

Three Threats to Putin's Regime: Democratic Threat, Military Threat and the Threat of War

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Abstract:

Putin's regime is considered one of the most powerful populist regimes in the world. This essay will explore the most significant threats to a populist regime such as Putin's. The essay will discuss three types of threats: democratic, military, and the threat of war. The democratic threat refers to the challenge of democratic forces to Putin's regime, while the military threat involves internal armed opposition to his rule. The threat of war encompasses the potential for foreign conflict and its associated side effects. Of these three, it is argued that the democratic threat poses the greatest risk to Putin's regime.

Keywords: Russia, Putin's regime, democratic threat, military threat, the threat of war

1. Introduction

Russia has always played a pivotal role in the international political arena. And in Russia's political map, the Putin regime has attracted widespread worldwide attention. The rise and stability of Putin's regime has not only profoundly affected Russia's domestic situation but has also caused ripples in the international community, bringing many challenges and potential threats. Since the beginning of the 21st century, political tensions in Eastern Europe have intensified, especially the recent Russia-Ukraine conflict, which has caused people to worry deeply about the future and impact of Putin's regime. In this article, we have mainly explored three types of threats. First, the democratic threat, which refers to the potential impact and challenge of democratic forces to Putin's regime; second, the military threat, which represents the internal risk that domestic armed forces may pose to Putin's regime; and finally, the threat of war, which is a threat posed by the possibility of external war and the possible chain effects of war. These three threats constitute multiple tests for the Putin regime and are a general concern to the international community. These threats are not siloed. They are closely linked. The external pressure of democratization on Putin's regime has gradually turned into a fierce external conflict, further exacerbating its challenges. Take, for example, the sanctions and diplomatic pressure imposed by the West on Russia, which not only exacerbates tensions between Russia and the international community but can also lead to a further escalation of external conflicts, posing a direct and imminent threat to Russia's national security. At the same time, external conflicts can evolve into

internal military threats, such as coups and other potential risks. External conflicts and tensions tend to exacerbate domestic political and social divisions, further shaking the stable foundations of regimes. These internal and external threats make the Putin regime face more complex and severe challenges in maintaining national security and political stability. Therefore, the Putin regime must carefully respond to these interrelated threats and seek a peaceful and stable solution by strengthening internal and external communication and cooperation to maintain the country's long-term peace and stability. Thus, the close linkage and interplay between democratic threat, military threat, and the threat of war represent a comprehensive challenge for the Putin regime. This article aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the manifestations of these threats and their implications for the Putin regime.

2. Democratic threat

The threat to democracy is a reality that cannot be ignored, as evidenced by color revolutions in the countries of the former Soviet Union. Since 2003, a series of color revolutions have erupted in the countries of the former Soviet Union, with the Orange Revolution being particularly eye-catching. This revolution achieved remarkable results in Ukraine in 2004, giving impetus to the democratization process in the country. By establishing democratic governments on Russia's periphery, these revolutions seriously threaten Putin's regime (Person and Faul, 2022). This threat lies in its direct political impact and the fact that it sets a vivid example for the Russian people. It proved that democracy was feasible in the former Soviet Union, which inspired the Russian people to yearn for and pursue

a democratic system of government. This yearning could lead the Russian people to fight for democracy, posing a potential challenge to Putin's regime and possibly triggering its downfall. In fact, since 2005, there have been a series of protests against the dictatorship in Russia, which have demonstrated the desire for democratization and dissatisfaction with the current regime. In 2011, the largest political protests in Russian history erupted, undoubtedly putting the Putin regime at risk of further rebellion (Person, 2017). In addition to the aforementioned revolutions, the Rose Revolution 2003 brought turmoil to the region. In this revolution, the democrat leader Mikhail Saakashvili succeeded in coming to power, a change that not only changed the country's political landscape but also caused deep concern among the Moscow elite. They fear that this wave of democratization could spread further and pose a direct challenge to Putin's regime (Horvath, 2011). These revolutionary events not only sparked a surge of democratic ideas in Russia by spreading democratic examples but also further weakened the image and status of Putin's regime. Giogia's democratic style of government gradually trickled into Putin's satellite state of South Ossetia, making Putin's regime less impregnable to the outside world.

