

Vladimir Putin's Political Leadership in Action: Two Developmentally Informed Case Studies on Domestic and Foreign Politics

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This article expands on Wagner and Fein's (2016) analysis of Vladimir Putin's political leadership viewed through a developmental lens. On the basis of a qualitative analysis of selected published materials on Putin's role in Russian politics from 2000 to 2015, 2 case studies take a closer look at important domestic (Case Study 1) and international (Case Study 2) issues. First, these case studies analyze in what sense the way in which Putin has dealt with important political challenges during his past 15-plus years in office can be interpreted through a developmental lens. Second, we discuss some of the major implications of a developmentally informed interpretation of Putin's leadership for Russian and Western politics.

Keywords: Vladimir Putin, leadership, reasoning structures, self-protective action logics

During the past 2 years, Russia's president Vladimir Putin has remained an omnipresent subject of discussion on public, political, and scholarly levels due to several political conflicts in which Russia has played an important, even though not always constructive, role (Hill, 2010; Judah, 2013; Plokhly, 2014; Sakwa, 2008; Shevtsova, 2003; Varese, 2001). Whereas Putin continues to enjoy considerable, albeit declining, support among his fellow citizens (Triebe, 2015), public opinion in the West is somewhat divided over major strategic political decisions he has recently taken. Admirers of Putin's strongman image (especially among more nationalist groups) compete with "rationalists," who think cooperation with Russia's leader is important in order to solve the most important

world problems, and those who hold rather critical views with regard to Putin's leadership. The latter therefore tend to be skeptical in view of the potential for fruitful cooperation. Admittedly, there are also overlaps between those camps. How can a developmentally informed analysis of Putin's leadership behavior offer a clearer picture of his supposed logics of reasoning—and thereby help to define adequate answers?

This article expands on Wagner and Fein's (2016) analysis of Vladimir Putin's political leadership viewed through a developmental lens, mainly drawing on Cook-Greuter's model of ego development and her Leadership Maturity Framework (LMF; Cook-Greuter, 2000, 2013, 2015), as well as on the model of hierarchical complexity (Commons, 2008) and other models of vertical development. For space reasons, neither of them can be spelled out here (for more detail on the LMF, see Wagner & Fein, 2016). In this initial contribution, we have made the claim that Putin's leadership can be understood in a more coherent and comprehensive way by assuming a structural core revolving around self-protective reasoning, identity, and behavior. Even though we ultimately cannot make claims about Putin's actual level of development in any domain due to methodological constraints, we do hold that his *publicly*

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displayed leadership behavior corresponds to what would be expected by a self-protective identity and action logic. On the basis of a qualitative analysis of selected published materials on Putin's role in Russian politics from 2000 to 2015, we have developed a tentative leadership profile that includes elements covering a specter between egocentric and self-conscious (or even achiever) action logics but is mainly informed by a self-protective center of gravity (Wagner & Fein, 2016). This term is understood here not as a general structure of mind but only with regard to the performance and skills that are predominantly displayed.

Whereas Wagner and Fein (2016) initial contribution has elaborated this claim in a more general way, this article provides more empirical evidence in view of some practical implications of Putin's leadership profile. The following two case studies, covering selected aspects of domestic and foreign politics, aim to flesh out our hypotheses in more detail and thereby illustrate to what extent the assumption of a self-protective identity and leadership behavior helps to understand current Russian politics. Another aim of this article is to discuss some of the major implications of this perspective for Russian, Western, and global politics.

We now take a closer look at important domestic (Case Study 1) and international (Case Study 2) issues that Putin has dealt with during his past 15-plus years in office.

Case Study 1: Domestic Politics

Being unable to provide an exhaustive picture of Putin's domestic politics here, we limit ourselves to illustrating some claims regarding the interplay between self-protective and "expert" (self-conscious) action logics on the basis of three examples: Putin's far-reaching institutional reforms, his action against political critics, and his "war against terrorism." Without retelling the story of how Putin restarted war in Chechnya, introduced the "power vertical" and substantially curtailed the freedom of the press after taking office as Russian president, this case study explores the motivational aspects behind these behaviors, as far as they become visible in the data. We argue that most of these actions seem to be motivated by the same set of considerations that are typical of self-protective identities—and would likely not be used by

other, in particular more complex, logics of reasoning, namely:

- controlling the political process, thus assuring one's own power without "interference" by independent civil society actors;
- establishing media that are loyal to the president and state, thus escaping critique and avoiding the risk of losing face;
- taking control of important parts of the economy for personal use (thus violating the law) without having to fear public outcry; and
- creating political enemies as threats that legitimize the persistent use of force and thus strengthening his power position on the basis of his image as a strongman.

