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All the World's a Stage, and Sanctions the Merely Props: an Interactional Account of Sender-Target Dynamics in the Ukrainian Crisis

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ABSTRACT

This article argues that sanctions are interactional tools; their interactive nature is evident if these measures are considered as a form of stigmatization, which is the outcome of an interaction between the group imposing the stigma and the actor that is stigmatized. Stigmatized states do not always accept the label that is placed upon them and can adopt strategies to counter or resist stigma. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, this can be understood as a state's foreign policy role. Such an approach is illustrated through a study of Russia's response to being sanctioned by the EU and the US for its policies in the Ukrainian crisis. It is argued that Russian leaders are unlikely to cave into Western pressure because they reject the role of deviant that is placed upon their state and instead adopt the role of the 'untouchable' state, which is consistent with Russia's great power identity. Though the sanctions may enable the EU and the US to activate their roles as normative powers, in the context of the Ukrainian crisis, they have locked the parties into roles that contribute to the crisis' duration.

KEYWORDS Symbolic interactionism; foreign policy roles; sanctions; Ukrainian crisis

Introduction

Sanctions are ubiquitous in international relations; they are adopted by a multitude of actors, can target various actors, come in numerous forms, and serve multiple purposes. Perhaps because of this diversity, these policy tools have been analysed from various angles. The present article approaches sanctions from a symbolic interactionist perspective. It is argued that unilateral sanctions are interactional tools, in the sense that they enable the sender to affirm its identity and adopt a role in its

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interactions with other actors.¹ This is most easily demonstrated by their stigmatizing function.

The European Union (EU) adopts restrictive measures under its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).² They are adopted in order to, *inter alia*, 'influence policies violating international law or human rights, or policies disrespectful of the rule of law or democratic principles'.³ Similarly, the previous Secretary of Treasury of the United States (US) remarked that: 'the underlying goal of all sanctions is an effort to change behaviour. Sanctions [...] are forward-looking, intended to keep illicit or dangerous conduct out of our system and create pressure to change future behaviour'.⁴ As defined here, sanctions would be adopted for their coercive purpose; their goal would be to change the target's behaviour. Inasmuch as coercive sanctions are adopted in response to 'illicit' behaviour that violates international norms, they also signal the EU and the US's commitment to the norm breached and stigmatize the target for wrongful behaviour.⁵

Stigmatization is the product of 'interaction between a particular audience of normals [which is the group that attempts to impose stigma] and a transgressive individual or group'.⁶ As Gomez and Nivet write, sanctions are demonstrative of the environment within which they are adopted as well as the roles adopted by the actors involved.⁷ According to symbolic interactionism, 'roles' are an actor's social positions within a group. They are the link between identity and action. For instance, the EU plays the role of a 'liberal norm enforcer', activating its identity as a 'normative power',⁸ through the adoption of restrictive measures in response to violations of civil and political human rights. This enables the organization to demonstrate its identity as a civil and liberal power⁹ as it affirms these corresponding norms' importance

¹Hellquist, "Creating 'the Self' by Outlawing 'the Other?"; see also Hellquist, "Regional Organizations and Sanctions Against Members," focusing on the 'conceptual understandings' regional organizations articulate about themselves and their regions through their sanctions' policies. Jaeger's definition of coercive sanctions as relational phenomena is different; he focuses on the meaning given to sanctions and their communicative purpose in conflict. See, particularly, Jaeger, *Coercive Sanctions and International Conflicts*, chapter 3

²Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the European Union [2016] OJ C202/13, Article 21(1).

³European External Action Service, 'Common Foreign and Security Policy' (CFSP) <https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/sanctions-policy/420/common-foreign-and-security-policy-cfsp_en>.

⁴Remarks of Secretary Lew on the Evolution of Sanctions and Lessons for the Future at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace' (30 March 2016) <<https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl0398.aspx>>.

⁵Though the paragraph focuses on sanctions' coercive and signalling/ stigmatizing functions, the present author is not unaware that sanctions serve multiple functions in international relations. Consider, e.g., Giumelli, "The Purposes of Targeted Sanctions"; Baldwin, "The sanctions debate and the logic of choice"; Eriksson, *Targeting Peace*, 9–14.

⁶Adler-Nissen, "Stigma Management in International Relations," 152. See also Zarakol, "What Made the Modern World Hang Together," 314.

⁷Gomez & Nivet, "Sanctionner et punir," 65. See also Brunnée and Toope, "Persuasion and Enforcement," 294–5.

⁸Manners, "Normative Power Europe"; see also Wagner, "Liberal Power Europe".

⁹Delcourt, "Au nom de quoi sanctionner et punir?" 83.

in the international legal order,¹⁰ thereby indicating they constitute ‘normal behaviour’.¹¹ If sanctions enable a state or, in the case of the EU, a regional organization to affirm its identity, they also put the target in the position of having to affirm its own identity as it decides which role to adopt in response to being sanctioned.

In order to illustrate this mechanism, the sanctions adopted by the European Union and the United States against the Russian Federation for its policies in Ukraine are used as a case-study. The sanctions are situated within the sender-target dynamic, though the focus is primarily on the role Russia has adopted in response to being sanctioned by the EU and the US. It will be argued that the sanctions enable the EU and US to activate their roles as enforcers of fundamental principles of international law, which emerge from their identities as normative powers and their interactions with ‘Others’ they cast in the complementary role of ‘norm transgressor’. In response to being sanctioned, Russia has adopted the role of an ‘untouchable’ state, in tune with its ‘great power’ identity. Though the sanctions may demonstrate the senders’ commitment to the norm that has been violated and demonstrate they are ‘doing something’, in the context of the Ukrainian crisis, they have locked the parties into roles that contribute to the crisis’ duration.

As such, the added value of this article is twofold. It first demonstrates the explanatory value of a symbolic interactionist approach to sender-target dynamics. By demonstrating their interactional function, the article adds to the literature that has drawn attention to sanctions’ relational purposes in international relations.¹² The caveat is that the findings are specific to the EU/US-Russia interaction within the context of the Ukrainian crisis; clearly, not all sender-target dynamics will lead to the same outcome. That being said, by focusing on Russia’s response to being sanctioned by the EU and the US, the present findings also provide insight into Russia’s foreign policy role in the Ukrainian crisis. Before proceeding with our analysis, a brief introduction to our case study is necessary.