The rise of this democratic force opens up the possibility of challenging Putin's regime and may even lead to its downfall. Another noteworthy case is the jeans revolution in Belarus in 2005. Dressed in jeans, a symbol of freedom and liberation, the protesters openly opposed Putin's ally, Belarusian dictator Alexander Lukashenko (Zarakhovich, 2006). This incident threatens the stability of Putin's regime and reveals the fragility of Putin's satellite government by setting an example of democracy. However, the situation in Ukraine and Georgia is different. After the democratization process, the two countries developed close relations with NATO, which undoubtedly limited the ability of the Putin regime to control these satellites by force. More seriously, this trend could prompt more countries to join NATO, posing a more immediate and serious threat to Putin's regime. Therefore, the Putin regime must face the challenges posed by these waves of democratization and find effective strategies to maintain its stability and security.

In the face of these diverse threats, the Putin regime has responded with a variety of tactics, including propaganda, youth movements, violent repression, political support, and military intervention. Putin's government has set up a youth movement called Nash, which aims to shape the public's negative perception of the revolution by spreading political ideas widely and highlighting the possible negative consequences of the revolution. At the same time, Putin's regime has actively portrayed the "Orange Revolution" and other democratic revolutions as prod-

ucts of Nazism and Western manipulation. These moves demonstrate the complexity and multifaceted nature of Putin's regime's response to threats to democracy, as well as its unwavering determination to maintain the regime's stability. Later, at the solemn "Victory Day" celebrations, Putin's regime orchestrated a massive rally of 60,000 people to highlight Putin's broad popular base and charisma. At this rally, Putin's regime skillfully portrayed his actions as righteous acts against Western colonial powers, thereby enhancing the sense of identity and belonging of the people at home to the regime (Horvath 2011). In addition to this, the Putin regime has also secretly used the power of nationalist activists, such as the Spartak football team, to violently suppress pro-democracy protesters. These nationalist thugs, with the connivance of the regime, inflicted brutal blows on pro-democracy protesters, seriously undermining the stability and harmony of society (Horvath, 2011). At the same time, Putin actively provides political support to Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko (Katherine, 2017).

After receiving Putin's endorsement, Lukashenko resolutely adopted heavy-handed measures, sending police and troops to violently suppress and arrest protesters, and maintained the stability of the regime with an iron fist. These actions not only demonstrate the Putin regime's resoluteness and ruthlessness in dealing with threats to democracy at home but also reveal its firm determination to maintain its own rule (Zarakhovich, 2006). In 2008, pro-Russian separatist forces in South Ossetia launched brazen attacks on the village of Giogia, and tensions erupted. As soon as the Georgia army tried to counterattack by force, the Russian army quickly intervened in the Georgia affair on the pretext of stopping a potential act of genocide (Osborne, 2008). In this conflict, the Russian ground forces showed great combat effectiveness, successfully defeating the Georgian army in only eight days. Despite Georgia's defeat in this conflict and its inability to join NATO (Katamadze, 2023), however, it remains steadfast in maintaining the functioning of a democratic government, continues to pose a threat to Putin's regime, and actively seeks closer ties with NATO. This incident highlights the complexity and brutality of regional conflicts and further demonstrates Georgia's firm determination to uphold democratic institutions.

