resulting from its invasion of Ukraine.³⁷² This will likely preclude it from being used as a viable soft power tool in Constantinople-aligned Orthodox nations. Furthermore, as Ukraine has now achieved its goal of an independent church, and revealed the cracks in the unity of the Russian world, it may lead to calls for autocephalous churches in Belarus and Moldova, both with Orthodox churches falling under the authority of the ROC.³⁷³ The

³⁶⁸ Halya Coynash, “Russia Moves to Crush Orthodox Church of Ukraine in Occupied Crimea,” Human Rights in Ukraine, last modified February 4, 2019, <http://khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1550095831>.

³⁶⁹ Sagan.

³⁷⁰ Nye, 94.

³⁷¹ Ponomariov.

³⁷² Zanamonets.

³⁷³ Artyemyev.

future of the ROC's use as a soft power instrument remains to be seen. However, following the events in Ukraine, its use will likely become more limited, and more complicated.

V. THE ROLE OF THE ROC IN GEORGIA

A. INTRODUCTION

Unlike the Russian attempts at influence via the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine, the relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) is much more friendly, making it fertile enough to enable the Kremlin to gain sway over the Georgian government and its people, at least for the near-future.³⁷⁴ The GOC is an immensely trusted institution in Georgia, more so than Georgia's own government institutions, and by maintaining influence over the GOC, the ROC and Kremlin are able to potentially sway governmental actions.³⁷⁵ A staggering 94% of Georgian participants in a 2014 poll voiced their confidence in the GOC, yet the same poll shows only 69% trust in the Cabinet of Ministers, 68% trust in Georgia's parliament, and 64% trust in the President.³⁷⁶ This consistently high level of trust is particularly useful to the Kremlin, as scholar Robia Charles notes, "sustained high trust in religious institutions indicates that these types of institutions are considered more legitimate than political institutions."³⁷⁷ Thus, making the GOC a more attractive and useful institution for Putin to gain influence over than the Georgian government itself.

Furthermore, the GOC holds a hallowed place in Georgian society. Despite a secular Georgian constitution separating church and state, in practice there are seemingly few divides between the two. So much so, in fact, critics argue that the GOC regularly interferes in matters of legislation, and interferes in civil matters. According to Dr. Kornely Kakachia, the Georgian constitution even highlights the "special role of the Apostle

³⁷⁴ Kakachia.

³⁷⁵ Kakachia.

³⁷⁶ Kakachia.

³⁷⁷ Robia Charles, "Religiosity and Trust in Religious Institutions: Tales from the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia)," *UC Berkeley*, August 1, 2010, 6, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1b88b59g>.

Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Georgia in the history of Georgia,” thereby officially solidifying the GOC as the country’s predominant spiritual institution.³⁷⁸

Owing to the widespread popularity of the GOC in Georgia, and the special relationship between the Georgian church and state, the increasingly intertwined connections between the GOC and ROC have led to different outcomes than in the case study of ROC influence in Ukraine provided in the previous chapter. Yet both cases seemingly highlight the ROC’s inability to influence nations in the Former Soviet Union through soft power. Counter to the case study of the ROC’s use as a tool of Russian soft power in Ukraine, where the results proved to be a failure for Moscow, the case in Georgia is more nuanced.³⁷⁹ This can be seen by the warm relationship that has developed between the ROC and GOC, particularly after overcoming the turmoil of the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia, and through the example of the ROC influencing Georgian action in favor of Moscow regarding the autocephaly of the Ukrainian church. Yet this example of influence on the GOC seems to show that the ROC has been a coercive influence in Georgia instead of a genuinely attractive one.³⁸⁰ There is speculation that the relationship between the GOC and ROC may lead to an erosion of trust in the GOC.³⁸¹ Moreover, a recent incident of protests erupting in Georgia in response to a Russian Duma member speaking in Georgian parliament at an Orthodox event held in Tbilisi seems to show that there is backlash against Orthodox influence in Georgia.³⁸² The full extent of the influence of the ROC as a tool of Russian soft power in Georgia may not yet have reached its zenith, and may still grow, as the GOC is an excellent target for the Kremlin to infiltrate with the ROC. However, the GOC remains at risk as being seen as co-opted by the Russian government and may thus lose its lofty position of support among the Georgian people.³⁸³

³⁷⁸ Kakachia, 1.

³⁷⁹ Ponomariov; Chapidze and Umland.

³⁸⁰ Kakachia; Chapidze and Umland.

³⁸¹ Kakachia.

³⁸² Kakachia; Giorgi Lomsadze, “Protests Erupt in Georgia over Russian MP’s Visit,” Eurasianet, June 20, 2019, https://eurasianet.org/protests-erupt-in-georgia-over-russian-mps-visit?utm_source=dlvr.it.

³⁸³ Kakachia.

To demonstrate this assessment, this chapter will examine the history of Orthodoxy in Georgia and the role the GOC plays as a centerpiece of Georgian culture, as well as the trust inherent within the GOC and how this trust makes it ripe for Russian exploitation through its *Russkiy Mir* narrative. Moreover, the chapter will look at how the ROC and GOC have been able to cultivate a fraternal relationship despite the 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict souring relations between the two governments, and how this relationship is influencing the GOC and Georgian government's response to the Ukrainian church's recent autocephaly in a way favorable to Moscow. Finally, it will investigate the potential future of Russian Orthodox influence in Georgia and potential deterrents to Moscow pursuing the ROC as a means of soft power influence in the nation.

B. THE *RUSSKIY MIR* AND ORTHODOXY IN GEORGIA

The history of Georgia and the GOC has long been intertwined with that of the ROC. In 1811, the Russian Emperor, Alexander I, placed the GOC under the control of the ROC, and enforced the law that GOC liturgies were to be performed in Russian in an effort to force the obedience of the Georgian people to Russia and promote their "Russification." This led to a movement amongst the clergy to regain autocephaly from the ROC; this movement helped spur a new Georgian national identity in protest of the enforced Russification. After the 1917 Russian Revolution, the GOC regained its independence from Moscow, and Georgia declared independence from Russia. However, in 1921, the Soviet army overran Georgia and ousted its newly formed government. This once more led to protest from the GOC to regain Georgian national independence, in particular by the Patriarch of the GOC, Patriarch Ambrosious. These protests ultimately led to his arrest by the USSR. However, the GOC continued to oppose the Soviets until the Patriarch's death in 1921. Thereafter, the GOC fell under influence from the Kremlin. Stalin seemingly relaxed restrictions on the GOC but placed informers in the GOC hierarchy and made it a tool of Kremlin influence.³⁸⁴

³⁸⁴ Chitanava.

