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# Russia's Security Policy under Putin

*A critical perspective*

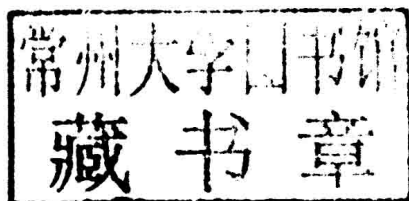
Aglaya Snetkov



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A critical perspective

**Aglaya Snetkov**



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# Russia's Security Policy under Putin

This book examines the evolution of Russia's security policy under Putin in the twenty-first century, using a critical security studies approach.

Drawing on critical approaches to security the book investigates the interrelationship between the internal-external nexus and the politics of (in)security and regime-building in Putin's Russia. In so doing, it evaluates the way that this evolving relationship between state identities and security discourses framed the construction of individual security policies, and how, in turn, individual issues can impact on the meta-discourses of state and security agendas. To this end, the (de)securitization discourses and practices towards the issue of Chechnya are examined as a case study.

In so doing, this study has wider implications for how we read Russia as a security actor through an approach that emphasizes the importance of taking into account its security culture, the interconnection between internal/external security priorities and the dramatic changes that have taken place in Russia's conceptions of itself, national and security priorities and conceptualization of key contemporary security issues. These aspects of Russia's security agenda remain somewhat of a neglected area of research, but, as argued in this book, offer structuring and framing implications for how we understand Russia's position towards security issues, and perhaps those of rising powers more broadly.

This book will be of much interest to students of Russian security, critical security studies and IR.

**Aglaya Snetkov** is senior researcher at the Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zurich, Switzerland and has a PhD in Russian and East European studies from the University of Birmingham.

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# Abbreviations

APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CS	Copenhagen School of Security
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EU	European Union
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OIC	Organization of the Islamic Conference
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
UN	United Nations
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
WTO	World Trade Organization
YUKOS	Yuganskneftegaz Kuybyshevnefteorgsintez



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# 1 Introduction

Although losing its superpower status with the end of the Cold War, Russia continues to be seen as a central player within international security. In recent years, for example, it has played a high-profile role in a number of pertinent security events, crises and developments. These include making use of its status as a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council to, alongside China, veto a number of UN resolutions on the Syrian civil war, the signing of the ‘new’ START agreement on nuclear arms reductions with the US in 2010, an armed conflict with Georgia over the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008, and most recently its role and actions during the 2014 Ukraine crisis, which saw the annexation of Crimea, and have led to the re-emergence of high-level tensions in its relationship with Europe and NATO.

In light of its continued, and often somewhat unpredictable and antagonistic, role within international security, understanding Russia as a security actor continues to attract attention. Indeed, the increasingly conscious effort by the Putin-led regime to take a more assertive line in its foreign security policy, and to reassert its ‘great power status’ in general, has been followed closely by both Russia-watchers and those interested in international security writ large (Mankoff 2012; Kanet 2011). In parallel, the internal political situation in Russia has also been a source of interest to the some of the same audiences, who have sought to understand the rise of the Putin regime, its political project and the extent of its control over all aspects of Russian life. In this way, the nature, and future trajectory, of Russia as both a domestic polity and a foreign policy actor remains a pertinent question for scholars, analysts and policymakers alike.

However, due to the divisions between academic disciplines, these two realms of interest – Russian foreign security policy and Russian domestic politics – have largely been treated separately from one another, creating an artificial divide between two facets of what this book sees as connected whole. The consideration of domestic and foreign policy as independent from one another is a trend that is noticeable – and increasingly recognized as problematic – with regard to scholarship on and the analysis of many state actors within the international system. It, however, seems particularly self-limiting for understanding and interpreting Putin’s Russia, in which the interconnections between the regime’s state-building project and both its domestic and foreign security policy

## 2 *Introduction*

have been publically asserted within official discourse, from the regime's first day in office through to its reactions to the mass-protests against the return of Putin to the Presidency in 2012.

Making Russia strong again – both domestically and internationally – was and, to a large extent, remains the stated prime objective of the Putin regime. The regime's efforts to this end have encompassed a domestic state-building project, efforts to both consolidate and expand the regime's power domestically, and regain the prestige of a 'great power' within the international system. And, as the Putin regime's policies, perceptions and reactions have evolved since 2000, there have been various shifts in its state-building macro-discourse, which, in turn, has both shaped, and been shaped by, changes in the self-identification and prioritizations of Russia as a security actor.

Taking this into account, this book sets out to investigate and account for the evolution of Russia's security policy since 2000, under the presidency of both Putin and Medvedev. It seeks to shed light on this subject by dispensing with the artificial separation of domestic and foreign policy. This study, rather, focuses on tracing the mutually-constituted relationship between Russian state identity and security discourses – both foreign and domestic – since Putin came to power. Not only does this study avoid the pitfalls of 'black boxing' the domestic from the foreign, and vice versa, by considering security policy in relation to the regime's wider state building political project, it also analyses domestic and foreign security policy as a coherent and interdependent whole around the internal-external security nexus.

