

When War is Preferable to Peace: Russia, the Post-Cold War Settlement, and the Kremlin's Policy towards Ukraine

Yuval Weber

***Abstract:** War has been ongoing in Ukraine since 2014 with little end in sight. This article articulates the overlapping commitment problems that caused both annexation and conflict onset, and the persistence of frozen conflict thereafter. I argue that Vladimir Putin's "power vertical"—the domestic political dynamics of Russia—relies heavily on restoration of a great power status perhaps unprecedented in modern Russian history. That is, Putin needs to expand Russia's geopolitical reach to justify his domestic hold on power. The potential exit of Ukraine from Russia's proposed Eurasian hierarchical order would have limited Russia's foreign policy aims, which would threaten Putin's hold on power at home as that would make Putin the Russian leader who "lost" Ukraine from the perspective of the Russian elite. This article illuminating this intersubjective foreign and domestic policy aims that jointly required Ukraine joining the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and the consequences when that explicitly did not happen, including the imposition of a frozen conflict in eastern Ukraine.*

Introduction

Russia and Ukraine are fighting a war on the battlefield, across the information space, and in the economic arena over the extent to which Russia may shape Ukraine's foreign security and economic policies—as it has done for the last several hundred years. From the Treaty of Pereyaslav in 1654 onwards, wherein the Zaporizhian Host sought a treaty of protection with Russia to leave the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the relationship between Russia and