As to Putin's introduction of the vertical of power, the underlying self-protective notion of democracy has already been outlined elsewhere (Wagner & Fein, 2016). Abolishing democratic elections of governors in favor of their direct nomination by the president, offering local governors certain liberties in their provinces in return for political neutrality on the national level (Reitschuster, 2004, p. 218), cutting down democratic participation rights in all areas of political life, curtailing independent and critical non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and introducing a so-called civic chamber as a means to reward and flatter loyal NGOs, thereby marginalizing critical ones—all of that contributed to increasing sociopolitical control and to limiting and impeding independent social activity. In fact, on March 26, 2000, the head of Putin's presidential administration, Alexander Voloshin, publicly announced that they were going to "introduce dictatorship tomorrow" in order "not to destroy the seeds of social unity by elections" (Reitschuster, 2004, p. 204f.). Moreover, an important element of Putin's institutional reforms was strengthening the role of secret service staff in all important areas of state administration (Gessen, 2012, p. 226).

Although these measures appear to be clearly motivated by self-protective drivers, the rather efficient and systematic way they have been put into place somehow suggests specific expertise and obstination, which have also been identified in Putin's leadership profile (see Wagner & Fein, 2016). However, in contrast to expert action logics, which value—and act according to—the authority of craft masters, Putin's "sovereign" or "delegative democracy" frankly ig-

nores international democratic standards. The same is true for internal contradictions, for example when limiting foreign financing of Russian NGOs but at the same time financing pro-Putin NGOs in other areas of the Commonwealth of Independent States himself (Fleischmann, 2010, p. 56).

Putin's media politics align well with this overall pattern. Only shortly after his taking office, Russia's then two richest men, media owners Boris Berezovsky and Vladimir Gusinsky, had been forced into exile, and 1 year later, all important TV channels had been nationalized (Gessen, 2012, p. 220). In the case of Gusinsky, repression against his media empire took the form of a forced deal, namely to trade his personal freedom against the economic majority at Media Most (Gessen, 2012, p. 206). All efforts by former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev to mediate between Putin and Gusinsky failed, and the public was shocked by this clear demonstration of Putin's message: "Don't interfere with my plans!" (Roxburgh, 2012, p. 59; Tregubova, 2006, p. 73).

One of the reasons for Putin's harsh action against Media Most apparently was the negative press he received about his handling of the Kursk disaster. After the Soviet-time nuclear submarine had crashed in the Barents Sea, Putin had refused to accept Western help (for fear of letting NATO staff touch Russian military materiel) for over five days, thereby probably causing the death of 118 marines (Roxburgh, 2012, p. 72). The case of Media Most thus served as a showcase and warning to other journalists that criticizing the president could have serious consequences. Although Putin often publicly invites criticism (Roxburgh, 2012, p. 162), our sources report multiple cases of "telephone justice," that is, judgments following political instructions from above, in relation to media cases (Roxburgh, 2012, p. 153). Besides, the secret services contribute to spreading a climate of fear and anticipatory obedience (Reitschuster, 2004, p. 134) by intimidating the media and harassing individual journalists in various ways (Gessen, 2012, p. 176; Harding, 2011; Tregubova, 2006, p. 163). Cases of physical violence against (Gessen, 2012, p. 176) or even murder of journalists might not be possible to trace back to Putin himself or the Federal Security Service (FSB), yet he must be held responsible for the overall illiberal, fear-based,

and even violent culture of social and political communication. Elena Tregubova, author of a critical biography of Putin, for example, found that a bomb that exploded right in front of her apartment had been produced by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. When she survived the attack, the Kremlin censorship instructed the media not to mention her name in public anymore (Tregubova, 2006, p. 233).

The motives informing this leadership behavior as reported by our data (Wagner & Fein, 2016) are Putin's "panic fear of the free press (Tregubova, 2006, p. 204)," given his perception of any independent voice as a personal threat. Tregubova explained this as a "paranoid syndrome of being sieged" (Tregubova, 2006, pp. 196 and 202). She also reported that Putin displayed "open hatred" (p. 136) toward journalists like Andrei Babitsky (who wrote critical articles about Chechnya) and that he could get "mad with rage" (p. 149) about critical media coverage, as in the case of Gusinsky's political comic program "Kukly (dolls"; p. 176), which admittedly treated Putin with bitter sarcasm before it was forbidden. In Putin's perspective, it is unacceptable to denigrate officials—an indication of missing differentiation between his person and role, let alone a more democratic understanding of political authority as a servant of the people. Inversely, Putin apparently conceives of the press as a loyal servant of the power holders, that is, especially himself (Gessen, 2012, p. 52). As a result, he created a "Kremlin pool" of selected journalists who are given privileged access to presidential activities in return for positive coverage. Journalists who do not observe the unwritten rules of the pool, for example by asking unauthorized questions, could be banned from the pool and, thus, from their sources of information (Tregubova, 2006, pp. 153 and 196). The majority of Russian media quickly adapted to these conditions by providing uncritical "adulation" instead of objective news (Reitschuster, 2004, p. 158) and by avoiding topics that were officially banned from the agenda (Tregubova, 2006, p. 156).