The Ukrainian crisis began when then Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich postponed an association agreement with the EU in favour of closer ties with Russia in November 2013. If at first this move provoked minor protests, the situation steadily escalated as the clashes between protesters and the riot police became increasingly violent. Ultimately, the protests led to the flight of President Yanukovich, allowing the opposition to take power during the final week of February 2014. It is at this time that Russian military personnel began to support eastern Ukrainian rebels and were reportedly seen in Crimea.¹³

¹⁰Hofer, “Negotiating International Public Policy”.

¹¹Manners, “Normative Power Europe,” 239: a normative power acts to ‘shape conceptions of normal’.

¹²*Supra* note 1.

¹³For a timeline see: Ruys and Verlinden (eds), “Digest of State Practice, 1 January – 30 June 2014,” 324–40.

The sanctions against Russia encompass asset freezes and travel bans against Russian individuals and private entities, sanctions targeting Russia's financial and energy sectors, as well as a ban on arms, related materials and dual-use goods. The EU and US first adopted sanctions in March 2014, in reaction to Russia's violation of Ukraine's territorial and sovereign integrity in breach of the United Nations (UN) Charter Article 2(4), which includes Russia's support to rebels in the Donbass region of eastern Ukraine and its annexation of Crimea.¹⁴ They also coordinated diplomatic sanctions, including Russia's exclusion from the G8. The US first adopted sanctions on March 6, 2014 through Executive Order 13660. Further measures were adopted on March 17, 2014, this time by both the EU and the US, following the referendum held in Crimea on reunification with the Russian Federation. This did not prevent Russian President Vladimir Putin from announcing the annexation of Crimea on March 18.¹⁵ Additional sanctions were adopted in August 2014 in reaction to of the Malaysian Airlines flight MH17, of which Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine are believed to be responsible.

According to a statement by the Presidents of European Council and of the European Commission, the sanctions' objective is to send a 'powerful signal to the leaders of the Russian Federation: destabilising Ukraine, or any other Eastern European neighbouring state, will bring heavy costs to its economy' and will cause Russian isolation.¹⁶ 'Sending a powerful message' that behaviour will lead to the imposition of costs and isolation is illustrative of the sanctions' signalling and coercive functions. As argued in the following section, the sanctions are tools that enable the EU and US to adopt a normative role in the Ukrainian crisis and to demonstrate that they are 'doing something'. Moreover, the lifting of the measures is dependent upon Russia's implementation of its obligations under the February 2015 'Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements' – also known as the Minsk II Agreements, which was intended to supplement the Minsk Protocol of September 5, 2014 – and its contribution to the peaceful settlement of the dispute with Ukraine,¹⁷ thereby indicating a change in Russia's behaviour is required. The Package of Measures calls for, amongst others, a ceasefire, the withdrawal of heavy weaponry and foreign-armed formations, military equipment and mercenaries.¹⁸ By linking the lifting of the sanctions to the Minsk II

¹⁴The White House (archives), "Readout of President Obama's Call with President Putin"; "Statement by the Press Secretary on Ukraine"; European Council, "Extraordinary meeting of EU Heads of State or Government on Ukraine," para. 3.

¹⁵*Prague Post*, "Full Text of Putin's Speech on Crimea."

¹⁶European Council, "Statement by the President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy and the President of the European Commission."

¹⁷The question that arises is whether the Minsk II Agreements are legally binding. We will not address the legal character of the Agreements here; instead it suffices to say that the EU considers that the Agreements are a means through which Russia can cease its alleged wrongful act in Ukraine. Consequently, at the very least, the Agreements are a policy tool that aims at enforcing international law.

¹⁸*The Telegraph*, "Minsk Agreement on Ukraine Crisis: Text in Full."

Agreements, sanctions relief is tied to the Kremlin's behaviour in the context of conflict in the Donbass region, in spite of the fact that the measures were also imposed in response to Russia's annexation of Crimea.

A report published by the Graduate Institute of Geneva finds that, if sanctions were considered 'somewhat successful' at providing access to the MH17 crash site, removing some weaponry from Eastern Ukraine and at bringing Russia to the negotiation table during the second Minsk rounds, 'since the sanctions were explicitly linked to implementation of key provisions of the Minsk II process, they have proven ineffective in coercing Russia to withdraw all equipment and personnel from eastern Ukraine'.¹⁹ On the other hand, according to the report, the sanctions have been most effective in signalling 'to Russia and the world the consequences of violating norms on territorial integrity, international humanitarian laws, and the resolution of conflict through internationally convened and supervised negotiations'.²⁰ Hence, the sanctioners have been successful in stigmatizing Russia within their audience, though over time the signal may weaken as sanctions fatigue sets in.²¹ The report does not address Russia's rejection of being labelled as a deviant. As argued below, instead of accepting the role that is placed upon their state, Russian decision-makers have adopted a role that is consistent with their country's identity as a 'great power'. This role guides the Russian government in adopting policies that enable it to resist external influence, i.e. the pressure imposed through sanctions, and to 'bite back' where necessary. The outcome is a sanctions tit-for-tat between Russia and the sanctions senders. Instead of contributing to resolving the Ukrainian crisis, these policy instruments have locked the senders and the target into conflict-based roles,²² thereby impeding a transition towards a peaceful settlement of the dispute.

In the following section, we outline the proposed 'interactional approach' to unilateral sanctions before applying it to Russia's response to being targeted by the EU and the US.

The Roles States Play: Situating Sanctions within the 'Sender'-'Target' Interaction

It is often recalled that sanctions do not work 'in isolation' or that they do not 'exist in a vacuum'.²³ This generally means taking into account other policy tools, such as diplomatic measures, that are applied to the situation. Here we

¹⁹Moret et al., "The New Deterrent?", 11.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²²Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of it."

