

The research project "**Russia's foreign policy in 2014-2022: narratives and factors behind the Kremlin's international decisions**" is a response to wide-ranging discussions in the field of International Relations on the processes shaping Russia's foreign policy. For more than a decade, Russia's international behaviour has been becoming increasingly aggressive, leading to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Why President Putin decided to make such a risky move, which may lead to the collapse of his, so far stable, regime and more broadly, which factors shaping Russia's foreign policy were of decisive importance? Although Russia's foreign policy has been broadly analysed, factors behind the Kremlin's decisions continue to be the subject of heated debates among analysts. There are numerous explanations that point to various important factors, but shortage of approaches which try to combine these different factors together and explain the relationships between them. Indeed, the nexus of changing external environment and internal circumstances is not clear from the existing studies. Likewise, the relationship between ideational factors (nationalism, dominant ideology) and changes in foreign policy decision-making processes is also understudied. This project aims to address these gaps and answer the following research questions:

- What were the main narratives and key factors shaping Russia's foreign policy in 2014-2022?
- How the mechanisms of interaction between these factors were shaped?
- How did the narratives and factors shaping Russia's foreign policy in 2014-2022 evolve leading to a full-scale invasion of Ukraine?

The project applies a multi-level theoretical framework based on role theory, which allows the identification of main narratives and the combination of various factors in the analysis and incorporation of domestic and external expectations and their interactions. For example, I want to examine the interdependencies between external (rhetoric and actions of the West, changing situation in Ukraine) and internal factors (the regime's weakening legitimacy, increasing authoritarianism, loosening control of the information sphere besides television) as well as their relationship with foreign policy-making processes (shifts among Putin's advisers, his increasing isolation potentially leading to miscalculations and incomplete information) and common perceptions among the elites (the NATO threat, the international system being seen as increasingly unfavourable to Moscow's interests), to understand how the importance of these individual factors changed, how they drove each other, and ultimately shaped Russia's foreign policy.

Given the multi-causal framework, the study combines different sources of data (statements of Russian and Western leaders supplemented with in-depth interviews with Russian analysts and scholars) and two qualitative data analysis methods: narrative analysis and process tracing. The first method will allow me to shed light on the representation of foreign policy problems and Russia's international duties by decision-makers and the range of foreign policy decisions that become possible by narrative constructions. Process tracing will be useful in identifying particular elements and explicate how they were relevant to the process, what did they change and make certain decision (im)possible, thus allowing to understand how the combination of different mechanisms led to specific decisions. Thus, it will help me to trace mechanisms between the evolution of different factors and the understanding of Russia's roles, and to analyse how particular roles translated into foreign policy behaviour.

The analysis of four events will be helpful in answering the research questions: limited war in Donbas; intervention in Syria; the 2017-18 period of "non-escalation" and toned-down nationalist narrative (during which Russia did not intervene after the pro-democratic Velvet Revolution in Armenia); and the invasion of Ukraine. All four case studies are relatively recent events allowing the investigation of factors shaping Russia's foreign policy in last years, and may be considered examples of intervention and "non-intervention". If Russia was ready for limited intervention in Donbas in 2014 and for the intervention in Syria in 2015, why it did not invade Ukraine on a full-scale earlier, e.g. following the successful annexation of Crimea? On the other hand, from the 2022 perspective, 2014 and the limited incursion on Donbas can be considered a case of "non-intervention", which raises the question of the most important factors that changed over this period and the role of the 2017-18 interlude. The analysis will not only allow for a better understanding of the individual decisions in all four cases, but primarily of the trajectory of Russia's foreign policy helping to understand the mechanisms of interaction between and impact of various factors shaping it.

Particularly noteworthy is the one-term fellowship at the University of Oxford, which will allow for collaboration and consultations with experts dealing with Russian politics there. In addition, study visits to leading British and French universities (University of Edinburgh and Sciences Po Paris) are planned to discuss preliminary conclusions with experts on Russian foreign policy, foreign policy analysis and role theory. Research findings will be presented and discussed at the International Studies Association's annual conventions and special seminars in Oxford, Edinburgh, Paris, and Warsaw. To reach policymakers and transfer the knowledge, I will also aim to engage with various think-tanks (OSW, Ifri). The results of the conducted research will be published in international journals, and the final goal of the project is a monograph published in Routledge or another reputable publishing house.