The fact that Putin sees the task of the media as being "image makers" of the political class, that is, to arrange for a maximum positive image of the respective leader (Reitschuster, 2004, p. 92; Tregubova, 2006, p. 196), rather than being the "fourth power" controlling them, in our view, is a clear indicator of a self-protective

leadership style, probably stemming from a self-protective identity. Putin's dependence on his popularity ratings, which turns the freedom of the press into a relative value (Reitschuster, 2004, p. 168), as well as his distrust toward any potential criticism, can most likely be explained by the perceived need to protect an (emotionally) weak self. Although we cannot make inferences concerning Putin's personal self-development from this, we do suggest that the patterns of political leadership displayed here follow self-protective action logics. Our claim that this leadership behavior is developmentally based—in other words, that it is not just the result of a strategic choice that could be easily changed in case of failure—can also be illustrated empirically by a number of incidents. They show Putin's apparent lack of understanding of the nature of a free press or an independent judiciary and, thus, for the fundamental, inherent cognitive limitations of his approach. In this regard, we find, on the one hand, multiple cases where Putin urged Western political leaders to influence their national press to encourage more positive coverage of Russian affairs or to urge their courts to act against certain individuals:

- In 2003, he tried to persuade Tony Blair to put pressure on the courts to extradite Bezovskiy. According to a well-informed source, Blair explained that this was impossible in the United Kingdom: it was a magistrate's decision, not the government's. Putin, unable to fathom the independence of the courts, took offense. . . . There is no reason to think that Putin was dissembling; rather, it seems clear that he actually believes that it is normal for Western politicians to influence the courts in the same way as Russian leaders can. (Roxburgh, 2012, p. 63).
- When the German public TV channel ARD criticized Putin's politics, the Russian Embassy complained, assuming that the Germans were starting a campaign against Moscow—and was surprised that the government did not pull ARD back (Reitschuster, 2004, p. 143).
- "Putin does not really understand democracy. . . . He believes that American presidents can have pesky newscasters removed from their jobs" (Roxburgh, 2012, p. 319).

On the other hand, Roxburgh (2012, p. 184), who has worked as a media adviser for the Russian government for many years, reported that in 2008, the Putin administration hired the New York-based PR firm Ketchum for \$1 million a month in order to polish the president's image in the West. Yet, in order to achieve this, Putin apparently expected his consultants to manipulate journalists and tell them what to write (Roxburgh, 2012, p. 191), instead of being able to take their advice. Although the Ketchum team insisted that the government needed to open up and talk to the press and that a better image required better politics in the first place, that is, that certain behaviors were simply unacceptable in the eyes of a Western public,

they [the Russians] would constantly demand that Ketchum "use our technologies" to improve coverage. . . . Based on their experience of the domestic media, they were genuinely convinced that we could *pay* for better coverage. . . . They believed that journalists write what their newspaper proprietors (or governments) order them to write, and wanted to "punish" correspondents who wrote critically about them by refusing to invite them to press events (thereby, in fact, forfeiting the chance to influence them). (Roxburgh, 2012, p. 185)

Putin's attempt to buy himself the publicity he wanted and to have a positive image created by "polit-technological" means illustrates not only his "technological" approach to politics and his firm belief in central control of people's behavior as a means to achieve stability. It also illustrates a lack of perspective taking and perspective coordination, that is, the failure to understand the difference between his own reasoning (and functioning) and that of a (more complex) liberal society, allowing political pluralism, a free press working without instructions (Tregubova, 2006, pp. 145 and 196), and a system of checks and balances between several independent institutions. Failing to conceive the inherent logic of a significantly more complex action logic and the sociopolitical system created by it, a self-protective leadership approach is obviously unable to deal with social and political pluralism other than by "governing it away" in both its political and PR practice. It therefore also cannot see the direct relation between its own political behavior, in this case Putin's record of illiberal reforms and human rights violations, and his negative image in the West.