²³Biersteker, Tourinho and Eckert, "Thinking about UN Target Sanctions", 30; Moret et al., "The New Deterrent?", 10. See for example European Council, "Sanctions": '[restrictive measures] are used by the EU as part of an integrated and comprehensive policy approach, involving political dialogue, complementary efforts and the use of other instruments at its disposal.' Emphasis in original. Accessed 23/10/2017.

add that it requires placing sanctions within the interaction between the sender and the target. An ‘interaction’ involves reciprocal action and communication between two or more actors that each play different social roles. Wendt’s *Social Theory of International Politics* is generally credited for introducing this process to international relations:

Given cause to interact in some situation, actors need to define the situation before they can choose a course of action. These definitions will be based on at least two considerations: their own identities and interests, which reflect beliefs about who they are in such situations; and what they think others will do, which reflect beliefs about identities and interests.²⁴

Two states, ‘Ego’ and ‘Alter’, interact and express their identities and interests through roles and counter-roles. After assessing a social situation, Ego adopts a particular role and casts ‘Alter’ in a corresponding counter-role that makes Ego’s identity meaningful.²⁵ Wendt’s understanding of roles is inspired by symbolic interactionism, in particular the work of Herbert Mead.²⁶ McCourt’s symbolic interactionist account of roles also draws from Mead:

Since identity affirmation is dependent on role-playing, and impossible without it, states choose to enact roles such as ‘leader’ or ‘reliable ally’ in particular situations in order to make their identity affirming behaviour in international politics meaningful.²⁷

In other words, roles enable states – or, in the case of the EU, regional organizations – to put their identity in action in world politics. They stem from identities, which is a consistent sense of self, and emerge through interaction. Holsti defines roles as ‘policy-makers own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis’.²⁸ In brief, roles allow actors to make sense of their social situation and to choose the most appropriate course of action,²⁹ such as, for instance, the adoption of sanctions in response to what is understood as a violation of international law.

The fact that the EU’s restrictive measures enable it to affirm its identity comes across in the preamble to the Treaty on European Union (2012), according to which the CFSP: ‘reinforc[es] the European identity and its

²⁴Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, 186–.

²⁵Ibid, 329. On Ego and Alter’s interaction, see generally *ibid*, 326–35.

²⁶For a critique of Wendt’s ‘constructivism’, see Adler-Nissen, “The Social Self in International Relations”, drawing from Palan, “A World of Their Making.”

²⁷McCourt, “Role-playing and Identity Affirmation,” 1600. See also *ibid*, 1608.

²⁸Holsti, “National Role Conceptions,” 245–6, quoted in McCourt, “The roles states play,” 374, who also note Holsti’s limited conception of international roles.

²⁹McCourt, “Role-playing and Identity Affirmation,” 1607; McCourt, “The Roles States Play.”

independence in order to promote peace, security and progress in Europe and in the world'. Hellquist has argued that the EU constructs its identity and the identity of 'Others' through the adoption of restrictive measures, which are part of the CFSP toolbox.³⁰ Another way to consider this practise is that implementing sanctions enables the EU to play the role of the 'norm enforcer' – therefore activating what Manners has coined EU's identity as a 'normative power', which is an actor that is able to shape the conception of 'normal'³¹ – and casting the target into the complementary role of 'norm transgressor'. Importantly, norms are also related to roles, in the sense that 'norms apply to some states and not others for role-related reasons'.³² For example, an actor's interpretation of human rights depends on the role it adopts in its international relations. This comes across in the EU's sanctions practice, which affirms the organization's commitment to civil and political human rights, a *liberal* interpretation of norms. As an analytical tool, 'role' also helps explain third-party alignment with the EU's restrictive measures against the Russian Federation. According to Hellquist, '[t]he EU uses alignment as a litmus test of neighbours' normative fidelity, in order to promote its own posture as an international actor' and to label Russia as a 'rogue'.³³ Third-party alignment constitutes 'normative boundary-drawing',³⁴ it is a practice that communicates who is 'good' and who is 'bad', who is valued and who is excluded, within the normative order promoted by the EU. Alignment with the EU's restrictive measures is indicative of whether its neighbours accept its normative role. For Hellquist, the EU has been unsuccessful in garnering support for its position within the context of the Ukrainian crisis; 'by resisting aligning, [third countries] contest the EU's claim to normative primacy in terms of both its leadership and its policy choice'.³⁵

The United States provides another illustration of how sanctions are interactional and identity affirming tools. During his final press conference, former President Barack Obama stated that the US' response to the crisis in Ukraine 'is a good example of the vital role that America has to continue to play, around the world, in preserving basic norms and values'.³⁶ He continued to say:

in every multilateral setting in the United Nations, in the G-20, in the G-7, the United States typically has been on the right side of these issues and it is

³⁰Hellquist, "Creating 'the Self' by Outlawing 'the Other?"; Hirsch, *An invitation to the sociology of international law*, 109–16.

³¹Manners, "Normative Power Europe." Whether the EU is acting in a 'normative' way through the adoption of restrictive measures is not addressed here.

³²McCourt, "The Roles States Play," 371.

³³Hellquist, "Either with Us or against Us?" 999.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵*Ibid.*, 1015. Note that Russia has not been more successful than the EU in gathering support, as explained by Hellquist.

³⁶*New York Times*, "Obama's Last News Conference"

important for us to continue to be on the right side of these issues because if we, the largest, strongest country and democracy in the world, are not willing to stand up on behalf of these values, then certainly China, Russia and others will not.

Obama defined the US as a normative power³⁷ in contrast to, *inter alia*, China and Russia who are placed in the role of actors who will not act to preserve 'basic norms and values', at least as they are understood by the US. Importantly, Russia and China both reject unilateral coercive measures, which they consider to be incompatible with their vision of the international legal order.³⁸ States that contest unilateral coercive measures invoke the importance of social and economic rights, which in their view are illegitimately constrained by unilateral sanctions. They also express a preference for multilateral practices that rest on the principles of sovereign equality and the peaceful settlement of disputes.³⁹

The above-quote from Obama is indicative of the US' role as a member of the 'audience of normals', which, based on Adler-Nissen's account of stigma, refers to actors that attempt to impose stigma, such as sanctions' senders.⁴⁰ In so doing, they give themselves a position of normative authority and make themselves responsible for upholding fundamental norms. The EU and US play a similar role when they pressure states to apologize for past wrongs, such as pushing Turkey and Japan to respectively apologize for the Armenian Genocide and atrocities committed during World War II. As Zarakol writes, Western states' pressure to apologize often stem from their 'own self-narratives and ontological security [which] direct them to take up leading *roles* in condemning past and present transgressions against human rights'.⁴¹ Her explanation is based on ontological security – to have a consistent sense of self and to have that self affirmed by others⁴² – but this does not mean that the concept of 'role' has no explanatory value (and notice how Zarakol herself uses the word). Rather, the two notions should be understood as complementary. Mitzen defines ontological security as routinized relationships with significant others and an actor's attachment to those relationships, even if these dynamics are based in conflict and can lead to physical insecurity.⁴³ It is submitted here that adopting a particular role and casting others in commensurate roles is a means through which an actor not only affirms, but also maintains a consistent sense of self. Once an actor depends on a

³⁷Diez, "Constructing the Self and Changing Others."