To examine the mutually-constituted interrelationship between state identity and security prioritization discourses in Putin's Russia, this study traces its impact on a single security policy: Chechnya. And how, in turn, this single policy issue impacted on these macro-level discourses. By analysing this particular single-policy, this study aims to gain insight not only into this specific policy issue, but also how the interrelationship between state identity and security discourses impacted on, and was impacted by, the evolution of individual policy decisions and discourse. In this way, the ebbs and flows of Russia's discourses and policies towards Chechnya can be seen as illustrative of concurrent shifts in Russia's national state identity and security discourses and priorities.

On coming to power, the Putin regime depicted Chechnya as a major threat to the fundamentals of the modern Russia nation-state – its territorial integrity and national sovereignty, with the regime making direct connections between the 'Chechnya issue' and wider state identity and their political project to rebuild Russia from a 'weak' to a 'strong' state. Whilst no longer considered a pre-eminent security concern by the Putin regime, a strong emphasis on the wider regional instability and terrorism in the North Caucasus, of which Chechnya is an important part, remains evident in both state and security discourses. Taking this into account, this book seeks to explain how Chechnya's symbolic importance within Russian state identity and security discourses altered from representing an existential threat in the early 2000s to being held up as an example of a

wider trend of successful state-building by the end of the decade. In other words, it seeks to account for how the image of Chechnya changed from that of a *state-breaker* to *state-maker* in official Russian discourse under Putin and Medvedev.

Furthermore, this study's longitudinal approach will enable the changes and continuity within the nature of Russia as security actor since 2000 to be assessed. It will trace the interrelationships between all these discourses – state identity, internal security, external security and single policy issue – across this period. And thus provide a contextualized account of how they came together to shape Russia as a security actor at a particular time, and hence how changes in these discourses influenced one another, and ultimately impacted on Russian security policy. Therefore, rather than presenting Russia or the Putin regime as a more or less fixed entity as is often the case, this longitudinal approach reveals that the nature of Russia as a security actor has evolved in a much more dynamic manner than is usually suggested.

### **Moving beyond the external-internal divide in analysing Russian security policy**

There is an extensive body of literature on the directions, interests and priorities of Russian security policy under both Putin and Medvedev. Most of these studies are situated within the International Relations (IR) literature, and apply theories and concepts from this field to an empirical examination of Russian foreign and security policy. Such studies have focused on Russia's relations with the West in general (de Haas 2010; Kanet 2005), and its external relations with the US, NATO or the EU in particular (Hallenberg and Karlsson 2006; Trenin *et al.* 2008; Averde 2005; Kaveshnikov 2010; Pouliot 2010). Others are based on Russia's approach and role with regard to particular international security issue areas, such as the proliferation and reduction of nuclear weapons (den Dekker 2010; Cimbala 2009; Shoumikhin 2002), the international arms trade and arms control agreements (Lahille 2008), weapons of mass destruction (Tsyppkin 2009) or energy security (Dellecker and Gomart 2011; Wood 2009; Hadfield 2008; Proedrou 2007). In response to Russia's renewed interest in what it considers as its region, a number of works have examined Russia's external relations with other post-Soviet states in general (Freire and Kanet 2012; Pirchner 2005), and more specifically with regard to Central Asia (Paramonov, Stokov and Stolpovski 2009), the increasingly problematic relations with its Western neighbours of Ukraine and Belarus (Nygren 2005), and growing tensions with states in the South Caucasus, and Georgia in particular (Nygren 2007a). Within this body of works, there is an implicit assumption that Russian security policy is largely the product of the external, or the international, rather than the internal, or Russia's domestic, context.

While fewer in numbers, a series of studies on Russia's internal security context have appeared in recent years. These cover a wider-range of topics, including the nature and dynamics of the Russian military and its reform (Vendil 2009; de Haas 2004), the power and the influence of the *siloviki* in Russia (Renz

2006; Soldatov and Borogan 2010; Taylor 2007), the politics of security (Galeotti 2010) and questions of food and environmental security (Sedik *et al.* 2003; Funke 2005; Stuvøy 2010; Wegren 2011). Such works have highlighted the impact of corruption, elite politics, the inefficiency of Russian bureaucracy, the misuse of resources and structural constraints on internal security problems in Russia. They, however, largely considered the Russian domestic security context as distinct to the international context of Russian foreign security policy (Hedenskog *et al.* 2005).