This is why despite its considerable investment, the Kremlin finally did (i.e., probably could) not follow Ketchum's advice. It rather preferred to rewrite all of Ketchum's article drafts and not to allow any of its own press speakers to actually speak freely to Western journalists. Moreover, after the murder of respected investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya, "followed by the Litvinenko murder, and then by the Russian invasion of Georgia" (Roxburgh, 2012, p. 184). Putin's chief of press, Dmitry Peskov, apparently "became too worried: he knew that whatever the formal topic of a briefing, journalists would end up asking about human rights and democracy. Safer not to meet them" at all (Roxburgh, 2012, p. 184). The Ketchum team thus eventually "watched our 'client' drifting back into their old ways" (p. 186). So even though there was a clear and strong search for expert knowledge in view of more efficiency in dealing with the media, the self-protective "center of gravity" of political leadership obviously did not provide sufficient space for developing and transforming existing practices. Although there apparently was a "theoretical," cognitive awareness of a need for change, we suggest that the power of the dominant self-protective action logic prevented the necessary self-transformation.

Given that Russia had actually experienced a period of relative liberalism and pluralism under Boris Yeltsin in the 1990s, including an emerging colorful landscape of politically independent media, this return to the principles of distrust and control is clearly a result of the changes brought about by Putin's political leadership. Different from Yeltsin, Putin is reported to worry more about his popularity (and thus, power) than about concrete reforms (Reitschuster, 2004, p. 230). And considering that Putin's charisma is generally perceived as that "of a clerk rather than of a James Bond" (Reitschuster, 2004, p. 230), the challenge to protect his fragile public self demands appropriate effort. This becomes best visible in Putin's war on terror.

"How do you conceive an image campaign for a hopeless case?" Elena Tregubova once asked a PR specialist. His answer: "You start a war!" (Tregubova, 2006, p. 116). Although trying to build up Putin's image as a strong leader is sometimes discussed as a pretense for starting a new military conflict in Chechnya in late 1999

(Reitschuster, 2004, p. 65), it is evident that "fighting terrorism" is also an "obsession" of Putin's himself (Roxburgh, 2012, p. 20). Being unable to go into much detail here, we limit ourselves to presenting a few features of Putin's leadership behavior with regard to terrorism and extremism that appear typical for self-protective identities:

1. A rather monochrome and undifferentiated, black-and-white construction of social conflicts: It is striking to what extent Putin's public statements connected to "terrorist," and to some extent also to "extremist," activities lack differentiation beyond simple us-them dichotomies. While Russia tends to be presented as a "victim of external attacks" by hostile outside forces (as in the case of the Beslan hostage crisis; Fleischmann, 2010, p. 148), there are generally "only terrorists" on the other side (e.g., in Chechnya; Fleischmann, 2010, p. 313). No differentiations are made, for example, between ordinary Chechen citizens and separatist fighters, nor are their motives acknowledged or discussed in any adequate way. Also, a "chain of equivalence" (Torfing, 1999, pp. 96-98) is often drawn between critics of Putin's politics and terrorists. Likewise, Putin has repeatedly claimed that the West supported bandits (Reitschuster, 2004, p. 140).

2. As a result of this simplistic construction (and thus, probably, perception) of a complex set of conflicts, Putin's discourse and activities against "extremists" and "terrorists" are consequently characterized by significant severity and harshness (Reitschuster, 2004, p. 91). Any kind of brutality with regard to Chechens is legitimated by both himself and high-ranking Russian representatives with reference to the recklessness of the terrorists themselves (p. 141). Moreover, the only seriously envisioned solution to the terrorist threat is seen in their complete "extermination," "annihilation," and "destruction" (Fleischmann, 2010, p. 150). Otherwise, Putin's zero-sum logic fears that "Russia will stop to exist in today's form if we don't stop that [the Nordost hostage crisis] immediately" (Reitschuster, 2004, p. 103). So the phenomenon of Chechen terrorism against Russia is not seen as part of a complex system or web of (partly self-made) causes and consequences, which would be a sign of more developed perspective taking and coordination practices. Neither are more differentiated options or strategies

of reaction considered by Putin's political leadership, let alone peaceful ways of conflict resolution.

3. The sharp and uncompromising attitude toward "terrorists" is also displayed in Putin's language and tone when speaking about the topic in public. Some of his famous quotes include:

- "Russia doesn't negotiate with terrorists. Russia destroys them." (Roxburgh, 2012, p. 47)
- "We must pull them [the terrorists] out of their caves and destroy them, dry out the swamp!" (Fleischmann, 2010, p. 138)
- "These people [the Chechens] are not human. You can't even call them animals—or if they're animals, they're rabid animals." (Roxburgh, 2012, p. 21)
- "Destroy the rats, . . . we must accept blows up to the complete destruction of the evil, fight without compromise!" (Fleischmann, 2010, p. 313)
- "We'll pursue terrorists wherever they are. If they're in an airport we'll get 'em there. If we catch 'em—excuse the expression—in the toilet . . . we'll wipe 'em out right there, in the outhouse. End of story" (shortly after taking office as prime minister, on September 24, 1999; Roxburgh, 2012, p. 23).