In 1977, the current Patriarch of the GOC, Ilia II, was enthroned as the Georgian Patriarch in a heavily Soviet-led church structure. However, he sought to fight against the USSR's policy of state atheism and bring religious life back to the forefront of Georgian life. Particularly during the greater openness in the Soviet Union under Gorbachev's policy of Perestroika, this church movement coincided with another movement of Georgian nationalism, so much so that government leaders began to discuss instituting an Orthodox monarchy or theocracy following the dissolution of the USSR.³⁸⁵ Ultimately, this did not happen, and in 1991 after Georgia declared independence from the Soviet Union, an election was held with the newly elected president declaring in his inauguration speech that "together with the restoration of the independence of the state, Orthodox Christianity should be declared as the state religion."³⁸⁶ It is clear how closely the GOC had become intertwined with the state and how broad public support was for the Church.³⁸⁷

This close embrace of the Orthodox church by Georgian government continued well into the 2000s. However, under Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, tensions began to rise between the government and the GOC. One such example was the Patriarch openly opposing the 2008 war with Russia and criticizing President Saakashvili for not preventing the war, saying, "The captain of a ship must lead his vessel, being able to manoeuvre and escape reefs."³⁸⁸ Thereafter, the Patriarch was the first high profile Georgian leader to meet with Kremlin officials following the war. Patriarch Ilia II and a GOC delegation travelled to Moscow and met with the Russian deputy foreign minister. A month later, they met with then Russian President Dmitri Medvedev, and expressed that politics would not subvert the unity and fraternal relationship between the two nations. He noted that "Georgia needs a strong Russia, like Russia needs unified and friendly Georgia. I think we will achieve this with the help of God."³⁸⁹ The actions taken by both the ROC and the GOC during and after the conflict were instrumental in maintaining the positive

³⁸⁵ Chitanava.

³⁸⁶ Chitanava, 41

³⁸⁷ Chitanava.

³⁸⁸ Chitanava, 47.

³⁸⁹ Chitanava, 48.

influence of the Kremlin, ROC, and *Russkiy Mir* narrative in Georgia and have allowed for the continued ability of Putin to exploit the narrative and the ROC as tools of soft power in the nation.

However, the 2008 conflict in the Georgian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia supposedly highlighted a key break from state policy for the ROC. The attacks called into question the idea of the *Russkiy Mir* and was the first conflict between Orthodox nations since the Second Balkan War of 1913.³⁹⁰ Yet, it was this idea of the *Russkiy Mir* that allowed for continued ties between the nations and a return to the idea of Orthodox Brotherhood following the conflict.

The Moscow Patriarch issued a rebuke against the actions, calling against the fighting between Orthodox peoples. It is to be noted that this was the previous Patriarch of Moscow, Alexy II, not the current Patriarch, Kirill. While not explicitly calling out the Kremlin, he made it known that he discouraged the fighting among Orthodox nations. On August 8, 2008, as battle raged between the two Orthodox countries, the Moscow Patriarch put out a statement saying, “Today, blood is being shed and people are perishing in South Ossetia and my heart deeply grieves over it. Orthodox Christians are among those who have raised their hands against each other. Orthodox peoples called by the Lord to live in fraternity and love are in conflict.”³⁹¹ The Patriarch provided more than just words, however, to bring peace to the region.

The shared faith allowed for the Patriarch of the GOC, Ilia II, to visit the occupied city of Gori to bring aid and food to the people there. It was revealed that the ROC facilitated the visit, delivering messages from the GOC to then President Medvedev, and Prime Minister Putin, to allow the visit to occur.³⁹² While priests and others close to the Orthodox Church mourned the conflict and called it a collapse of unity of Orthodox peoples, the actions taken by the ROC and GOC appear much to the contrary, at least so far as putting the differences between the politicians aside to help those affected by the

³⁹⁰ Lomagin.

³⁹¹ Lomagin, 511.

³⁹² Kishkovsky.

conflict and help bring comfort to their Orthodox brothers and sisters. To this end, the ROC stood in solidarity with the GOC and allowed for the Georgian Patriarch to provide assistance and aid to his people in the region.

Moreover, when the Abkhaz diocese requested assistance in gaining religious autonomy from the Georgian Patriarch, the Patriarch of Moscow refused the request, showing the ROC's reluctance to further split ties between the two Patriarchs.³⁹³ Following the conflict the ROC went against Kremlin official policy, and refused to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and went on to issue a resolution recognizing the GOC's jurisdiction in the regions.³⁹⁴ This further encouraged unity between the two churches. However, the actions on the part of the ROC have been speculated as being a purely pragmatic maneuver. Were the ROC to have backed the independence of the diocese of the breakaway regions it is likely the GOC would have recognized the autonomy of the UOC-KP in Ukraine, one of the splinter groups from the UOC and a precursor to the newly autocephalous OCU. Additionally, it risked the powerful Georgian Patriarch publicly denouncing the ROC and the Kremlin, and would have made it more difficult for Russian leadership to appeal to the Georgian people through a shared religion and set of values, and harder to counter their pro-European sentiments.³⁹⁵ While the decisions taken by the ROC ostensibly appear to have countered the Kremlin and its goals, this show of unity in support of the ideology of Orthodox Brotherhood served ultimately to further Putin's goal of uniting the *Russkiy Mir* under Orthodoxy, and paved the way for increased relations with the GOC, allowing for the ROC to remain a viable option for soft power projection in Georgia. This relationship between the Kremlin, ROC, and GOC is particularly important as the Georgian Patriarch holds enormous moral authority with the Georgian people, which would be beneficial for the Kremlin to utilize and exploit.

³⁹³ Shalva Dzidziguri, "The Power and Limits of the Russian Orthodox Church," *Forbes*, December 14, 2016, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2016/12/14/the-power-and-limits-of-the-russian-orthodox-church/#3dcde3874b35>.

³⁹⁴ Kakachia.

³⁹⁵ Dzidziguri.

Evidencing the beneficial role played by the ROC during and after the conflict in Georgia, its actions seemingly in opposition to the Russian government, have allowed the Kremlin to improve relations with the most trusted institution in Georgia. In January 2013, marking Patriarch Ilia II's 80th birthday and 35th year as Patriarch, Putin wrote a cordial and congratulatory message on his website thanking him for his "warm attitude" towards Russia and the ROC.³⁹⁶ He went on to highlight the shared history of the Russian and Georgian peoples and how the Georgian Patriarch's actions helped to preserve relations between the nations, further evidencing the role Georgia and the GOC plays in Putin's *Russkiy Mir*. Later that month, Ilia II went on a six-day trip to Moscow where he was given an award from the ROC's International Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Christian Nations. While in Moscow, he also met with President Putin. During the meeting, the Georgian Patriarch cited the love and fraternity between the two nations, and called Putin "a very wise man [who] will do everything to ensure Russia and Georgia remain brothers, and the love between the countries will be eternal."³⁹⁷ He went on to say that "In the past Russia and Georgia were like brothers, but apparently someone envied this, and artificially created hostility between us."³⁹⁸ These statements appear to show that the influence of the ROC and the narrative of Orthodox brotherhood have been effectual as a soft power tool in Georgia, and have effectively and positively influenced the leader of Georgia's most venerated institution.