In 2014, Putin's regime adopted a similar tactic, using military force and support for separatist rebels to intervene in the events in Donbass. This action led to the Minsk agreements that brought parts of eastern Ukraine under the control of pro-Russian rebels (Nuland, 2020). However, despite such challenges, much of Ukraine remains a democratic institution, which poses a constant threat to Putin's regime. As a result, Putin's regime launched a full-scale invasion in 2022 in an attempt to consolidate its control

in the region by force. However, the war continues, and Ukraine's democracy still stands. In general, the threat to democracy is a presence that the Putin regime cannot ignore. Although Putin succeeded in suppressing protesters and maintaining the stability of his regime during the 2005 protests, in 2011, his regime faced a huge challenge to political stability. This has also prompted these democracies to further disseminate democratic ideas, triggering widespread opposition. Furthermore, the threat of spreading democracy seemed to be continuous toward Putin's regime because Georgia is still democratic, and Ukraine is still democratic at this point. So, it is likely that Putin's regime will face political instability due to the continuous spread of democracy.

The last external threat to democracy comes from democratic organizations and states in Europe, the Middle East, and Russia's periphery. These organizations and countries, including the European Union, NATO, and the United States, pose a serious threat to Putin's regime by providing economic aid, arms support, and ideological support to actively prop up democratic forces that oppose the existing regime (Nuland, 2020). The European Union and the United States have provided substantial economic and ideological support to Ukraine and helped Ukraine build a solid democracy, including through aid for trade (Kavanagh, 2022). These initiatives provide Ukraine with the necessary funding and resources to maintain and develop a democratic government, which poses a continuing challenge to Putin's regime. Especially during the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022, Ukraine also received arms aid and support from Western countries. This allows Ukraine to equip itself with modern Western weapons to effectively confront Russia. This has weakened Russia's confidence in Putin's regime and facilitated the spread of democratic ideals across the wider region. In general, these external democratic forces have constantly challenged the authority and stability of the Putin regime by providing practical support and ideological guidance, exacerbating political tensions within Russia. These external democratic forces have provided ideological aid to Russia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East and spawned large-scale popular democratic protests in these regions. For example, between 2011 and 2014, mass protests erupted in Russia, while democratic movements such as the Arab Spring and color revolutions were in full swing across the globe (Person and Faul, 2022). These actions not only shook the foundations of the dictatorship of the former Soviet states but also posed a direct challenge to Putin's allies, which led to a significant decline in confidence in Putin's regime and even triggered the crisis of Putin's regime's collapse. At the military level, the intervention of democratic forces in the Middle East has also played a role in protecting democratic governments and organizations. These inter-

ventions may have weakened the stability of the regime in Putin's satellite states, such as Syria, further reducing confidence in Putin's regime and international support. This evolution of the situation may not only raise suspicion among the Russian public about Putin's regime but also stimulate the active anti-Putin forces in the country, thus posing a more serious threat to Putin's regime (Person and Faul, 2022).

Putin's regime has responded to these threats from outside democratic forces through military intervention, remilitarization, and cyber means. In the cases of Ukraine and Georgia, the Putin regime has taken decisive military action to safeguard its interests and security. In addition, Putin has intervened militarily in Syria through bombing and ground fighting, deploying troops to defend the Assad regime (Nuland, 2020). In response to the situation in Libya, the Putin regime has supported Syria with a bombing campaign that has forced the flow of refugees in Libya and Syria to threaten the United States, Turkey, and the European Union to withdraw from intervention, thus giving the Putin regime's friends a chance to survive. Thanks to the effective protection of the Assad regime, the strategic operation of the Middle East region was carried out smoothly. It is worth mentioning that the presence of the United States has helped the Putin regime to a certain extent. By protecting democratic forces, the United States indirectly weakens Assad's enemies, such as the Islamic State (Nuland, 2020), thereby strengthening the position of Putin's regime. This complex regional political landscape has boosted Putin's regime's international influence, further cementing its position domestically and internationally and making it appear more powerful and assertive. Putin also uses the Internet to attack policies and actions of the USA, E.U., and democratic powers and also to distract the election of the USA to make it unstable so democracy will not spread further in Russia and Europe. Which can protect his regime by undermining democracy (Nuland, 2020). Western powers reacted by introducing payment for advertising on Facebook and banning political advertisements on Twitter, but this failed (Meg, 2019). Putin's military success in Georgia can be linked to the newly developed weapons (Nuland, 2020).