4. In practice, this approach not only entails a considerable level of brutality (Politkovskaya, 2001, and 2003; Roxburgh, 2012, p. 66). It also typically disregards the consequences and impacts it generates, including "collateral damages" of Putin's "anti-terrorist operations," such as civilian victims. Tens of dozens of them had to be lamented after his violent intervention in both the Nordost and the Beslan hostage crises, most of which could have been avoided by a different approach, as analysts have meanwhile found out. But here, the value of human lives was subordinated to that of protecting military secrets (such as the nature of the gas used in the musical theater storming) or that of keeping up Putin's image of a strong and successful leader (Reitschuster, 2004, p. 129). As a matter of fact, Putin clearly calls those victims a "lesser evil" compared to not fighting or punishing the respective terrorists (Putin, Gevorkyan, Timakova, & Kolesnikov, 2000).

5. Moreover, self-protective leadership is generally characterized by trying to demon-

strate strength and by avoiding to lose face at all costs. Therefore, obvious mistakes cannot be admitted (Reitschuster, 2004, pp. 129 and 132), let alone regretted or retrieved. Instead, the project of self-protection creates more fear and terror among others itself in order to legitimate its behavior (Gessen, 2012, pp. 186 and 270).

6. Consequently, there is no evidence of empathy or significant perspective taking of any other view than the leader's own. In fact, Roxburgh (2012, p. 23) noted that he has

never heard Putin (or any other Russian leader) speak about the real grievances of the Chechen people—their mass deportation from their homeland to Central Asia under Stalin, the swamping of their culture and language by the Russians during the Soviet period. Nor is there much explicit awareness of the fact that it was the brutal Russian invasion in 1994 that radicalized the Chechen fighters and encouraged Islamic fundamentalism. . . . It was the war, and the atrocities committed by Russian forces, that turned mere separatists into ideologically driven terrorists. Without that understanding, Putin's new war was bound to make matters even worse. (Roxburgh, 2012, p. 23)

As a result, Putin's efforts in this domain appear, again, extremely persistent but also extremely ineffective. Instead of solving any problem (except that of his popularity rating), his war on terror has created many new ones (Gessen, 2012, p. 186). We argue that Putin's war on terror is a typical behavioral pattern of self-protective action logics that ultimately seek respect, acknowledgment, and validation for their weak, fragile selves but at the same time do not realize that they "mistake fear for respect" (Roxburgh, 2012, p. 319). Obviously, the impacts of this misconception are exponentiated in the case of a (self-protective) political leader, all the more that of a (former) great power. The following case study discusses to what extent this dilemma is also at the heart of Putin's foreign politics and which implications result from this.

Case Study 2: Foreign Politics

The domain of foreign politics, in our view, is a crucial key to understanding Putin's leadership behavior. Roxburgh (2012, p. 121) described its inherent structures of reasoning and meaning making as those of a "strongman haunted by almost paranoid illusions of weakness and external danger" (see also Tschikow, 2016). Russian journalist Masha Gessen's

(2012, p. 50) characterization of Putin's notion of patriotism, suggesting that the country is as strong as the fear it generates in others, also supports this analysis.

As mentioned elsewhere (Wagner & Fein, 2016), given Putin's uncritical attitude toward the Soviet past ("There has never been anything better and smarter than the Soviet power" or "Soviet history is the most humane in the world"; Fleischmann, 2010, pp. 68 and 330, respectively), the collapse of communism and the Soviet Union is likely to have been a somewhat traumatic experience for him (Wagner & Fein, 2016). Therefore, trying to compensate for this loss must be regarded as one of the central drivers of his foreign politics. More precisely, we suggest that

1. Putin fears that Russia and Russians could lose even more of their status and influence (e.g., due to "orange revolutions" like the one in Ukraine), which is perceived as a potential humiliation of their national honor and pride (Fleischmann, 2010, p. 68). Therefore, one of the new foreign policy principles adopted in 2008 declared it a priority to "defend the lives and dignity of Russians, wherever they might be" [emphasis added]; (Roxburgh, 2012, p. 254). Another principle declared all post-Soviet countries with ethnic Russian populations as Russia's "zones of privileged interest". Note that "dignity," in contrast to "rights," is a rather fluffy and flexible concept and that "interests" can well get into conflict with laws and rights.