Whilst both sets of work provide valuable insights into Russian security policy, they proceed from a self-imposed and artificial separation between the internal/domestic or the external/international spheres of the Russian policymaking context, resulting in assessments exclusively focused on one or the other. As such, the interconnections and interrelationship between the domestic and foreign contexts of Russian security policy remain under-analysed. This book seeks to contribute to this gap in understanding, by approaching its analysis of the evolution of Russian security policy since 2000 from a perspective that considers the domestic and foreign security policy contexts as interrelated around an internal-external security nexus, whereby the internal and external spheres impacts on, and are impacted by, one another. In this way, it seeks to make a contribution to the existent literature by providing a comprehensive account of the evolution of Russian security policy from 2000 to 2014.

### **A post-positivist account of the internal-external nexus in Russian security policy**

In large part, the self-governing and largely artificial separation between the internal and the external context within the analysis of Russian security policy stems from the fact that most studies take their theoretical lead from the realist perspective in IR. In contemporary IR, a structural realist perspective remains the default approach to analysis. Within such perspectives, states are treated as ‘black boxed’ units within an international system defined by anarchy, whereby the behaviour of and interaction between these units becomes the sole focus of analysis, with this being determined by the shifting balance-of-power or order within the system. In other words, developments inside state units are excluded from the analysis, and deemed irrelevant to the task in hand: analysis of the structural determinants governing state’s behaviour towards each other (e.g. Waltz 1979). Against this background, many studies of Russian security policy – either explicitly, or implicitly by virtue of the fact that they underlie many proclaimed a-theoretical works – take their lead from such assumptions, and thus focus on the external dimension and exclude the internal.

In recent years, and in large part seeking to escape this ‘black boxing’ of domestic factors, a number of studies have sought to provide a post-positivist reading of Russian security policy (Neumann 2005; Hopf 2005; Morozov 2008; Tsygankov 2005, 2007, 2013; Clunan 2009). Thus, rather than focusing on examining objective structural determinants of Russian security behaviour and

relationships with other actors, these works have sought to address post-positivist inspired research questions relating to how Russia interprets itself, others and the contexts in which its functions, and how this came to impact on certain policy decisions and actions. An illustrative example of how this approach to the analysis of Russian security policy switches the focus of investigation from 'why' to 'how' questions is that such studies are not interested in whether Russia is objectively a 'Great Power' within the international system, but rather in 'how' Russia has sought to construct its identity as based on being a 'Great Power', and, in turn, how this impacts on its security policy. Hence, the focus is on the nature and interrelationship between state identity and security, and the key principles, norms, discourses and parameters within this relationship (Lomagin 2007; Kassianova 2001; Hopf 2005; Williams and Neumann 2000). These studies demonstrate the way in which particular identity constructions – such as the example above of Russia as a 'Great Power' – enable, but also constrain, foreign and security policy options and outcomes (Clunan 2009; Tsygankov 2013).

However, as with positivist research on Russian security, most of these studies focus primarily on Russia's external security policy (Blum 2008; Neumann 2005; Morozov 2008; Tsygankov 2005, 2007, 2013; Clunan 2009), with the analysis approached from a foreign policy perspective. Hence, while the adoption of a post-positivist perspective opens up the possibility of extending the focus of investigation to include how domestic dynamics influence on foreign policy, and vice versa, the majority of these studies have taken a unidirectional focus: how domestic state identity shapes foreign policy. Therefore, there is a lack of post-positivist research on Russia's internal security policy in relation to its wider state and security agendas, and which traces the interrelationship between the internal and external security context in a bidirectional perspective around an internal-external security nexus. This book sets out to address this gap in post-positivist analysis of Russian security policy. To do so, it draws on insights from the Critical Security Studies research agenda that has emerged in recent decades, and in particular securitization theory.

### **Critical security studies in non-Western contexts**

Since the end of the Cold War, the Critical Security Studies research agenda has sought to introduce a greater range of issues, theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches to the study of security within IR (see Browning and McDonald 2011; Peoples and Vaughan-Williams 2010). Of particular relevance to this study, many of these works have focused on investigating the nature of domestic insecurities. Indeed, with a focus on issues such as terrorism (Jackson 2005; Closs Stephens and Vaughan-Williams 2009), modes of governance (Bigo 2002; Dillon and Reid 2001), biopolitics (Epstein 2007; Bell 2006; Elbe 2006), borders and migration (Hysmans 2006; Doty 2007; Salter 2006) and risk and resilience (Beck 2002; Aradau and Van Munster 2007), these studies have sought to challenge the traditional 'black boxing' of security as based exclusively on

external threats to states. Instead, these scholars ground their analysis within processes that take place within the domestic domains of states.