Tellingly, the real-world results of this relationship between Russia and the GOC are being realized following the recently gained autocephaly of the OCU. Georgia and Ukraine have had close political relations with one another following the fall of the Soviet Union. However, matters between the GOC and the OCU seem to be threatening this relationship. In response to the decree by the Patriarch of Constantinople granting Ukraine religious independence from Moscow, neither the GOC nor the Georgian government have

³⁹⁶ Kakachia, 4.

³⁹⁷ Kakachia, 5.

³⁹⁸ Kakachia, 5.

congratulated Ukraine or given any show of support for the groundbreaking development.³⁹⁹

This seems to be a new trajectory for relations between the two countries with regard to Russian involvement in the two nations. In reaction to the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia, then Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko expressed his support for Georgia in the conflict. Moreover, during the 2014 Ukrainian conflict, Georgian officials showed solidarity with Ukraine against Russia. However, in the recent religious battle, Georgia seems reluctant to give its support, largely due to the stance of the GOC.⁴⁰⁰ Publicly the Georgian government is declining to weigh in on the matter, with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, David Zalkaliani deferring to the GOC, stating “I would like to state clearly that the Georgian Orthodox Church is reviewing the question. Considering the canonical processes, the position regarding this issue should first be determined by the Orthodox Church of Georgia. As for the state, it does not interfere with the church’s affairs.”⁴⁰¹ The Georgian government’s deference to the church and unwillingness to support their longtime ally Ukraine may be attributed to the immense influence of the GOC in Georgia.

The Georgian Patriarch’s official stance on the matter remains the same as prior to Ukraine’s autocephaly, that he has no official stance. However, this is not the unified view within the Georgian church. Some Georgian religious leaders have gone on record extending their support for the new OCU, with one Metropolitan, Peter Tsaava of Chkondidi, stating that “The Ukrainian nation of forty million people deserves its independence.”⁴⁰² Yet this view lies in contrast with many church official who frame the withholding of support in pragmatic terms, seeing support for Ukrainian religious independence as threatening the GOC’s hold over Abkhazian Orthodoxy.⁴⁰³ As noted earlier in this chapter, the ROC continued to recognize the GOC’s religious authority in

³⁹⁹ Chapidze and Umland.

⁴⁰⁰ Chapidze and Umland.

⁴⁰¹ Chapidze and Umland.

⁴⁰² Chapidze and Umland.

⁴⁰³ Chapidze and Umland.

the disputed territory of Abkhazia after the 2008 conflict.⁴⁰⁴ By recognizing Ukrainian independence, there is fear in the GOC that the ROC would retaliate by recognizing the religious autonomy of the church in Abkhazia, facilitating its split with the GOC. This fear is not unfounded, as the ROC's Chairman of External Church Relations, Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev, delivered a message of caution to the GOC on the matter, stating that "I cannot imagine the Georgia Orthodox Church recognizing the autocephaly of the so-called Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Most of the clerics of the Georgian Patriarchate are very well aware of the ecclesiastical reality and the serious consequences of such a decision."⁴⁰⁵ This sentiment was later echoed by President Putin, who issued a warning to those in opposition to the ROC with regard to Ukraine's autocephaly.⁴⁰⁶ This demonstrates that the actions of the GOC were motivated by fear of losing authority over the churches in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, rather than actual soft power stemming from the ROC.

Yet, the GOC has spoken out against claims that its actions were forced through coercion from the ROC. It is argued that the GOC's decision not to take a side in the matter is not only due to trepidation about repercussions from the ROC, but also pro-Russian leanings of the Georgian church's hierarchy.⁴⁰⁷ Theologian Giorgi Tiginashvili went so far as to say "the majority of the Holy Synod of Georgia is Russophile. They are linked to Russia via private contacts, previous educational and living experiences, etc."⁴⁰⁸ This evidence suggests that there may be an element of genuine attractiveness for the ROC. The close relations between the ROC and GOC, as well as the leverage held by the ROC in the independence of the Abkhazia church, leaves the GOC at this time reluctant to go against the wishes of the ROC and the Kremlin. Possibly owing to the great power of the GOC over the Georgian population, the government seems disinclined to oppose the rulings of the GOC in this matter, linking Georgia's official stance to the wishes of the Moscow.

⁴⁰⁴ Kakachia.

⁴⁰⁵ Chapidze and Umland.

⁴⁰⁶ Chapidze and Umland.

⁴⁰⁷ Chapidze and Umland.

⁴⁰⁸ Chapidze and Umland.

C. CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The long-term development of the relationship between the ROC and GOC remains to be seen. However, as Dr. Kakachia points out, the GOC's embrace of anti-Western ideology could have a detrimental impact on Georgian public perception, and ultimately foreign policy. This potential public backlash risks isolating the GOC, and ultimately the Kremlin's, influence over Georgia's public, undermining the idea of the shared culture and Orthodox conservatism of the two nations.⁴⁰⁹

In fact, it appears as though cracks are already beginning to be seen in this relationship, and an anti-Russian resistance is forming in the Georgian parliament. On June 20, 2019, the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (IAO) met in Tbilisi, comprised of an international group of lawmakers from largely Orthodox nations. The meeting was set up by the Georgian majority party, the Georgian Dream Party, and the main speaker was the president of the IAO and Russian Duma member, Sergey Gavrilov. Outrage erupted when Gavrilov sat in the Georgian parliamentary speaker's seat to give his address. The protests were led by members of Georgia's primary opposition parties, who found it unacceptable for a member of the Russian Duma to take the head seat in Georgia's parliament to address its members.⁴¹⁰

Elene Khoshtaria, a member of an opposition party, European Georgia, went so far as to rush into the parliament building wearing a Georgian flag, tearing up Gavrilov's speech, and called him an occupier.⁴¹¹ She rebuked the Georgian Dream party for inviting Gavrilov, stating that "the Georgian Dream brought in the occupiers and put them in the parliamentary speaker's seat. By doing this, the Georgian Dream slapped all of Georgia's history in the face."⁴¹² Subsequent to the incident, the Chairman of the Georgian Dream party, Bidzina Ivanishvili, agreed that Gavrilov should not have presided over the Georgian Parliament, and the Georgian Dream member who organized the IAO event, Zakaria

⁴⁰⁹ Kakachia.

⁴¹⁰ Lomsadze.

⁴¹¹ Lomsadze.

⁴¹² Lomsadze.