2. Putin longs to restore Russia's great power status, especially to be on the same level as the United States again (Fleischmann, 2010, pp. 4 and 106). This quest gains additional urge by Putin's reported perception that "you are either a great power or colony" (Fleischmann, 2010, p. 68), recalling Eigel and Kuhnert's (2016) description of a typical egocentric leadership approach: "You either outwork people or you steamroll over them; there is really no other way" (p. 73). So with Russia's previous status lost, its leadership apparently feels reduced to reacting to other players' initiatives instead of being able to set the agenda themselves—which a fear-based leadership obviously perceives as a problem. This explains a number of (not always friendly) advances while trying to regain political initiative on an international level.

3. Putin wants Russia to be a "normal" member of the family of nations (Fleischmann, 2010,

p. 252), to have uncluttered relationships with other states, in particular "to be part of Europe," and to be respected as a major player (Roxburgh, 2012, pp. 24 and 28). This point is delicate when it comes to details of what is the basis of the respect Russia claims. On the basis of the available data, our impression is that Putin claims respect "per se," that is, to be taken seriously without particular conditions. In this regard, Roxburgh (2012, p. 85f.) quoted an aid of former British prime minister Tony Blair's, who was one of the first Western leaders to capture

the [Russians'] need to treat them seriously. Their problem was that they felt excluded from the top table and weren't being treated as a superpower. You had to show them respect. Even if they weren't really a superpower any more, you had to pretend they were.

What is the problem with these claims from a developmental perspective? In a nutshell, the problem is that Russian political leadership does not relate others' reactions to its own behavior. In other words, it does not sufficiently coordinate its own perspective (and will) with those of other the political players it wishes to be respected by and cooperate with. Roxburgh (2012, p. 200) paraphrased Putin's reasoning as follows: "accept us as we are, treat us as equals, and establish cooperation based on mutual interests." This claim and strategy works well with partners who equally operate on the basis of a (more narrow) interest-driven approach. It works less well or not at all with partners who are used to cooperating on a broader basis of shared values such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. For as long as Russian political leadership does not share these values, it is not equal in this respect.

Another fundamental problem, related to the first one (perspective taking), is that Putin's leadership does not see the contradictions in its own claims: first, that being accepted "as we are" implies a shared perception of how and what post-Soviet Russia actually is. Currently, the Russian political elite, encouraged by the discourse of its leadership, refuses to accept the objectively diminished political and economic role of their country (Reitschuster, 2004, p. 197). It also displays a reluctance to face the fact that the latter is a direct result of both its own political performance and an obvious lack of attractiveness of the (Soviet and post-Soviet)

authoritarian political model, compared to the liberal–democratic one in the eyes of most eastern European societies. Thus, it does not accept the fact that Russia’s great power status, which to a considerable degree was based on the use of force instead of free decision-making, is gone—if one accepts that force is no longer an available option. Given the freedom to decide, eastern Europe has made its choice, and it was not the Russian one.

Instead of accepting this and taking moral or at least political responsibility for what happened in the past, however, Russian political leadership has shown no critical distance toward the imperial and violent aspects of Soviet politics in the Baltics and other ex-Soviet territories. Whereas it maintains that cutting off what the Russian state sees as its privileged sphere of influence was an illegitimate thing to do (Fleischmann, 2010, p. 184), it does not waste a thought on the rights, let alone the feelings, of multiple peoples who were de facto occupied by the Soviet Union. What’s more, Putin even makes jokes about the Baltic quest for independence (p. 184). This is the second fundamental contradiction that goes unnoticed in Putin’s leadership: He demands acceptance and respect for Russia, its “trauma,” and its “sacrifices” with regard to the lost empire, but he does not offer the same acceptance and respect to others. So the problem is that he voices demands without accepting conditions (a typical pre-conventional, prosocial behavior), or as Eigel and Kuhmert (2016, p. 74) described, the mentality of what they conceived of as “Level 2 people”: “Tell me the rules, and I’ll play your game if I get what I want.” Putin wants to be part of the global community of leading players but does not want to accept its rules. For accepting these rules would mean that Russian (more precisely: mainstream Russian) politics would have to change; in other words, to develop toward more complex ways of meaning making and action. It would have to stop dictating its will by means of force and rather conform to mutually agreed-on rules. Yet, apparently, its current self-protective political leadership does not want to make this change—or is unable to do so.