³⁸Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The Declaration of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China."

³⁹Hofer, "Negotiating International Public Policy."

⁴⁰Adler-Nissen, "Stigma Management," 152.

⁴¹Zarakol, "Ontological (In)security," 8. Emphasis added.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 4.

⁴³Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics." On the debate on the origins of ontological security consider Zarakol, "Ontological (In)security," 6–7 and 19–20.

particular interaction to uphold its identity, role taking and alter-casting become routinized, even if this means perpetuating harmful practices. In this manner, ontological security is not only a state's attachment to its identity but also to its roles in its interactions with others. Restrictive measures have 'continuously expanded to become the Union's default policy option for dealing with almost any crisis',⁴⁴ this practice enables the organization to maintain a consistent sense of self as it responds to international emergencies. The same can most certainly be said of the US.

Actors who take on the role of 'audience of normals', and consequently impose stigma, cast the target into the corresponding role of the deviant.⁴⁵ Importantly, sanctioning a state for wrongful behaviour is rooted in normative demands and suggests a hierarchy between the sanctioner and the target;⁴⁶ the former is 'normatively' superior to the latter. However, as Adler-Nissen cautions, interactions involving stigma should not be interpreted 'as a one-way disciplining process' but as complex interactive processes:

while stigma involves an "asymmetric power relationship", stigma may be resisted and coped with in various ways, leading to a complex interaction between the stigmatizer and the stigmatized. This interaction is crucial to "the success or failure of attempts to enforce discipline and define the 'normal'"⁴⁷.

The sanctioned party may reject the sender's legitimacy as a norm enforcer as well as the role that it is placed upon it and adopt another strategy in response. Adler-Nissen identified three potential strategies: stigma acceptance, stigma rejection and stigma resistance.⁴⁸ Only in the first case would the stigmatized actor accept the label and adjust its behaviour in order to reintegrate with the in-group. In the second scenario the stigmatized state accepts the group's behavioural norms but rejects being responsible for deviant behaviour. In the third scenario, the sanctioned state accepts the role of the deviant and wears it as an emblem of pride. It counters the label imposed on it by attempting to stigmatize the actors that initially imposed it. In the latter two scenarios, stigmatization is unsuccessful and can lead to a power struggle between the sanctioned and the sanctioner.

Within the interactional approach to sanctions presented here, these strategies can be understood as the role the target adopts in response to being sanctioned.⁴⁹ Such roles are linked to the target's quest for ontological security as it affirms its identity in its interaction with other actors. Like apologies,

⁴⁴Hellquist, "Either with Us or against Us?" 1015.

⁴⁵Similarly, Hellquist, "Creating 'the Self.'" 72.

⁴⁶Zarakol, "Ontological (In)security," 8. Similarly, third-party alignment with the EU's restrictive measures takes place 'within a clear hierarchical relation', Hellquist, "Either with Us or against Us?" 1001 (references omitted).

⁴⁷Adler-Nissen, "Social Self," 36.

⁴⁸Adler-Nissen, "Stigma Management."

⁴⁹In this sense the target 'makes' a role for itself, which is 'the process wherein the person constructs activity in a situation so that it fits the definition of the situation'. McCourt, "The roles states play," 379.

sanctions ‘involve a state’s self-narratives and self-regarding normative commitments’.⁵⁰ If being a deviant, and correspondingly accepting the sanctioner’s normative superiority, threatens the target’s sense of self – in the same way that ‘admitting to past crimes against humanity would definitely require a state to reconsider its sense of self’⁵¹ – it will not give into the sanctions but will adopt a role that is consistent with its own sense of identity and that enables it to resist the pressure. In order to illustrate this mechanism, Russia’s response to being sanctioned by the EU and the US is used as a case study.

According to Nephew, Russia is ‘under the most serious sanctions pressure still extant, save for North Korea’.⁵² In reaction to the sanctions, Russia has demonstrated its willingness to continue with its objectionable activity in spite of pressure to alter its policy. This is a question of the state’s ‘resolve’, which is defined as the ‘psychological determination of the sanctioned state to deny victory to the sanctioning party and to preserve its chosen path’.⁵³ Nephew’s study focuses primarily on the sanctions’ coercive functions, and applies a rational choice approach to the issue. In his view, despite the success of the sanctions campaign in terms of imposing pressure, which he refers to as ‘pain’, the sanctioners have failed to completely understand Russian national values and readiness to absorb costs.⁵⁴ He proposes to ‘methodically and efficiently increase the pain on the areas that are vulnerabilities’, e.g. Russia’s infliction points.⁵⁵ He makes this proposal albeit recognizing the sanctions may fail at causing Russia to change its behaviour. On the other hand, Tsygankov finds that ‘the Kremlin is unlikely to back off when it feels its interests and values are at stake’.⁵⁶ He cautions that:

Counter to the prevailing expectation [that a more ‘pressured’ Russia will become more compliant and cooperative], sanctions and military pressures are likely to strengthen the potential for anti-Western nationalism inside Russia, thereby pushing Putin toward more hawkish and provocative actions
...⁵⁷

This article integrates the concept of ‘role’ in understanding Russia’s policy in Ukraine and its response to the unilateral sanctions. Our interest is in the role Russian leaders have given their state in the course of the Ukrainian crisis and the sense of self they are affirming and maintaining through this role. It is argued that Russian leaders have rejected the role of deviant that is placed

⁵⁰Zarakol, “Ontological (In)security,” 7.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Nephew, *The Art of Sanctions*, 156.

⁵³Ibid, 13.

⁵⁴Ibid, 162.

⁵⁵Ibid, 163.

⁵⁶Tsygankov, “Vladimir Putin’s last stand,” 298.

⁵⁷Ibid, 298–9.

upon their state by the senders. To do otherwise would imply Russia is normatively inferior to the EU and the US and that it was wrong to defend its vital interests and values in Ukraine. It would further suggest that Russia is a weak state that can be influenced by other powers. Rather, Russia has adopted the role of an ‘untouchable’ state, which is consistent with its ‘great power’ identity. Furthermore, Russia’s response to the sanctions should be understood within the implied normative hierarchy of sanctions practices. Russia is sensitive about its standing in international politics, and towards the West in particular,⁵⁸ and seeks recognition as an equal.