Furthermore, Putin uses nuclear weapons (Kroenig, 2016) and new weapons (Nuland, 2020), threatening NATO and the USA to stop their intervention in Europe even if it does create a threat to NATO and weakens the power of influence of NATO, which crushes the confidence of democratic powers (Nuland, 2020). Hence, it brings power and stability to Putin's regime. Success can be shown NATO cannot directly intervene in the war in Ukraine (Bowman, 2023). However, NATO and the USA are prepared to act by developing new nuclear weapons to challenge Russia to keep its place as a democratic country to prevent the

threat of Putin's regime (Kroenig, 2016), which may stop the growth of confidence and power of Putin's regime. So, the democrats and anti-Putin power in Russia will have a greater chance of defeating Putin's regime. Overall, the threat of democratic Western countries and organizations is certainly threatful to Putin's regime because it can support the democratic countries around Putin's regime and his satellite states and the ability to spread democracy. But their threat is weak in defeating Putin's satellite state, such as Syria, and even helping it.

Moreover, most of the strategies adopted by the Putin regime in deterring Western forces have been remarkable. For example, by intervening in Syria and halting direct military operations against Ukraine, the Putin regime has effectively curbed the momentum of Western expansion in the region. However, despite the great efforts of the Putin regime, it has not been able to completely defeat Ukraine thanks to the continued assistance of Western countries. Although the Putin regime has achieved a certain degree of success in terms of Internet strategy, it also faces many challenges. Today, democratic ideology is still widely spread online, especially among young people (Lulican 2020). This trend could lead to a growing backlash against Putin's regime within Russia and its satellite states.

Thus, while the Putin regime has adopted several strategies to address external threats in several areas, the challenges remain daunting. How to effectively balance domestic stability and international pressure will be a problem that the Putin regime needs to seriously consider and solve in the future.

The pro-democracy Russians pose a threat to Putin's regime by voicing their opinions, organizing political actions, and disseminating anti-Putin news on the Internet within Russia (Denisova, 2016). The Internet differs significantly from offline communication, primarily due to the scarcity of surveillance, allowing anti-Putin activities to take place unhindered. The anti-Putin comments posted on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook pose a serious threat to Putin's regime, as they can foster opposition to his administration among the Russian public, weakening his grip on power and public support, ultimately leading to the collapse of his regime (Denisova, 2016). This is evident from the crowd inspired by these comments, who participated in the 2011 anti-Putin protest, a testament to the waning support and instability. Additionally, using the Internet to orchestrate political actions poses a further threat to Putin's regime, as it facilitates the organization and coordination of large-scale political actions, such as popular protests against Putin, that undermine his control and erode people's faith in his regime. This, in turn, leads to more anti-Putin actions that weaken his grip on the country, ultimately leading to his downfall (Denisova, 2016). The Internet has played

a pivotal role in organizing and coordinating several anti-Putin protests, notably the online protest in 2010 and the larger-scale demonstrations from 2011 to 2014. These actions were efficiently planned and executed through online platforms, posing a significant threat to Putin's regime. Furthermore, the Internet serves as a powerful tool for disseminating anti-Putin news, leveraging platforms like Twitter and Facebook to counter the propaganda perpetuated by Putin's administration (Denisova, 2016). This alternative narrative exposes the true nature of Putin's regime to the public, eroding their confidence and support and ultimately losing control over public perception. As a result, the regime risks losing its grip on power, paving the way for its eventual downfall. Putin's regime addresses these threats through the application of strict laws and the deployment of violent forces. In 2014, Putin tightened the Law of Extremism to combat "extremist" comments and videos critical of his regime. This included filtering content on YouTube, blocking comments or videos, and imprisoning those who posted them. By doing so, Putin's regime effectively curtailed the spread of anti-Putin ideas and prevented the organization of protest actions that threatened his control. Furthermore, the introduction of the Blogger Law in 2014 empowered the Russian government to delete any blog deemed unfavorable, thus suppressing negative news and commentary about Putin's regime. This strategy bolsters the regime's image as strong and positive among the Russian public, weakening support for political movements opposed to Putin. Putin's government resorted to violent means as well, employing official forces such as the OMON, internal troops, and the police to quash protests using water cannons, vehicles, and mass arrests. Many activists and organizers of the protests were detained, further suppressing dissent. These actions were highly effective in neutralizing the threat posed by the protests of 2011-2013. Despite the spread of democratic ideas in Russia, Putin's regime maintained its grip on power, demonstrating its success in crushing democratic protests. Overall, Putin's regime has been successful in managing threats to democracy. Large-scale democratic movements have been dismantled, and the protests organized and coordinated in 2011-2013 were successfully suppressed. While individual opponents and Western media outlets cannot be completely censored, they lack the power to mobilize a domestic anti-Putin movement capable of challenging the regime. Liberal/democracy-supporting governors or influential figures within the government pose another democratic threat to Putin. These individuals threaten Putin by leveraging their power to disseminate negative news about him within the government, influence the Duma through their capital, and assist Putin's opposition parties. This poses a significant threat to Putin, as it could potentially end his presidency