Kutsnashvili, later apologized. These actions on behalf of the Georgian Dream party did not quell the outrage, which spilled into the streets. Citizen protests began outside of the parliament building, as well as in other Georgian cities. Several, including Manana Nachkebia, a member of Georgia's New Rights party, claimed the Georgian Dream party's actions were treasonous.⁴¹³ Nachkebia said of the situation, "Do you really believe that they committed treason by accident? Step by step, using soft power, they [the Georgian Dream] want us to accept that diplomatic relations with Russia can be restored, that it is possible to have friendship with Russia, it is possible that Russia and Georgia are back in together [...] but their calculations were wrong."⁴¹⁴ Gavrillov later left Georgia amongst the protests and threatened consequences for these actions.⁴¹⁵

This evidences the fact that while the Georgian government may be receptive to the messaging of the GOC even if it is influenced by the ROC, at least a vocal portion of the populace is still not swayed by the Russian influence, even in a religious context. For the time being, it appears evident that Putin's Orthodox diplomacy is useful in gaining influence over the GOC and the Georgian government. Yet, the question bears asking: how long can this arrangement last with anti-Russian sentiments still existing within the Georgian populace?

D. CONCLUSION

The GOC and Russia have had a long and tenuous history together, and the GOC has gained authority and significance in Georgia by being a historical bulwark of Georgian culture and national sovereignty against Russia.⁴¹⁶ However, the ROC, and by extension, the Kremlin, has been gaining influence in Georgia through the very institution which has long symbolized its independence. In fact, the influence of the ROC has surprisingly increased in Georgia at a time when relations between Russia and Georgia were at their worst. This has allowed the influence of Moscow to continue in the nation, despite tensions

⁴¹³ Lomsadze.

⁴¹⁴ Lomsadze.

⁴¹⁵ Lomsadze.

⁴¹⁶ Chitanava.

lingering from the 2008 conflict. The visits to Moscow following the conflict and the glowing statements about Russian president Vladimir Putin expressed by the Georgian Patriarch demonstrate that the leader of the GOC is willing to continue the church's relationship with Moscow.⁴¹⁷ Yet, the GOC and Georgian government's unwillingness to support Ukraine's religious break from the Russian church further highlight the fact that this influence largely comes not from soft power, but by the ROC's threats of recognizing the churches in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This threat tempers the GOC's actions in recognizing the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. If the ROC recognized the autocephaly of the churches in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, it would erode the authority and legitimacy of the GOC.⁴¹⁸ This suggests that while, ostensibly, the ROC acts as a means of attractive influence in Georgia, in reality, its influence comes from the leverage it has over the GOC.

As pointed out by Dr. Kakachia, if public perception shifts against the GOC for being too closely intertwined with the ROC and the Kremlin, trust in the GOC may erode, reducing its power in the nation, and ultimately, Putin's ability to influence the Georgian government and its people.⁴¹⁹ This shift is seemingly beginning to manifest itself, at least in the Georgian parliament and protests in the streets, as some Georgians are becoming uneasy with the amount of influence Moscow is having in their nation through the church, as proved by the response to Gavrilov speaking at the IAO meeting.⁴²⁰ Russia's Orthodox diplomacy is seemingly testing its limits in Georgia. For the time being, it appears as though Putin's use of the ROC has been somewhat successful there, but that success may have an expiration date.

⁴¹⁷ Kakachia.

⁴¹⁸ Chapidze and Umland.

⁴¹⁹ Kakachia.

⁴²⁰ Lomsadze.

VI. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

A. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters of this thesis have investigated Russia's uses of soft power, the Russian Orthodox Church's role in Russia's soft power strategy and its relationship with the state, and has analyzed the use of the ROC in case studies in Ukraine and Georgia. This chapter will revisit the major conclusions of those chapters, and seek to synthesize them into policy recommendations for the United States. This chapter will do so by reasserting what soft power is, and what tools of soft power influence Russia possesses. Next, it will reexamine the previous chapters' conclusions in the context of the major questions explored in this thesis: Does the Russian government utilize the ROC as a source of soft power? If so, has this strategy been successful in gaining influence abroad? Is Russia successfully able to use soft power? This chapter will review the question on soft power last, as this reinforces the findings on the prior two questions, and focuses the questions of the ROC's influence in the broader narrative of Russian soft power uses. It will then tailor the proposed policy recommendations in light of the answers to these questions.

B. SOFT POWER AND RUSSIAN SOURCES OF INFLUENCE

As noted in chapter 2, the concept's originator, Joseph Nye, asserts that soft power is power which "co-opts people rather than coerces them."⁴²¹ It stems from nation's culture, politics, and foreign policy. These elements create genuine attraction for a nation which entice other nations to share its goals and desire the same outcomes.⁴²² It is argued by scholars that Russia misunderstands the use of soft power.⁴²³ Yet, Russia does have genuine tools of attraction. Russian universities are attractive for students from the FSU, as they remain some of the best in the region in both the sciences and humanities. Russia is seeking to expand this attraction by increasing the quota for foreign students. Russian

⁴²¹ Nye, 95.

⁴²² Nye.

⁴²³ Rutland and Kazantsev; Sergunin and Karabeshkin.

universities have also set up partnerships with universities in the FSU, encouraging academic exchanges and professional programs.⁴²⁴

The twinning-cities programs in Russian cities like Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Kaliningrad spread Russian cultural understanding and humanitarian aid abroad, demonstrating traditional uses of soft power. Similarly, Houses of Moscow have been set up in neighboring nations. The Houses of Moscow promote Russian culture and business connections, and closer links to Russia.⁴²⁵ The power of narratives espoused by the Russian government are also means for the Kremlin to increase its soft power.⁴²⁶

The narrative of sovereign democracy, scholars argue, is primarily a tool to undermine Western influence, but that does not mean it cannot be a genuine tool of ideological attraction.⁴²⁷ This is highlighted by the policies of Viktor Orbán's Hungary closely mirroring Putin's policy of sovereign democracy, and Orbán's drive to erode the spread of Western style liberal democracy.⁴²⁸ Moreover, scholars suggest that the *Russkiy Mir* narrative is a largely reactionary measure employed by the Kremlin to stem Western influence in the Former Soviet Union, rather than build Russian attraction. The idea of Russia as a protector against Western values, however, may hold merit with some foreign audiences, particularly amongst Orthodox and Slavic populations. Tsarist Russia's historical role as defender of the Eastern Orthodox faith and faithful in the Balkans and Levant resurfaced in the post-Soviet era for Russian support of Serbia and other Orthodox Christians, leading to popular support for a Russian counterbalance to Western influence.⁴²⁹

While economic tools fall outside of Nye's definition of genuine soft power, scholars argue that economic tools, such as energy agreements like the Nord Stream pipeline, contribute to building positive foreign attraction towards Russia as a reliable

⁴²⁴ Sergunin and Karabeshkin.

⁴²⁵ Sergunin and Karabeshkin.