Until recently, this research agenda has only, by and large, been applied to European, North American and other 'Western' contexts. However, in recent years, there have been increasingly calls from within the Critical Security Studies community for a greater engagement with non-Western contexts and experiences (see Bilgin 2010; Vuori 2008, 2010; Wilkinson 2007). Indeed, reflecting the widespread academic focus on global order change and the growing role played by non-Western actors within this new order during the last decade, it is increasingly acknowledged that it is no longer sufficient to examine questions of global security primarily, or exclusively, through the experience of West (see Agathangelou and Ling 2009; Bilgin 2008; Hobson 2007; Barkawi and Laffey 2006). This realization is leading to a shift in the focus within IR, whereby the study of non-Western contexts and the position of non-Western powers is no longer deemed as 'alternative' or considered secondary to our reading and understanding of global security, but is now seen as at the very heart of it (see Zakaria 2011; Kupchan 2012; Murray and Brown 2012). Against this background, it is being increasingly suggested that Western theoretical models and labels designed for study of security should also take into account the positions, views and interests towards questions of security held within these non-Western contexts (Bilgin 2010; Vuori 2008, 2010; Wilkinson 2007; Acharya and Buzan 2007; Tickner and Wæver 2009; Shilliam 2010, Shani 2008; Barkawi and Laffey 2006; Agathangelou and Ling 2009).

More specifically, this book seeks to build on the securitization model of security, as put forward by Buzan and Wæver in their foundational text: *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (1998). According to the theory of securitization, all issues in official state discourse are either non-politicized (the state does not deal with it, and it is not an issue in the public debate), politicized (an issue that is part of public debate and policy) or securitized (an issue that is presented as an existential threat, and can be dealt with using measures outside normal politics), and 'any issue can end up on any part of the spectrum' (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998, p. 24).

Despite being the subject of vibrant and extensive theoretical debate over the last decade (McDonald 2008; Stritzel 2011; Van Munster 2007), the majority of both empirical and theoretical works using the securitization model have been based on cases from within Western, and particularly European, contexts. With some notable exceptions (e.g. Wilkinson 2007; Coskun 2008; Vuori 2008, 2010), few studies have tried to utilize the securitization model to investigate non-Western security contexts, or to refine the model theoretically on the basis of such cases. In addition, most works have focused on examining the securitization of an issue, while some have sought to analyse an initial desecuritization of an issue. There are, however, not many studies that have sought to examine the full cycle of (de)securitization, tracing an issue from its initial securitization through to its complete desecuritization. This study seeks to consider the full cycle of (de)securitization by investigating not only the precise moments of



securitization or desecuritization, but also the constituted processes, discourse and practices in between them.

In this context, this study represents an attempt to comprehensively operationalize theories and models from Critical Security Studies to the study of a 'non-Western' power. It argues that when operationalizing theoretical models of security in non-Western contexts – and in order to garner a more comprehensive reading of how actors such as the Russian state conceptualize their security policy – it is important to take into account not only the local contexts in which they operate, but also these actors' readings of statehood and security and the way in which their security principles and priorities evolve across time. In so doing, this book seeks to re-engage Critical Security Studies with the changing landscape of the IR discipline.

### Methods, sources and data analysis

In view of its post-positivist theoretical perspective, an inductive and qualitative analytical approach was adopted here. As noted by Checkel, post-positivists 'are committed to a deeply inductive research strategy that targets the reconstruction of state/agent identity' (Checkel 2004, p. 231). In other words, post-positivist research methodologies seek to faithfully reconstruct discourse within the context in which it was articulated. According to Bevir and Rhodes, researchers 'should treat data as evidence of the meanings or beliefs embedded in actions. They should not try to bypass meanings or beliefs by reducing them to given principles of rationality, fixed norms or social categories' (Bevir and Rhodes 2004, p. 203). Hence, only by reproducing the contextual normative significance of an actor's discourse, including its ideas and beliefs is it possible to fully comprehend their actions. Following this particular methodological assumption, discourse analysis should not only seek to 'recover agents' understandings in order to obtain an insider perspective on social life', but also 'put meanings into their intersubjective context' (Pouliot 2007, p. 365). Taking this into account, the aim of this book is to reproduce Russian official discourse by 'thickly inductive and empirical' discourse analysis (Hopf 2002, p. 3), so as to analyse this discourse according to the context in which it was articulated and from which it gains its meaning.

To illustrate the relationship between wider state and security agendas and individual security policies, the single 'case plus study' method (Hansen 2006) is adopted, by examining the evolution of a single case, in this case Chechnya, across an extensive period of time. In contrast to a neo-positivist use of case studies to test ideas or theoretical models deductively and provide verifiability of this study by replication in multiple cases or by a defined objective criteria (George and Bennett 2004, pp. 7–9), a single case study is here used in order to examine a particular subject in great detail. As argued by Hansen,

One might ask why one large case study rather than a series of smaller ones was chosen, and the answer is that while ... discourse analysis can be