and limit his power by unifying government officials, swaying the Duma, and bolstering anti-Putin parties. By doing so, they aim to strip Putin of his dominance over the government and allow his true power to be exposed and controlled. Furthermore, the spread of anti-Putin news can influence the public and government officials, changing their perception of Putin and undermining his power. Mikhail Khodorkovsky is a notable example of someone who posed such threats to Putin. As a liberal-supporting oligarch and advisor to Yeltsin, Khodorkovsky used his oil and gas company to finance opposition parties like Yabloko and SPS in 2003. This united them against Putin, significantly threatening his reelection prospects and his control over the government. Khodorkovsky's actions emboldened other oligarchs to stay in power and limit Putin's control over Russia's capital and the Duma, further undermining Putin's regime. Khodorkovsky also hinted at Putin's potential manipulation of the 2008 election, strengthening public dissatisfaction with Putin and leading to widespread criticism. This threatened Putin's regime by creating a negative perception of him among the public, potentially leading to actions that would undermine his regime in future elections.

Putin combats the threat posed by influential individuals by appointing "uniformed autocrats," commonly referred to as "old comrades," to positions of power within the military and state secret services (Baev, 2004). This strategy allows him to replace democratic-leaning individuals within the government with those more supportive of his dictatorship and loyal to him due to their similar backgrounds. Additionally, it enables Putin to gain control of the violent sectors of the government, such as the FSB, and enforce his rule through force. In the case of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, for instance, the FSB and the police served as the force that investigated and arrested him (Baev, 2004). Overall, while the threat posed by democracy-supporting influential figures may seem significant, Putin has effectively neutralized it by employing "uniformed autocrats" to consolidate his power and eliminate these threats. However, it is arguable that Putin's actions have exposed his dictatorship to the public and government, leading to a decrease in support for him during the 2008 election. This, in turn, has contributed to the political instability of his regime, as evidenced by the subsequent protests (Baev, 2004).

3. Military threat

The Prigozhin mutiny threatens Putin by taking control of the military from Putin and physically threatening Putin. In June 2023, he led Wagners marching from Ukraine to Moscow, which he claimed was the „march of justice,“ to undermine the control of the military from the two generals led by Putin, general Shoigu, and General Gerasimov

(Roth, 2023). This threatens Putin; it might undermine Putin's control of the war and the military, leading to more Russian military forces mutiny due to his action paralyzing the commanding system and creating greater political instability. Furthermore, his action managed to create support in the Russian public because many Russians agreed with his opinion on the war due to the highlight the war is not just and Putin's „denazification“ is a lie (Roth, 2023). This might lead to anti-Putin activists gathering and forming political mobs and protesting against Putin, leading to regime instability. (Kurmanaev, 2023). Also, it is worth mentioning that Prigozhin's action might lead to him being able to rival Putin's place with his public support and his physical threat to Putin, such as the Wagner troops going to Moscow (Edele, 2023). His mutiny also weakened the image of Putin's regime because it showed Putin a lack of control of the army, which might lead to more mutinies.