⁴²⁶ Popescu; Feklyunina.

⁴²⁷ Popescu; Kazharski.

⁴²⁸ Kazharski; Grodsky.

⁴²⁹ Feklyunina; *Pew Research*, "Views on the Role of Russia in the Region;" Taki; Gerd.

trading partner. Therefore, while not strictly tools of soft power, they can be utilized to grow attraction for Russia. The Eurasian Economic Union is both an economic and cultural project which can shape positive sentiments for Russia and has been a major image-building project for the Kremlin economically and culturally.⁴³⁰ One of the most attractive sources of genuine Russian soft power, however, appears to be the subject of chapter 3, the Russian Orthodox Church.⁴³¹

C. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS ON THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH AS SOURCE OF SOFT POWER

Evidence in the thesis indicates that the Russian Orthodox Church is a genuine source of Russian soft power, domestically and abroad. The ROC's role as the leading Slavic and Eastern Orthodox Church generates sympathy in other Slavic Eastern Orthodox countries. Polling shows that majority Orthodox nations in Central and Eastern Europe (with the notable exception of Ukraine after 2014) view a strong Russia as necessary to balance against Western influence.⁴³² This suggests that the narrative of shared Orthodox heritage and the uniqueness of Russian civilization as one distinct from the West and western Christendom may make Russia attractive in these countries. Simultaneously, however, respondents there believe it is important for their governments to work with the West as well to further their national interests.⁴³³

Domestically, through its centuries of historical intertwinement with the Russian state, the church has helped shape modern Russian identity.⁴³⁴ After Gorbachev's liberalization of the church in the *glasnost*'-era Soviet Union, Orthodoxy in Russia became a cultural marker of Russian identity, even more so than a religious one. Polls reveal that seventy-two percent of Russians identify as Orthodox, even though only seven percent of Russians regularly attend church services.⁴³⁵ Moreover, polling indicates that the Church

⁴³⁰ Sergunin and Karabeshkin.

⁴³¹ *Pew Research*, "Views on the Role of Russia in the Region

⁴³² Feklyunina; *Pew Research*, "Views on the Role of Russia in the Region, and the Soviet Union."

⁴³³ *Pew Research*, "Views on the Role of Russia in the Region, and the Soviet Union."

⁴³⁴ Knox.

⁴³⁵ *Pew Research Center*, "Russians Return to Religion."

is the third most trusted institution in Russia behind the President and the Russian Army.⁴³⁶ This evidence points to the large amount of domestic respect given to the ROC. While it has been argued by scholars that this has led to the subjugation of the church by the Russian state to further its own legitimacy, the argument is more nuanced.⁴³⁷

The thesis finds the ROC to be an autonomous actor in its partnership with the Kremlin, not merely co-opted by the government.⁴³⁸ The relationship between the ROC and Russian state is seemingly one based in mutual partnership when the interests of the two overlap.⁴³⁹ While scholars correctly argue that in the realm of foreign policy religious actors are necessarily subordinate to the state, this does not mean the church cannot possess autonomy in its actions abroad.⁴⁴⁰ Rather, the relationship between the two points to the ROC being a junior partner in a largely symbiotic relationship.⁴⁴¹ The ROC has shown a large degree of autonomy in its partnership with the Kremlin. While the ROC works largely in concert with the state, this is seemingly done to the mutual benefit of both actors. The ROC views itself not only as a religious actor, but a worldly actor as well; one which must do God's work not only to save souls but to save the Earth itself.⁴⁴² This belief manifested itself through the ROC's actions to protect Orthodox believers around the world, stop the spread of diseases such as HIV/AIDS, promote societal peace and morality, and lobbying for global multipolarity to campaign against the spread of what it views as decadent Western culture.⁴⁴³ To do this the ROC must work through the Kremlin to further such social and foreign policy goals. The Church is able to utilize its domestic support to lobby for policies, foreign and domestic, which it sees as beneficial to furthering its worldly

⁴³⁶ *Levada Center*, "Institutional Trust," October 11, 2016, <https://www.levada.ru/en/2016/11/10/institutional-trust-2/>.

⁴³⁷ Blitt; Curanović.

⁴³⁸ Freeze; Petro; Lomagin; Mersol.

⁴³⁹ Lomagin.

⁴⁴⁰ Curanović.

⁴⁴¹ Petro.

⁴⁴² Freeze.

⁴⁴³ Petro; Lomagin.

mission. In return, the Russian government is able to derive legitimacy through policies and narratives crafted with the widely esteemed Church.⁴⁴⁴

A key soft power narrative used by the ROC and Russian state is that of the *Russkiy Mir*. This narrative was crafted largely by the ROC, which has lobbied the government for the cultural and spiritual reintegration of Russia with the Former Soviet Union, as it views this territory as core to the Russian world. Similar to Putin, the ROC shares the belief that the dissolution of the USSR was a geopolitical catastrophe.⁴⁴⁵ As the ROC led the development of the *Russkiy Mir* narrative, which was readily adopted by the Kremlin, it evidences the mutual partnership between the church and state in the development of foreign policy, and highlights the Church's success in crafting policy in mutual interest with the Kremlin.⁴⁴⁶

Additionally, the Church has been a key partner with the state in working to undermine the unipolar world order led by the United States. This benefits the ROC, as it sees Western values as counter to traditional Russian culture and Orthodox teachings, and seeks to prevent the West from acting in what it views as a destabilizing manner in Russian society.⁴⁴⁷ This benefits the state, as it seeks to reemerge as a global great power by challenging the United States and liberal democracy.⁴⁴⁸ Accordingly, the ROC lends credence to the state's narrative of Russia as a unique civilization, separate from Western society.⁴⁴⁹

However, while the ROC often works in cooperation with the Kremlin, this is not always the case.⁴⁵⁰ The ROC spoke out against the Kremlin's actions in Russia's 2008 conflict with Georgia, and it defied the Kremlin's wishes in recognizing the independence of the Orthodox churches in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. These actions demonstrate the

⁴⁴⁴ Petro; Mersol.

⁴⁴⁵ Lomagin.

⁴⁴⁶ Petro.

⁴⁴⁷ Curanović.

⁴⁴⁸ Lomagin.

⁴⁴⁹ Curanović.

⁴⁵⁰ Petro.

autonomy of the Church in foreign policy. Moreover, it shows the ROC's view of itself as a spiritual actor, which influences it to act in the interests of Orthodoxy, even when it may put the ROC at odds with the Kremlin.⁴⁵¹ The ROC, while working with the state, has seemingly been careful not to become subservient to the state. It acts to further its own interests, even when that puts it in opposition to the government.⁴⁵² The next section lays out the ROC's own soft power in two former Soviet republics with large Orthodox populations, Ukraine and Georgia.

D. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS IN THE CASE STUDIES OF UKRAINE AND GEORGIA

Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis sought to answer the question of how successful the Russian Orthodox Church has been in shaping foreign audiences in the two majority-Orthodox nations of Ukraine and Georgia.⁴⁵³ Both nations were invaded by Russia, Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014. The ROC responded in very different ways to Russia's use of hard power in each country, with similar results for its attractiveness in both countries.⁴⁵⁴ The case study in Ukraine discusses the deepening schism between the ROC and the Ukrainian Orthodox Churches, leading ultimately to religious and administrative independence for the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) from the authority of the ROC, eliminating its control over most of Ukraine.⁴⁵⁵ The case study in Georgia, on the other hand, finds that the ROC has had good relations with the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC) since the 2008 invasion.⁴⁵⁶ The influence of the ROC has led to the GOC's and Georgian government's unwillingness to support the autocephaly of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine.⁴⁵⁷ This unwillingness, however, likely stems more from the

⁴⁵¹ Lomagin.

⁴⁵² Petro.

⁴⁵³ *CIA*, "Ukraine;" *CIA*, "Georgia," *The World Fact Book*. Accessed September 09, 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>.

⁴⁵⁴ Mirovalev; Kakachia.

⁴⁵⁵ Ponomariov.

⁴⁵⁶ Kakachia.

⁴⁵⁷ Chapidze and Umland.

ROC's ability to coerce the Georgian government and Church, than from its innate attractiveness to Georgians.

Ukraine became independent in 1991 with three Orthodox churches with divergent allegiances: the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), beholden to the ROC, the separatist Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kiev Patriarchate (UOC-KP), and the separatist Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC). In 1992, the UAOC merged briefly with the UOC-KP, however, the UAOC broke away from the UOC-KP in 1995, leaving three major Orthodox churches in Ukraine. Autocephaly of the various Eastern Orthodox churches and their geographic jurisdiction is determined by the Patriarch of Constantinople. Both separatist churches claimed legitimacy in Orthodoxy as independent churches under the Patriarch of Constantinople.⁴⁵⁸ Yet, under the Synodal Letter of 1686, the canonical territory of Ukraine fell under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Moscow, and the Patriarch of Constantinople refused to recognize these churches as legitimate until 2018.⁴⁵⁹

After Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine, the Metropolitan of the UOC, who was directly subservient to the Patriarch of Moscow, spoke out against Ukraine's attacks on pro-Russian separatists.⁴⁶⁰ In Ukraine, the ROC was seen as propounding the *Russkiy Mir* narrative, particularly through its control of the UOC. The latter supported the narrative and discredited actions taken by the Ukrainian government to end the 2014 conflict on terms favorable to Ukraine. Not only did the UOC remain silent on Russia's invasion of Crimea, the UOC Metropolitan of Simferopol and Crimea supported priests who blessed Russian soldiers and equipment.⁴⁶¹

The inactions and actions of the ROC and UOC led Ukraine's president to prioritize the Orthodox independence of Ukraine, calling the ROC a tool of Russian hybrid war.⁴⁶² This exemplifies the ROC's failure as a soft power instrument in Ukraine. After pleadings

⁴⁵⁸ Sagan.

⁴⁵⁹ Ponomariov.

⁴⁶⁰ Mirovalev.

⁴⁶¹ Sagan.

⁴⁶² Mirovalev.

from Ukraine's president, in October 2018 the Patriarch of Constantinople recognized the two separatist churches, granting them autocephaly and the ability to form a unified, independent church recognized by the Constantinople Patriarch. In December of that year, the leaders of the previously unrecognized Ukrainian Orthodox churches met and formed the united Orthodox Church of Ukraine.⁴⁶³ The ROC's actions in Ukraine have been counterproductive, eroding support for the Russian church in Ukraine, and minimizing its ability to be utilized as a tool of attractiveness and influence there. A 2018 survey showed that only 9% of Ukrainians desired Orthodoxy in Ukraine to be linked to the ROC.⁴⁶⁴ In response to the Patriarch of Constantinople granting autocephaly to the Ukrainian church, the ROC announced that it was severing its ties with Constantinople. This split undermines the Russian world narrative, and risks isolating Russia in the global Orthodox community, which would be detrimental to its abilities to project soft power through Orthodoxy. This demonstrates that ROC actions in Ukraine not only damaged the soft power potential of the ROC there, but may impact its use on a larger scale.⁴⁶⁵

In contrast, during the 2008 Russian conflict with Georgia, rather than support the Kremlin's actions, the ROC spoke out against them. The Patriarch of the ROC immediately called for an end to the conflict and for peace between the two Orthodox countries. Additionally, the ROC interceded on behalf of the Patriarch of Georgia, petitioning the Russian government to allow the Georgian Patriarch to provide food and aid to the war-torn city of Gori.⁴⁶⁶ Moreover, countering the Kremlin's stance that the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia should be granted ecclesiastical independence from the GOC—which would further estrange their cultural ties to Georgia—the ROC refused and issued a resolution recognizing the GOC's authority over the churches in these regions.⁴⁶⁷

The ROC's refusal to recognize the independence of the Orthodox churches in South Ossetia and Abkhazia was motivated in part by a desire to preserve fraternal relations

⁴⁶³ Ponomariov.

⁴⁶⁴ Kulyk, "Church and Geopolitics."

⁴⁶⁵ *Radio Free Liberty/Radio Europe*.

⁴⁶⁶ Lomagin.

⁴⁶⁷ Kakachia.

with the GOC, as well as by the threat of lost legitimacy. Should the ROC recognize the independence of the separatist churches in these regions, it risked the GOC recognizing the independence of the separatist Orthodox churches in Ukraine which sought to break from the ROC's authority.⁴⁶⁸ This action casts the ROC not as a source of soft power in Georgia, but rather a source of coercion, as the refusal to recognize the breakaway churches gave it leverage over the GOC, and prevented the GOC from threatening the ROC's own legitimacy and canonical territory in Ukraine.

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea, neither the GOC nor the Georgian government have given any show of support for the newly autocephalous OCU. This was unexpected, as Georgia and Ukraine have shared good relations following the fall of the Soviet Union, and Georgia had previously expressed solidarity with Ukraine in its conflict with Russia. The reluctance of the GOC to speak out on the matter is thought to be stem from two reasons. First, in the inverse of the ROC's position in 2008, if the GOC shows support for the OCU, it risks the ROC supporting the independence of the Orthodox churches in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Second, there is genuine support for the ROC and Russia in the GOC.⁴⁶⁹ Thus, in this instance, the influence of the ROC over churches in Abkhazia and South Ossetia is sufficient threat to shape the stance not only of the Georgian church, but government as well. This can be seen not only as a success for the ROC, but also for the Kremlin, as it had voiced its opposition to the independence of the Ukrainian church.⁴⁷⁰ Yet, as the GOC's action was motivated largely through the threat of the Russian church's recognition of the breakaway churches in Georgia, this success was not one of soft power, but of hard power. It is an example of coercion on the part of the ROC, through the peril of delegitimizing the GOC's authority in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.⁴⁷¹ This demonstrates Moscow's misunderstanding of soft power and how to use genuine tools of attractiveness, distorting Nye's definition of the term.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁸ Kakachia.

⁴⁶⁹ Chapidze and Umland.

⁴⁷⁰ Mirovalev.

⁴⁷¹ Chapidze and Umland.

⁴⁷² Nye.

The ROC's coercive power to delegitimize the GOC's jurisdiction in break-away regions may reduce the ROC's soft power in the former Soviet Republics. Perceptions that the ROC overtly influences the GOC may jeopardize the legitimacy the ROC maintains in Georgia.⁴⁷³ Such an outcome seems reflected in the Tbilisi protests that ensued when a Russian Duma member addressed the Georgian parliament from the speaker's chair at a meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (IAO).⁴⁷⁴ While the ROC has proven capable in influencing the government and GOC in Georgia, this was not done through the inherent attractiveness of the ROC, but through the leverage the ROC had over the GOC. This shows that Russia still faces limits in its use of Orthodox soft power, and a fundamental misunderstanding of how to use the soft power tools at its disposal. If the influence continues to be seen as coercive, it may lead to future backlash from the Georgian public.⁴⁷⁵

E. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS ON RUSSIA'S USE OF SOFT POWER

In response to the question: Is Russia successfully able to use soft power, the answer is nuanced. The Russian government has made numerous references to the importance of soft power.⁴⁷⁶ However, when viewing Russia's use of soft power in the context of Nye's definition of soft power as a tool of attraction, scholars maintain that the Kremlin falls short. This thesis finds that this lack of organic attraction largely stems from two main causes. The first is due to Moscow's misunderstanding of the use of soft power. Rather than build its own innate attractiveness, Russian leaders seem instead to use soft power tools to coerce and/or erode the soft power of foreign nations. This seems particularly evident in cases where Russia perceives foreign soft power to be influencing nations in its perceived near abroad.⁴⁷⁷ This was evidenced in both the case study in Ukraine and in Georgia, where the ROC did not build genuine attractiveness in these nations, instead it

⁴⁷³ Kakachia.

⁴⁷⁴ Lomsadze.

⁴⁷⁵ Kakachia; Chapidze and Umland; Lomsadze.

⁴⁷⁶ Rutland and Kazantsev.

⁴⁷⁷ Rutland and Kazantsev.

coerced the churches of these nations to support Russian goals.⁴⁷⁸ Second, scholars maintain that due to its use of hard power, especially the 2014 invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea, Russia is limited in its appeal abroad.⁴⁷⁹ Polling through the Pew Research Center indicates this is the case. While the majority of global respondents indicated Russia plays a more important role on the global stage than it did ten years ago, the majority of respondents also indicated that they view Russia negatively and sixty-three percent view Russian President Putin unfavorably.⁴⁸⁰

In sum, a large body of evidence points to Russia being limited in its ability to generate attraction through its fundamental misunderstanding of soft power, using it as a tool to undermine instead of attract, as well as its use of armed force and economic coercion. Despite the tools it has available, the Kremlin has arguably been unable to generate attractiveness through their use.⁴⁸¹ Even the ROC, one of Russia's most attractive sources of influence in the FSU, has not been effectual in garnering influence, as evidenced by the case studies in Ukraine and Georgia. The Russian military force used in those countries, paired with a misuse of the soft power potential of the ROC, have led to an inability of the ROC to produce genuine soft power for Russia.⁴⁸²

F. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As this thesis confirms, the largest detriment to Russia's soft power has been its use of hard power. Russian coercion and threats counteract its soft power influence.⁴⁸³ To further its soft power, Russia would first need to limit its hard power use. The case in Ukraine exemplifies this. Prior to the 2014 invasion of Ukraine, the Ukrainian people held a generally favorable view of Russia. However, after the invasion, the situation reversed, leading to a significant drop in the number of Ukrainians who held favorable views of

⁴⁷⁸ Mirovalev; Chapidze and Umland.

⁴⁷⁹ Rutland and Kazantsev; Sergunin and Karabeshkin.

⁴⁸⁰ Letterman.

⁴⁸¹ Rutland and Kazantsev; Sergunin and Karabeshkin.

⁴⁸² *Pew Research*, "Views on the Role of Russia in the Region, and the Soviet Union;" Mirovalev; Chapidze and Umland.

⁴⁸³ Rutland and Kazantsev; Sergunin and Karabeshkin.

Russia.⁴⁸⁴ Moreover, the use of force in Ukraine has damaged the Russian economy, eroding the bright image of its decade long spurt of high growth rates and its financial ability to fund soft power projects.⁴⁸⁵ Russia should move towards a balance of what Nye terms “smart power,” which creates a balance of hard and soft power.⁴⁸⁶ With the invasion of Ukraine, Russia appears to have shifted the levers of influence too far in the direction of hard power, to the detriment of its soft power.⁴⁸⁷

To strengthen its attractiveness as a nation, Russia could work to strengthen its genuine sources of soft power.⁴⁸⁸ It is argued that Russia has universities that are respected in the near abroad; however, according to U.S. News, Russia’s top university, M.V. Lomonosov Moscow State University, was ranked 275th globally in their world college rankings.⁴⁸⁹ As higher education is viewed as a positive tool of soft power for the nation, Russia should increase funding to boost the prestige and rankings of its universities to provide just one example.⁴⁹⁰ This can be extrapolated to other image building projects for Russia such as the Eurasian Union, twinning-cities projects, and “Houses of Moscow.” All of these tools can be expanded on to build Russian attraction in a peaceful manner.⁴⁹¹

Russia and the ROC remain attractive in the post-communist world, as all Orthodox Central and Eastern European nations, except Ukraine, desire a strong Russia to balance Western influence.⁴⁹² The Russian government must not be seen as too intertwined with the ROC if it is to preserve the Church’s standing abroad. If it relies too heavily on the ROC as a tool of foreign policy, this would likely erode the Church’s legitimacy in the eyes of foreign audiences, and accordingly, make it a less attractive partner for the Russian

⁴⁸⁴ Kuzio.

⁴⁸⁵ Lo.

⁴⁸⁶ Nye.

⁴⁸⁷ Rutland and Kazantsev; Nye.

⁴⁸⁸ Sergunin and Karabeshkin.

⁴⁸⁹ *U.S. News*.

⁴⁹⁰ Sergunin and Karabeshkin.

⁴⁹¹ Sergunin and Karabeshkin.