So even if the quest to “belong” somehow seems to refer to conformist–interpersonal reasoning, the fact that Putin does not want to conform shows the actual center of gravity of his leadership. As a result, apparently unaware

of what would be needed to make a substantial next step forward, Putin displays a mixture of flattery and aggression, of “charme offensives” and tit-for-tat behavior (Roxburgh, 2012, p. 147), which sometimes looks like an attempt to “shock” the West “into cooperation” (p. 200). At one time, he started “courting the west” as was the case after 9/11, when he became “friends” with George Bush Jr., and the media ran a veritable “George & Vladimir Show” (p. 24). Understandably, Putin “felt rarely privileged” about being invited to the Bush family farm in Texas. But then, he did not understand how his “friend” could unilaterally quit the ABM treaty (p. 43). He has trouble understanding why the United States wants to protect itself against Iran—and why this has nothing to do with Russia (p. 205). Also, mainstream Russian politics never really accepted the reasoning behind NATO’s enlargement—and, again, cannot comprehend why the West does not regard this as a move against Russia, even though it also serves as a means to protect eastern Europeans from Russia (pp. 95 and 198).

Therefore, at other times, disappointed about what he perceives as a denial of cooperation, Putin either looks for alternative partners, such as China or Assad’s Syria (whose leadership behavior is easier to decode for him), or continues to act according to opportunistic action logics, such as tactically seeking good contacts with all parties in order to then play them against each other. Sometimes he simply follows the eye-for-an-eye logic, for example when taking “revenge” on the United States for expelling 50 supernumerary Russian diplomats (“Our reply will be very cynical. . . . We will cause chaos in your embassy!”) (Roxburgh, 2012, p. 147) or when harassing the British ambassador in Estonia for having participated in an inauguration ceremony of an anti-Soviet memorial (Roxburgh, 2012, p. 33).

Inversely, few in the West seem to really understand Russia’s—more precisely, her leader’s—fear of encirclement. Roxburgh (2012, p. 201) reported an incident where Bush, after lengthy explanations by Putin about why Russia felt threatened by the United States, simply said: “I see this is really serious for you. Nobody advised me you treat this so seriously.” So far, Western leaders have responded to Putin’s politics with different, not necessarily coherent, strategies by doing one of the following:

- accepting Putin's call for "friendship" (e.g., Gerhard Schröder, Silvio Berlusconi);
- trying to somehow account for Russia's sensitivities, offering compensatory measures (such as establishing the "privileged partnership," in order to sweeten the pill of NATO enlargement); or
- ignoring the differences between each other's reasoning or pretending not to see them and expecting Putin to behave "like themselves" (this is what most of the European Union did and still does, especially before the Ukraine crisis; [Reitschuster, 2004](#), p. 193).

The typical reaction in the European Union today is either

- trying to avoid an open confrontation, out of fear of uncontrolled escalations, sensing that one doesn't fully understand Putin's mode of reasoning, or
- refusing to go deeper into the roots of mutual misunderstandings, for similar reasons and out of fear of either spoiling good relationships or to lose one's operating mental model.

In any case, it seems clear that Russia and the West often enough talk past each other, not sharing the same values and fears and hardly understanding those of the other. Hence, they have trouble developing a common vision of global security ([Roxburgh, 2012](#), pp. 251 and 321). At the same time, they need to cooperate in the face of multiple global challenges.

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

Although this might look like a desperately dilemmatic situation, a developmentally informed understanding of political leadership can disclose new insights and fresh perspectives and, thus, help to develop innovative solutions that dissolve the dilemma on the basis of a more comprehensive, more complex, metasystematic perspective. From this perspective, Vladimir Putin's political leadership, as it is publicly displayed in his behaviors, seems to have its center of gravity in a primarily self-protective identity. More precisely, our analysis suggests that one can describe the main logics and dynamics of reasoning at the basis of his leadership as follows:

1. The main driver of Putin's politics is his longing for being respected as a major in-

ternational player among others, ideally standing on the same level as the United States.

2. Although he seems to be most familiar, most at ease, and most secure with self-protective or opportunistic action logics, due to his socialization, previous career, and possibly certain traumatic experiences, he also seeks a more interpersonal quality of communication and means of doing politics on multiple occasions, partly as a way of receiving the desired respect.
3. In order to get this, he is willing to contribute his share, for example by keeping promises, being loyal to his political "friends," conforming to certain standards, or engaging in pragmatic solutions, as long as he trusts that no one will cheat him or "fish for respect" at his expense. In that case he might even surprise others as being "the nice guy."
4. If (for whatever reasons) he does not get the respect he is after, he might attempt to force others into respect and cooperation—which often enough produces counterproductive outcomes, the impacts of which, in turn, he does not seem to anticipate. As a result, though merely seeking respect, he ends up frightening everyone and mistakes fear for respect. This is because
5. he apparently cannot understand the reasoning behind mainstream Western policy-making on the basis of the mental model that is primarily displayed in his behavior, and, due to its limited capacity of perspective taking, is therefore unable "to see any connection between his own repressions at home and the hostile reactions abroad." ([Roxburgh, 2012](#), p. ix)

Although Putin's behavior might indeed seem confusing and often contradictory from expert, achiever, or pluralist perspectives (presumably the most widespread action logics in Western politics), which are used to (co)operate on more factual rather than personalized or even force-based terms, self-protective behaviors make perfect sense in themselves. Therefore, we argue that Western leaders should start to take the self-protective operating system of Putin's leadership seriously—and to take it into account in their own policy-making.