Putin deals with threats by employing military forces, secret services, sanctions, and potential assassinations. When Wagner's forces marched towards Moscow, Putin ordered the Russian Air Force to attack them using helicopters, but three helicopters were shot down, resulting in a failed attack (Marten, 2023). Subsequently, Putin deployed FSB forces to stop Prigozhin, but they were also unsuccessful. Finally, Putin used Belarus to negotiate with Wagner and deported Prigozhin to Belarus, where he was possibly assassinated by blowing up the plane (Roth, 2023). Overall, the threat posed by Prigozhin is considerable, as he was poised to reach Moscow and challenge Putin's power by overcoming the armed forces attempting to stop him. However, even though Putin managed to stop him by deporting him and possibly assassinating him, Prigozhin's actions still garnered support from many Russians against the war and Putin's decisions. This strengthened his opposition and public actions against Putin, potentially leading to the downfall of his regime. The separatist force in Chechnya posed another significant military threat to Putin, as it exposed the weaknesses of his regime. In the 2000s, Putin's regime was not as strong as it is now. The existence of Chechnya separatists threatened Putin's ability to compete with the West in the „Counter-terrorism war.“ If he failed to conduct a successful military operation in Chechnya that could restore the pride of the army and the Russian government, his popularity would decline among the public and the military (Baev 2004). This could lead to political instability for Putin's regime; if he lost support from the public and the military, powerful generals might challenge his position, leading to a loss of power. Therefore, Putin needed to seize this opportunity to establish a new power base and a loyal Russian army, enabling him to pursue his conflicts with the West and maintain his presidency with the sup-

port of the generals.

Putin's regime employed various strategies to address the threat posed by the separatists, including engaging in a war against them. In 1999, Putin initiated the Second Chechen War aimed at defeating the Chechen militias. This endeavor restored the pride of the Russian military, thereby bolstering Putin's status (Baev, 2004). Nevertheless, it also gave rise to numerous challenges, such as the reliance on untrusted generals like Anatoli Kavshnin, Troshev, and Shamanov (Baev, 2004). Their strong influence within the army and the public threatened Putin's position as they capitalized on their power, potentially undermining his regime. However, Putin swiftly mitigated this threat by dismissing them from the military before the situation escalated.

Furthermore, the Chechen separatist forces retaliated against Russia by employing terrorist tactics (Baev, 2004). These actions aimed to undermine Putin's control over the public by creating chaos and fear. Putin responded by strengthening his grip on the Russian populace. Overall, the Chechen threat was not a significant obstacle for Putin. He successfully defeated the separatists and effectively managed the fallout from the war, including the issue of powerful generals. The side effects of the Chechen threat arguably strengthened Putin's power. The separatists' defeat bolstered his image, and he capitalized on the opportunity to halt the democratization of his regime, further consolidating his power under the guise of counter-terrorism (Baev, 2004).

4. Threat of war

War is the next type of threat to Putin. War threatens Putin by causing the public to oppose Putin due to economic problems. Since Russia joined the military operation in Syria, Russia's financial spending has largely moved to supporting military operations rather than improving the living conditions of Russian citizens (AA, 2016). The sanction by the West on Russia caused massive economic problems, such as unemployment and inflation, at the beginning of 2022, and protests happened every month. These were the biggest protests since 2014, and many protested due to inflation at the beginning of the war. The reason why this case threatens Putin is the same as the Syria case mentioned above.

Putin tackles this threat by using police force to suppress the protests and tackling the economic problem by trading with Eastern countries and employing people in the military-related sectors. Putin used similar tactics to tackle the public action in Russia as he used violent force to suppress them in 2011-2014, but at this time, it did not work that well. The protests continued rather than being pulled down. Putin also improves Russia's economy to solve the root problem by placing unemployment by conscription.