⁴⁹² *Pew Research*, “Views on the Role of Russia in the Region, and the Soviet Union.”

state.⁴⁹³ Western efforts to tarnish the image of the ROC as a handmaiden of Putin's authoritarianism might accelerate such an outcome.

Regarding Ukraine, if the Russian government and ROC appealed to the commonalities shared by the people of Russia and Ukraine, and respected both the sovereignty of Ukraine, and the autocephaly of the OCU, it could prove to restore ties between the two churches, and ultimately, favorable images between the two nations. Furthermore, this could aid in the restoration of relations with the Orthodox center in Constantinople as well, which could prove more useful to increasing the legitimacy of Russia's Orthodox influence.⁴⁹⁴ Western efforts to prevent such reconciliation and limit Russia's ability to profit from improved ties among the Orthodox churches would correspondingly reduce its soft power.

It is important for the United States to understand how Russia views itself. As Russia's historical aspiration is to remain a global great power, its actions in foreign policy are influenced according to this aspiration.⁴⁹⁵ To do so, Russia is seeking to undermine the post-war order led by the United States and spread through western democracy.⁴⁹⁶ Its narrative of sovereign democracy is seeking to provide an alternative to liberal democracy, and this narrative is gaining attraction, shown in the authoritarian turn of NATO members such as Hungary, Poland, and Turkey.⁴⁹⁷ As Nye argues, "even the best advertising cannot sell an unpopular product."⁴⁹⁸ In order to decrease the attractiveness of Russian-style authoritarianism to NATO allies, the United States must highlight the negative consequences of authoritarianism and sovereign democracy, and should maintain a steadfast commitment to its democratic values.⁴⁹⁹ As Russia's sovereign democracy narrative appears to be gaining sway in NATO, the United States should critique the

⁴⁹³ Torbakov.

⁴⁹⁴ Zanimonets.

⁴⁹⁵ Clunan.

⁴⁹⁶ Lomagin.

⁴⁹⁷ Kazharski; Grodsky.

⁴⁹⁸ Nye, 102.

⁴⁹⁹ Kazharski; Grodsky.

curbing of individual rights and limits on free press found in Russian sovereign democracy.⁵⁰⁰ In light of recent Russian election where Putin's United Russia party faced major losses, the lack of freedoms inherent in sovereign democracy seem to be leading to backlash for Putin.⁵⁰¹ The United States should seize this opportunity to speak out in support of the will of the Russian people and promote the advantages of self-rule. The United States could exploit the losses suffered by Putin's party by highlighting the defeats as the Russian public standing up to authoritarian rule.

Additionally, as Putin undermines democratic values abroad and at home through disinformation, the United States must not waver in its commitment to the truth both domestically and on the international stage.⁵⁰² As noted by Nye, the exaggerated claims about Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction damaged U.S. credibility and soft power internationally.⁵⁰³ The United States cannot afford such missteps in foreign policy, as Russia will readily use exaggerations or lies as a means to further its disinformation campaigns to erode the global credibility of liberal democracy.⁵⁰⁴ Yet, it has been argued that the current U.S. politicians have created an environment where America's believability is in question, leading to an erosion on the importance of the truth in politics.⁵⁰⁵ This decrease of American credibility leaves it less able to combat Russian disinformation and will make it harder to fend against Russian soft power. In fact, the United States' own soft is declining. In 2016, America was found to be first in global soft power rankings; however, it fell to third in 2017 and dropped to fourth place in 2018 behind the United Kingdom, France, and Germany.⁵⁰⁶ For the United States to remain a global beacon of democratic

⁵⁰⁰ Grodsky.

⁵⁰¹ Ivan Nechepurenko, "Putin's Political Party Suffers Losses in Moscow Election," *New York Times*, September 9, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/09/world/europe/putin-moscow-election.html>; Grodsky.

⁵⁰² Grodsky.

⁵⁰³ Nye.

⁵⁰⁴ Grodsky.

⁵⁰⁵ Arthur Goldhammer, "Can Truth Survive After Trump?" *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas*, no. 43 (Winter 2017), <https://democracyjournal.org/magazine/43/can-truth-survive-trump/>.

⁵⁰⁶ Natasha Bach, "Under President Trump, the U.S.'s 'Soft Power' Is Waning," *Fortune*, July 13, 2018, <https://fortune.com/2018/07/13/us-soft-power-ranking-fourth-place/>.

values, in contrast to Russian authoritarianism, it must reassert its own commitment to these values and to the truth in order to regain its own soft power influence.⁵⁰⁷

As the situation pertains to the ROC, and in particular its schism between the ROC and Patriarch of Constantinople, as well as the autocephaly of the OCU, the United States should continue to promote religious freedom around the world. The United States has traditionally held the role as a defender of religious freedoms and free choice, and must continue to do so. On January 10, 2019, the U.S. Secretary of state released a statement recognizing the autocephaly of the OCU, and asserted support for Ukrainian sovereignty, as well as reaffirming its commitment to religious freedoms around the world.⁵⁰⁸ This is a positive decision for the United States, and signals its commitment to its traditional role as a promoter of global freedoms. This aids in U.S. soft power promotion, and contrasts Russian's response to the situation.⁵⁰⁹ Furthermore, the United States could undermine the soft power potential of the ROC, by condemning its apolitical actions in Georgia and Ukraine.⁵¹⁰ By revealing the use of the ROC as a means of coercion in Ukraine and Georgia, America may be able to erode the attractiveness of the Russian church in the FSU.⁵¹¹

Realist scholars argue that soft power is unimportant. However, through hard power a nation's influence stops at the limits of its military and economy. Through soft power, a nation can far extend its hard power reach and co-opt other nations to support its goals without using military or economic force.⁵¹² Russia understands the importance of soft power, yet arguably misunderstands how to use it, and fails to balance its use of hard and soft power.⁵¹³ As the United States sees its own soft power declining, it must refocus its

⁵⁰⁷ Bach; *Freedom House*, "Democracy in Retreat: Freedom in the World 2019," Accessed September 14, 2019, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2019/democracy-in-retreat>.

⁵⁰⁸ Michael R. Pompeo, "Declaration of Ukrainian Autocephaly," (Press Statement: Washington DC: State Department, 2019), <https://www.state.gov/declaration-of-ukrainian-autocephaly/>.

⁵⁰⁹ Pompeo; Zanamonets.

⁵¹⁰ Chapidze and Umland; Mirovalev.

⁵¹¹ *Pew Research*, "Views on the Role of Russia in the Region, and the Soviet Union."

⁵¹² Nye.

⁵¹³ Rutland and Kazantsev; Sergunin and Karabeshkin.

efforts on increasing its attractiveness and implement concrete measures to promote truth, democracy, and religious freedoms at home and abroad.⁵¹⁴ This will help not only to rebuild American soft power, but also allow the United States to contrast itself with Russia, in order to decrease Russian soft power efforts.

⁵¹⁴ Bach.

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