Understanding Russia’s Breach of International Law and Resolve as Foreign Policy Roles

Roles are based on an actor’s identity and emerge in interaction. Consequently, the role adopted by Russia in response to the West’s sanctions is based on the sense of identity it seeks to affirm in its interaction with the West in the course of the Ukrainian crisis. In other words, the position adopted and actions pursued by Russian officials very much depend on their understanding of their state’s identity and their interpretation of the US and EU’s actions and the events that unfolded in Ukraine in 2014. In line with a symbolic interactionist understanding of roles, this section applies an interpretivist approach – which considers how an actor interprets events and the actions of others⁵⁹ – and takes into account discourse from Russian representatives and elites,⁶⁰ i.e. those who speak on behalf of the state.⁶¹ We therefore focus on President Putin’s interviews and public statements, while also drawing from Russian Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev’s claims as well as the speeches given by representatives of the Russian Federation in international forums. As discourse communicates the appropriate course of action,⁶² a study of Russian discursive practices will provide insight into how Russian officials view their state’s role towards the West and within the Ukrainian crisis. We also take into account the position of the sanctions in their speech acts. The selected data is restricted to English-translated texts, which does not reveal the internal debates amongst Russian decision-makers as they negotiated which role Russia should adopt

⁵⁸Like Turkey and Japan, *ibid.* See further Zarakol, *After Defeat*, chapter 5, arguing ‘Russia’s actions make sense only in a framework of status seeking in a socially stratified international society of established and outsiders’ (at 202).

⁵⁹McCourt, “The Roles States Play,” 381; McCourt, “Role-playing and Identity Affirmation,” 1608; Wehner and Thies, “Role Theory, Narratives, and Interpretation”; Bevir, Daddow and Hall, “Introduction,” 166–7: the interpretivist approach emphasis agency over structure; Bevir and Daddow, “Interpreting foreign policy.” For an interpretivist approach to sanctions: Hellquist, “Interpreting Sanctions in Africa and Southeast Asia,” 319.

⁶⁰McCourt, “Role-playing and Identity Affirmation,” 1608.

⁶¹Wehner and Thies, “Role Theory, Narratives, and Interpretation.”

⁶²McCourt, “Role-Playing and Identity Affirmation,” 1609.

in the context of the Ukrainian crisis, and subsequently as a ‘sanctioned’ state.⁶³ Nonetheless, for the purpose of our analysis they are useful because they demonstrate the image of Russia its leaders wish to project to the wider world, and what they want to communicate to English-speaking audiences. Russian officials appear to be consistent and coherent in their representation of their state and in their speech acts since 2014. The empirical analysis is combined with secondary sources, notably constructivist scholarship that has studied Russian foreign policy in the Ukrainian crisis. The findings below are limited to the role that has been adopted by Russia in a specific context and should not be interpreted as suggesting that Russian policy-makers only had one role at their disposal.⁶⁴ Rather it seeks to illustrate the explanatory potential of foreign policy roles in understanding not only the Ukrainian crisis but also how the Kremlin has responded to being sanctioned.⁶⁵

Russia’s ‘Great Power Identity’ Affirming Role in Ukraine

Hopf writes: ‘Russia’s great power identity is partly the product of interaction with other great powers’.⁶⁶ Roberts likewise states: ‘Russian foreign policy under [Putin’s] leadership is shaped by, and shapes, a sense of Russian identity that is highly influenced by its relations with the West’.⁶⁷ What Hopf and Roberts call ‘Russian identity’ can be construed as a ‘role’ that is based on Russia’s ‘great power identity’ and is constructed through interaction, which subsequently informs Russian leaders on the appropriate course of action.

A survey of President Putin’s annual addresses to the Federal Assembly from 2012 (the date of Vladimir Putin’s re-election) to 2019,⁶⁸ reveals that he views his country as a sovereign, independent state, thereby reflecting Russia’s ‘great power’ identity, which has emerged through Russia’s history as an imperial power. Russia is projected as a strong and stable state that upholds conservative and universal values.⁶⁹ Recognizing that it is not the sole powerful actor of the international stage, Russia values multilateralism. The balance of power between states is guaranteed through the principles

⁶³See McCourt, “The Roles States Play,” 380, on role negotiation. Wehner and Thies, “Role Theory, Narratives, and Interpretation,” 419–420.

⁶⁴Nor does it seek to provide a typology, as other authors have done, such as Adler-Nissen, “Stigma Management in International Relations,” or, indeed, Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of it.”

⁶⁵Consequently, the analysis should not be understood as definitive but as another ‘demonstration of the importance of role-playing to identity affirmation in international politics’, McCourt, “Role-playing and Identity Affirmation,” 1608.

⁶⁶Hopf, “Identity, Legitimacy, and the use of Military Force,” 243. Also 225: ‘What Russia considered to be legitimate actions by a “great power” depended on the identity that was produced by both domestic and external interactions.’

⁶⁷Roberts, “Understanding Putin,” 29.

⁶⁸For the purposes of our study, the speeches delivered in 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2018 were the most insightful, as reflected in the references and bibliography.

⁶⁹Putin, “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly 2013”; Putin, “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly 2016”.

of sovereign equality between states, the principle of non-intervention and the peaceful settlement of disputes.⁷⁰ Nonetheless, the role adopted by Russian leaders to affirm this great power identity depends on its interactions with other states, in particular the US and European countries.⁷¹ The Kremlin's interpretation of these interactions can lead it to pursue its own unilateralism at the expense of multilateralism. Russia's foremost responsibility is to ensure its independence against foreign influence, particularly the United States. According to the Russian Head of State, America is 'always influencing Russia's relations with its neighbors, either openly or behind the scenes'.⁷² Putin's Annual Addresses distinguish Russia from weak, fragmented states that are easily influenced, such as European countries. For example:

If for some European countries national pride is a long-forgotten concept and sovereignty is too much of a luxury, true sovereignty for Russia is absolutely necessary for survival. [...] [E]ither we remain a sovereign nation, or we dissolve without a trace and lose our identity.⁷³

Russia's great power identity means pursuing a role as an 'equal' to other powers. In order to affirm this, Putin initially sought to be a multilateral partner of the US and the EU, particularly after 9/11 in the context of the 'war on terror'. However, these hopes were dashed⁷⁴ as the West was reluctant to accept Russia as an equal.⁷⁵ In reaction, Putin readjusted Russia's foreign policy and pursued a role as an alternative to Western unilateralism and sought 'to establish its own unilateral regional hegemony'.⁷⁶ This is reflected in Putin's Annual Addresses to the Federal Assembly. Although he does not explicitly place Russia in opposition to a specific state, 'the Other' are those that do not recognize or respect Russia as an equal nor as a strong, sovereign country.⁷⁷

This is not to say that Russia has given up on the role as an equal to the EU and the US, to the contrary; the opposite would imply that Russia is no longer a great power, thereby challenging its ontological security. Instead, Russia places itself as equal, if not superior to, its Western neighbour: 'Russia has come to be understood as the True Europe, while Western Europe is a corrupted version occupied, influenced, and suborned by the United States'.⁷⁸ Another indicator of Russia's superiority is Putin's stark criticism of countries

⁷⁰Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The Declaration of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China."