Furthermore, Putin increased trade with China, India, and Kazakhstan to improve the level of foreign which worked out quite well and led to a rise of GDP by 3% (Rascoe, 2023). However, Russia's economy is very fragile due to funding the ongoing Ukraine conflict, which leads to Russia abandoning institutions as a predictable tax system and escaping domestic and foreign capital (Rascoe, 2023). Therefore, the economy might collapse, leading to dissatisfaction with Putin's regime and more instability. Overall, the economic problem caused by the war is a reasonable threat to Putin's regime, even though the huge economic problem only occurred seriously at the beginning. However, there is a great potential threat that the economy could collapse, leading to domestic dissatisfaction toward Putin's regime and his downfall.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict threatens Putin, making it difficult for him to achieve his goals. Since 2014, Putin has begun to intervene in Ukrainian affairs, trying to establish a pro-Russian government to stop the spread of Ukrainian and foreign democratic forces in Russia and prevent Ukraine from becoming a base for foreign democratic forces such as NATO, thereby limiting Russia's power. In addition, Putin has implemented his political strategy by supporting Russian ethnicities around the world. However, the war poses a challenge to Putin's regime. Suppose Russia cannot defeat Ukraine, and Ukraine maintains its democratic government after the war. In that case, this will expose Russia to democratic forces, which could lead to the rise of anti-Putin and pro-democratic forces that would weaken Putin's regime. This threatens Putin's regime because if Russia fails to defeat Ukraine and Ukraine maintains its democratic government after the war, it will cause Russia to be exposed to democratic power, leading to anti-Putin and pro-democracy power to rise in Russia to undermine Putin's regime (Person and Faul, 2022).

Furthermore, suppose Russia fails to support all of Russia's diplomatic strategy. In that case, it will lead to a fall in Putin's image, leading to the decline of support for Putin in Russia, especially his key supporters, the nationalists in Russia. Also worth mentioning is if Ukraine won the war, it might join NATO quickly, skipping the MAP process (Reuters, 2023), which can strengthen Ukrainian's military power against Russia's further aggression in the future which consolidates the development of democracy, strengthening the threat of democracy to Putin's regime as mentioned above. Ukraine also provides a base for supporting the Russian democracy/ liberal forces by sending ideological and military support, which can be shown by the action of the anti-Putin militias of taking over the region of Belgorod and killing several Russian troops and vehicles during the Ukraine war (Harding, 2023). This weakens Putin's regime's control over its enemies, which increases their threat to Putin.

Putin's regime tackles the threat of Ukraine's military intervention, arms support to the rebels, establishing a strong image of Putin's regime, and trade with other pro-Putin countries (Person and Faul, 2022). Putin's regime tackles Military interventions, and arms support was used both in 2014 and 2022; in 2014, the rebels in Donbas were aided with light and heavy weapons, and in 2022 Russia supported the rebels in eastern Ukraine with even more heavy weapons. Military intervention was used in cases Putin secretly sent about 9000-12000 troops to Donbas in 2014(Reuters, 2015). In the 2022 Ukraine war, Russia sent about 900,000 military personnel to Ukraine to reach a full-scale invasion(Lillis, 2023). In 2014, it resulted in the defeat of the Ukraine government, which reached the Minsk Agreement to stop Ukrainian intervention toward Donbas (Nuland, 2020). In 2022, the action drags Putin's regime into a harsh, non-stopping war, which makes Putin's regime's power questionable. Putin also used a similar strategy in the Crimea crisis, in which he seized Crimea (Nuland, 2020).

Furthermore, Putin also attacked militias in 2023(Harding, 2023). Overall, democratic Ukraine is a reasonable threat to Putin's regime. Even Putin reached an easy victory in 2014, and the action against the anti-Putin militants, Ukraine in 2022 is nowhere near defeat. This led to the fall of the strong image of Putin's regime, so democratic and anti-Putin power rose in Russia, which led to the fall of Putin's regime.