In this regard, the developmental lens can help to see the bigger picture, that is, illumi-

nate the internal functioning of self-protective leadership and, on this basis, suggest adequate responses and ways forward toward a more successful cooperation. For example, it makes clear why communicating with a leader like Putin on the level of expert, achiever, or pluralist logics is bound to fail. It is inadequate because it takes for granted considerations, values, and behaviors that are not part of the self-protective mode of perceiving, evaluating, and doing things. Moreover, all developmental theorists agree that a person generally does not understand reasoning and/or behavior that is significantly more complex than (as a rule, more than one or two levels above) their own. As the second case study has shown, similar problems may occur the other way around. This is because social actors tend to view their own mental models as self-evident “general knowledge,” unless they display metasystematic thinking (Model of Hierarchical Complexity No. 13; [Commons, 2008](#)) or operate on the basis of an autonomous self-concept (according to the LMF; [Cook-Greuter, 2013](#)). The latter are the first reasoning logics able to understand, accept, and respect other systems of meaning making in their own right, that is, without projecting their own values onto them. Because metasystematic and autonomous perspectives are, roughly speaking, one level beyond the reasoning of typical “pluralist” meaning makers, these considerations should at least be theoretically accessible to them as a developmental goal.

So what does metasystematic political leadership mean in practical terms? And how would it likely deal with a colleague behaving in self-protective ways? Although developing more comprehensive and more detailed strategies in this regard is beyond the limits of this article, a few practical conclusions appear paramount here.

First, one has to start by treating self-protective colleagues as what they are, that is, accept the limitations, as well as the needs and the developing potential of this action logic. As outlined in this article, its major need is to receive respect and positive feedback from others, in order to stabilize its weak and fragile identity and self-concept. Its development goal is the next more complex, conformist (diplomat) action logic—and not

pluralist “Western” behavior. Consequently, in order to for one to invite and support conformist behaviors, the most effective incentives are expressions of respect, either for anything in the self-protective actor’s thinking, being, or behavior that really merits respect or for actually conforming to particular rules. Note that the aim here is not to make the self-protective actor conform to rules because of certain external incentives (that would merely confirm his opportunistic logic of reasoning) but by inner conviction, in other words, to generate an understanding that rules are important in social life as such, as a precondition for good interpersonal relations. Yet obviously, one of the major self-protective limitations is the restricted access to other, in particular to more complex, action logics, combined with a rather poor capacity for social perspective taking. Because this often causes behaviors that are perceived as antisocial (because they actually disregard fundamental social rules), the strategy of granting respect must be combined with strict sanctions for any “misbehavior,” that is, for overstepping the rules.

Although the first aspect has already been practiced to some extent by Western foreign politics, the necessity of the latter is apparently hardly understood at all. This, in turn, seems to be due to the (supposedly) dominant pluralist attitude in much of Western politics, with its strong impulse to tolerate differences in principle. However, if one makes concessions to a self-protective actor (which in some sense equals giving him respect) without clearly delineating the boundaries of what is acceptable (i.e., desirable in order to maintain this respect and/or to get even more of it), he will continue to test those boundaries until he gets what he ultimately wants: a clearer sense and delineation of who he is. Unfortunately, violating existing boundaries is the only strategy available to him for doing so, precisely because the (often implicit) codes of conduct that more complex action logics naturally share are not part of his universe. So in a nutshell, our recommendation for more successful cooperation with the current political leadership in Russia is to

- stop ignoring differences and take Putin for what he (according to his behavior) is: a self-protective leader;

- make crystal clear what the expectations toward him are—and insist on them being met if Putin wants to be taken seriously as a major player;
- combine these expectations with persistent “friendly pressure,” that is,
- give the maximum respect where respect is due but
- consequently sanction any “trespassing” of boundaries immediately;
- take potential threats seriously but not always literally, acknowledging the need behind them without giving up legitimate expectations and principles; and
- explain much more explicitly how Western reactions are linked to Putin’s behavior and that he himself is (co)responsible for both.

So far, mainstream political culture in Russia, strongly influenced by current political leadership, has not made the move toward conformist action logs. At the same time, the West does not have the same means to put pressure on her as did the Allies with regard to postwar Germany. However, we argue that in this situation, a developmentally informed understanding of political leadership can serve as a reliable “compass” that opens up more effective strategies of communication and cooperation with Russia and helps to avoid typical mistakes of the current ones.

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