⁷¹As affirmed by Hopf, "Identity, legitimacy" though he speaks of 'identity' and not roles.

⁷²Putin, "Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly 2014."

⁷³Ibid. Lavrov, "Statement at the 71st session of the UN General Assembly."

⁷⁴Hopf, "Crimea is Ours," 244. On the effects of US unilateralism and the expansion of NATO, see *ibid* 232–3, 244, 246–7. See also Putin, "Address to the UNGA 2015," 24.

⁷⁵As has usually been the case throughout history, Roberts, "Understanding Putin," 36.

⁷⁶Hopf, "Crimea is ours," 244.

⁷⁷See, e.g., Putin's reference to Turkey in: Putin, "Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly 2015".

⁷⁸Hopf, "Crimea is ours," 235–6. See also White and Feklyunina, *Identities and Foreign Policies in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*, 110.

that irresponsibly intervene in other states' internal affairs, which in the most extreme cases cause terrorism.⁷⁹ For example, Russian actions in Syria are presented as taking responsibility in the fight against terrorism, in contrast to other states that have helped it spread. In this way, Putin (implicitly) places Russia in opposition to American unilateralism and to states that follow US policies without regard to stability.⁸⁰

Overall, the foreign policy roles Russia has pursued is a reflection of its expectation that its partners recognize and respect its great power identity and its corresponding interests. Importantly, as argued by Tsygankov, these include maintaining historical and cultural ties with Eurasian and European countries.⁸¹ When these expectations were not met, notably by the EU and the US, Russia demonstrated its willingness to take the necessary unilateral steps, such as in Ukraine in 2014.

According to Hopf, 'the predominate elite discourse of Russian national identity makes the annexation of Crimea and the arming of rebels in Donetsk and Luhansk sensible'.⁸² He argues that Russian policies in the Ukraine can be understood as the result of Russia's identity and its understandings of Western politics coupled with the circumstances that arose in Ukraine. It was, for instance, absolutely essential that NATO be prevented from integrating Ukraine, as this would have made the region impenetrable to Russia.⁸³ Similarly, Roberts contends that:

Russia's actions in Ukraine are best explained by the West's provocation of Russia, epitomized by NATO's eastward expansion, and the resulting cultural and geopolitical vulnerability that animates Putin's ideational narrative; and by Putin's assessment of Russia's relations with its neighbours, with whom Russia is said to share a historical and cultural bond. Both phenomena have fostered a desire to create an alternative to Western dominance of world affairs.⁸⁴

Tsygankov's assessment reaches similar conclusions. In his view, what made it 'possible, even inevitable, was the West's lack of Russia's values and interests in Eurasia, on the one hand, and the critically important role that Ukraine played in the Kremlin's foreign policy calculations, on the other hand'.⁸⁵ In the Russian narrative, the events that unfolded in Ukraine are interpreted as a threat to Russia's security interests as well as its fraternal and economic ties with Kiev.⁸⁶ In Putin's own words: it became necessary for Russia to assert

⁷⁹See also Lavrov, "Statement at the 71st session of the UN General Assembly".

⁸⁰Although this was explicit in: Putin, "Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly 2018".

⁸¹Tsygankov, "Vladimir Putin's Last Stand."

⁸²Hopf, "Crimea is ours", 244.

⁸³Ibid, 247.

⁸⁴Roberts, "Understanding Putin," 30.

⁸⁵Tsygankov, "Vladimir Putin's Last Stand," 280.

⁸⁶Putin, "Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly 2018"; Putin, "Address to the UNGA 2015"; statements by Russian representatives in: United Nations Security Council, Verbatim Record of 1 March 2014, 3-5, and Verbatim Record of 3 March 2014, 3-4; Medvedev, "Russia and Ukraine: Living by New Rules."

itself and ‘to protect [their] legitimate interests unilaterally’.⁸⁷ At the end of 2014, he explained that Russia ‘faced trials that only a mature and united nation and only a truly sovereign and strong state can withstand. Russia proved that it can protect its compatriots and defend truth and fairness’.⁸⁸

Consequently, for the sake of protecting fundamental interests and asserting its ‘great power’ identity, the role adopted by Russia in Ukraine makes violating the UN Charter necessary and reasonable, even if this is inconsistent with the multilateral legal order. Putin has signalled ‘to the outside world that Russia remains capable of defending its position even if these leads to undermining Ukrainian statehood’⁸⁹ and, consequently, international law.⁹⁰ Viewed in this manner, violations of international law are the outcome of interactional processes. This has important implications in terms of adopting sanctions to enforce compliance with international law. Sanctions may affirm the importance of norms and stigmatize wrongdoers, however whether or not they are successful in changing a targeted state’s behaviour depends on its interpretation of the senders’ motives and how it decides to affirm its identity, hence on the foreign policy role it chooses to adopt. It also depends on the targeted state’s resources and capacity to resist, should it adopt a role that demonstrates ‘resolve’.⁹¹ This is arguably the case of Russia.

The ‘Untouchable’ State

Following the assessment above, Russia’s policy in Ukraine is believed to be necessary to affirm its great power identity and guarantee its interests. This role extends to Russia’s response to the West’s sanctions, where Russia has taken on the role of the ‘untouchable’ state that cannot be influenced by external powers. Importantly, it should be borne in mind that Russia considers itself as an *equal* to the EU and the US. The logical consequence is that Russia rejects the senders’ positioning of moral authority. Its strategy is similar to stigma rejection; recall that stigma rejection means that the sanctioned state shares the same norms as the group that imposes stigma but it denies it is responsible for wrongdoing. Russia shares the same norms as the EU and the US, indeed it justifies its own actions within the scope of existing multilateral frameworks, however, it understands them and puts them in practice differently.⁹²

To start with Russia’s response to being sanctioned, it is worth quoting Medvedev:

⁸⁷Putin, “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly 2014”; see also *Prague Post*, “Full Text of Putin’s speech on Crimea”.