The war threatens Putin by introducing political and social dissatisfaction toward Putin. Many Russians do not support the Russian-Ukraine war due to political beliefs and social problems such as the massive conscription. This threatens Putin's regime because it can damage Putin's image by showing to the public that Putin's regime is making the wrong decision of starting the war. Since February 2022, there have been several anti-war protests all across Russia. A mixture of protesters joined the protests due to political or social reasons: liberals, communists, anarchists, family members of soldiers, and other individual oppositions. There was a mixture of reasons why they joined the protest; the liberals, relatives of military members, and individual oppositions stated Putin mistreated their family members in the front, while others stated other reasons(Vogel, 2022). This threatens Putin's regime because it will lead the public to question the work the regime had done, which will lead to the public supporting other electors; therefore, Putin's presidency ends.

Putin deals with those threats by oppressing the protests with violence, arresting protesters, propaganda the war, and purging out threatening electors. Putin arrested 13789 protesters since February (Vogel, 2022), but the protest is still carrying on, which shows this strategy is useless. Putin also uses propaganda to portray his politi-

cal correctness of invading Ukraine to gain support from the general public, which can undermine the distraction of the anti-war protests(Rizzuto and Hink, 2023). Putin mainly uses speeches to spread his ideas; he portrays the hostility of the Western powers and Ukraine to Russia and describes the war as a justice war against Nazis and the Western „threat“ toward Russia in Ukraine (Rizzuto and Hink, 2023). Putin's regime also (Mahon, 2023) imposed censorship by deleting negative news about the war with the excuse that it is „fake news“.

Furthermore, foreign news such as VOA, Free Radio of Europe, and BBC prevent negative news from spreading, which ensures public support for his regime (Reuters, 2022). This action was particularly successful because it can block some Russians from viewing them, not the ones with VPNs. However, it still limits the spread of negative news to achieve the majority's support. Putin also arrested threatening anti-war electors such as Yekaterina Duntsova to prevent the spread of anti-war ideas and the potential threat of losing the election due to the presence of anti-war electors(Jazeera, 2023). Overall, the threat of political and social dissatisfaction raised by war is worth questioning because the majority still managed to support Putin's regime due to successful propaganda and censorship, even though there was a presentation of causing problems in the election by purging other electors he will still manage to win the election. However, the spread of anti-war and anti-Putin ideas in the young might still be able to cause a generation of opposers in the future.

5. Conclusion

Putin's regime is considered one of the most powerful populist regimes in the world. This essay identifies three main threats to Putin's regime: democracy, military, and the threat of war. Upon evaluating these threats, it becomes evident that democratic threats pose a significant challenge to Putin from various angles and possess considerable power. Unlike certain military threats that can be addressed with force, the strength behind democratic threats, such as those posed by the USA and NATO, are beyond Russia's capacity to handle. Additionally, it could be argued that the threat posed by Prigozhin is equally formidable due to physical intimidation and public support generated. However, Putin has managed to address this threat effectively; evidence shows that he continues to enjoy majority public support, mitigating this threat. While short-term war may present a serious challenge for Putin, the public has not had an opportunity for direct action against his regime due to election control. It is also worth noting that despite failing to fully invade Ukraine and thereby posing a military threat, democracy remains resilient or even grows stronger as a result of such actions. Arguably, the fundamental cause of military threats like

those seen in Ukraine lies in the spread of democracy - making democratic threats ultimately more potent than any other challenges faced by Putin. Even when considering historical instances of democratic threats before 2004 or during 2011-2014, when Putin's power was less entrenched, these periods presented greater opportunities for cracking his regime - rendering them more threatening overall. Despite Putin's efforts to neutralize some of them, the overarching trend indicates that democracy is still gaining ground in Russia. This threatens Putin's regime in the long term, potentially weakening its control and support and ultimately leading to his downfall. Furthermore, Putin's strained relationship with the West is exacerbating this threat. Democratic forces will likely receive increased support from the West, further undermining Putin's dictatorship and contributing to political instability within his regime.

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