⁸⁸Putin, “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly 2014”.

⁸⁹Tsygankov, “Vladimir Putin’s Last Stand,” 298.

⁹⁰Of course, Russia does not acknowledge that its behaviour is inconsistent with international law, as discussed below.

⁹¹*Supra* note 53 and accompanying text.

⁹²Malksoo, “Russia and China Challenge the Western Hegemony.”

The next question is whether [the EU] really punished us. Perhaps they gave us some uncomfortable moments. Bad? Not really. We are developing. We live and naturally, we'll survive. Have the Russian authorities changed their political position? They have not. Are they supported by the Russian people? You know very well that they are and they have support that no other political authority has because nobody likes it when their country is pushed around. Therefore, responsibility for these sanctions is borne by the entire European Union and other countries that supported them. [...] [W]e'll never ask for these sanctions to be lifted. They'll come and say: Let's finally put an end to this because nobody is better off for it; everyone is only the worse off.⁹³

According to Putin, unilateral sanctions 'not only serve political objectives, but are also used for eliminating market competition'⁹⁴ and for restraining Russia's development,⁹⁵ but '[n]o one has managed to restrain Russia'.⁹⁶ In his 2014 Presidential Address, he explained that even if the crisis in Ukraine had not arisen

[the West] would have come up with some other excuse to try to contain Russia's growing capabilities, affect our country in some way, or even take advantage of it. The policy of containment was not invented yesterday. It has been carried out against our country for many years, always, for decades, if not centuries. In short, whenever someone thinks that Russia has become too strong or independent, these tools are quickly put into use.⁹⁷

Russian leaders therefore present their country as being familiar with Western pressure and sanctions are framed as yet another attempt to weaken it. Whereas we may expect states under sanctions to blame the sanctioners for their economic difficulties, Russian officials are doing the opposite. As Russia is understood as a 'work in progress',⁹⁸ any pain that Russia may experience as a consequence of the sanctions is framed as the natural result of Russia's development. Although Putin has recognized that the sanctions are harmful to Russia's economy, this acknowledgement is always followed by an assurance that Russia will overcome the hardships and that it is not alone in feeling the sanctions' consequences.⁹⁹ In his 2016 Presidential Address, Putin stated that:

two years ago, we encountered serious economic challenges and a difficult situation on global markets. We found ourselves facing sanctions that were an attempt to get us to dance to another's tune and ignore our own fundamental national interests. But let me say again that the main reasons for our economic slowdown are to be found above all in our internal problems [...].¹⁰⁰

⁹³Medvedev, "Interview with Time Magazine."

⁹⁴Putin, "Address to the UNGA 2015."

⁹⁵Putin, "Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly 2018."

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Putin, "Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly 2014."

⁹⁸Hopf, "'Crimea is ours,'" 238 and 242.

⁹⁹Putin, "Interview to German Newspaper Bild. Part 1."

¹⁰⁰Putin, "Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly 2016."

This is equally reflected in Medvedev's statement quoted above.¹⁰¹

Consequently, by emphasizing internal issues and opportunities for development, Russian representatives diminish the influence of external factors, demonstrating their resolve to not be manipulated 'into dancing to another's tune'. In this manner they position their country as 'untouchable'. This is in line with Russia's great power identity.

Consistent with this identity, Russia demonstrated its ability to impose costs on the senders by imposing counter-sanctions. It implemented travel bans in March 2014 and an embargo on agricultural products in August the same year.¹⁰² In addition, Gazprom reduced its gas supplies to EU countries in September 2014.¹⁰³ The agricultural embargo was presented as 'special economic measures to protect Russia's security' and was explained as part of the new Russian Food Security Doctrine. Although it was adopted in retaliation to the sanctions, it is framed as a positive and necessary policy for Russia's development and growth: 'Sanctions or no, we have taken this path and will not deviate from it'.¹⁰⁴ Russia is improving its agricultural production as the necessary steps are taken to substitute European and American food imports.¹⁰⁵ This move is significant because, as Hopf writes, Russia would have preferred to shed itself of its 'raw material appendage'.¹⁰⁶ However, the sanctions 'make Russia's most undesired outcome the most likely one',¹⁰⁷ as it is through this policy that Russia can ensure its autonomy and inflict costs on the senders.

The sanctioning states also sought to inflict political and diplomatic costs by isolating Russia. They did this by collectively suspending bilateral meetings and by excluding Russia from the G8. Putin's attitude towards the G8 is dismissive: 'Russia never became a full-fledged G8 member [...] It was not us who did not go somewhere; other countries did not come to Russia'.¹⁰⁸ According to Putin, the G8 examines the 'same issues within the G20, APEC [Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation] in the East and within BRICS [Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa]',¹⁰⁹ wherein Russia remains

¹⁰¹Supra note 93.

¹⁰²Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Statement by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on retaliatory sanctions"; President of Russia, "Executive Order on Applying Certain Special Economic Measures". These measures have been extended until 2020, President of Russia "Executive Order on Extending Certain Special Economic Measures."

¹⁰³Moret et al., "The New Deterrent?", 8.

¹⁰⁴See for example: the Russian Government, "Dmitry Medvedev takes part in the First National Food Security Forum."

¹⁰⁵From the website of the Russian Government: "Import substitution in industry and the agro-industrial complex of the North Caucasus"; "First meeting with government on import substitution"; "A meeting on sectoral import substitution programmes"; "Meeting of the Government Commission on Import Substitution".

¹⁰⁶Hopf, "Crimea is Ours," 236.

¹⁰⁷Ibid, 244.

¹⁰⁸Putin, "Interview to German Newspaper Bild. Part 2."

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

a participant. Russia has also forged new alliances and became more active in international issues, becoming, for instance, an important player in the Syrian conflict¹¹⁰ and providing support to Venezuela's President Maduro, in opposition to Washington.¹¹¹

Although Russia has been labelled as a deviant for its violation of Ukraine's sovereign and territorial integrity, its leaders deny any wrongdoing. Putin's account of the events that took place in Crimea in February 2014 is worth quoting here:

We did not make war, nor did we occupy anyone; there was no shooting, no one got killed during the events in Crimea. Not a single person! We used the Armed Forces only to stop more than 20,000 Ukrainian service members stationed there from interfering with the free expression of will by the residents of Crimea. People came to the referendum and cast their vote. [...] In Crimea, there was no violation of international law. Under the United Nations Charter, every nation has the right to self-determination.¹¹²

Contrary to violating international law, Russia argues it is upholding the right to self-determination, and, somewhat provocatively, invokes Kosovo's declaration of independence as a precedent.¹¹³

The sanctioning states have linked the lifting of sanctions to Russia's fulfilment of its obligations under the Minsk Agreements, which Russia is failing to adhere to. On the other hand, Russian officials continuously reiterate that the Ukrainian authorities are stalling the cease-fire and failing to respect their end of the deal. We can, for instance, refer to the following statement by Putin:

Everyone says that the Minsk Agreements must be implemented and then the sanctions issue may be reconsidered. This is beginning to resemble the theatre of the absurd because everything essential that needs to be done with regard to implementing the Minsk Agreements is the responsibility of the current Kiev authorities. You cannot demand that Moscow do something that needs to be done by Kiev.¹¹⁴

Russia therefore contests the continuous renewal of the sanctions on the basis that the Agreements are not properly respected by Ukraine.

In an attempt to turn the tables against the senders, Putin has stated that they have violated international law through the adoption of unlawful sanctions, claiming they violate the UN Charter and the rules of the World

¹¹⁰*New York Times*, "Obama and Putin Play Diplomatic Poker Over Syria."

¹¹¹*The Guardian*, "Venezuela: Russia Urges US to Abandon 'Irresponsible' Plan to Topple Maduro"; *The Guardian*, "Russian Military Arrive in Venezuela to Discuss 'Training And Strategy'."

¹¹²Putin, "Interview to German newspaper Bild. Part 1"; *Prague Post*, "Full Text of Putin's speech on Crimea."

¹¹³Roberts, "Understanding Putin," 52; Other arguments Russia raised as justification are discussed in Corten, "The Russian intervention in the Ukrainian crisis," in particular intervention by invitation.

¹¹⁴Putin, "Interview to German newspaper Bild. Part 1"; Medvedev, "Speech at the panel discussion"; Medvedev, "Interview with Euronews TV Channel"; Lukashevich, "Remarks at the OSCE Permanent Council meeting".

Trade Organization.¹¹⁵ Alongside other (primarily non-Western states) Russia often claims that unilateral sanctions are contrary to the general principles of international law.¹¹⁶ Should its population suffer from the sanctions, Russia could align with states that have also been placed under sanctions and that condemn unilateral coercive measures for violating human rights and causing undue harm to innocent civilians, such as Iran, Belarus and Myanmar, and with groups that support them, mainly the G77 and Non-Aligned Movement.¹¹⁷

With regard to its own sanctions, Russia has invoked various justifications under international law. When it withdrew from a series of bilateral agreements with the US, in protest to the unilateral sanctions, it invoked the countermeasure argument and a fundamental change of circumstances as justification. In response to a complaint Ukraine filed against it before the World Trade Organization, Russia argued that its sanctions fell within the scope of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs' security exception, Article XXI. In a landmark decision, the Panel agreed.¹¹⁸ Russia would therefore adopt sanctions for legitimate purposes, whereas the West has adopted unilateral sanctions in pursuance of illegitimate unilateralism and to weaken, restrain Russia.

Overall, Russia has developed a strategy that seeks to minimize the coercive and stigmatizing effects of the sanctions. It does this by adapting to the costs that are imposed on it while imposing counter-costs on the sanctioning states through the agricultural embargo and by stigmatizing them out for adopting unlawful unilateral coercive measures. Importantly, Russia does not want to be seen either as suffering the consequences of the sanctions nor as being influenced by the group of senders.

This does not mean, however, that the sanctions have had no effect. At the very least, they can be understood as an annoyance to the Russia state, which has had to adapt in ways it would have preferred to avoid. For instance, whereas Russia wanted to shed itself of 'raw material appendage', it is more important for Russia to play out its great power identity and to respond to the sanctions with a counter-punch through the ban on agricultural goods from the senders.

There is also a sense of disappointment in the West's reaction to Russia:

We do not want confrontation with anyone. We have no need for it and neither do our partners or the global community. Unlike some of our colleagues abroad, who consider Russia an adversary, we do not seek and never have sought enemies. We need friends. But we will not allow our interests to be infringed upon or ignored. We want to and will decide our destiny ourselves and build our present and future without others' unasked for advice and

¹¹⁵Putin, "Address to the UNGA 2015"; Putin, "Interview to American TV channel CBS and PBS".

¹¹⁶Hofer, "The Developed/Developing Divide"; Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The Declaration of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China."

¹¹⁷Hofer, "The Developed/Developing Divide."

¹¹⁸World Trade Organization, "Panel Report of 5 April 2019."

prompting. At the same time, we desire well-intentioned and equal dialogue and we affirm the principles of justice and mutual respect in international affairs. We are ready for a serious discussion on building a stable system of international relations for the twenty-first century.¹¹⁹

If Russia's annexation of Crimea was made necessary because of its understanding of Western policies, and notably 'against the background of years of accumulated resentment against US unilateralism in world affairs',¹²⁰ then the adoption of sanctions increased the enmity and the perception that the West was not willing to acknowledge Russia as an equal player. As demonstrated throughout this section, the sanctions are framed as an illegitimate means to weaken Russia and undermine its essential security interests while paying lip service to the role it wishes to project. It is therefore essential for Russia to stand its ground and to present itself as unaffected by the sanctions, lest its great power identity becomes insignificant.

Concluding Remarks

Ultimately, compliance with and violations of international norms are *interactional* processes. Roles allow actors to adapt and adjust, and they can be transformed through interaction. This suggests that if one of the players in an interaction changes its role this could have an effect on the other player and cause it to shift into a new role in response. If sanctions are adopted for normative purposes and sanctioners do not take into account how the target interprets their measures – and consequently the role it adopts in response – then they are simply posturing without genuinely contributing to resolving the crisis they are intervening in. Like sanctions, wrongful acts do not exist in a vacuum and need to be situated within the interactions from which they arise. It would seem that Russian understanding of US and EU policies in Ukraine, caused its leaders to believe Russia's interests in the region were threatened and react aggressively in 2014.

Russian decision-makers' understanding of their state's position in the world, as well as their interpretation of its interaction with the senders and of their sanctions, indicate it is unlikely to change its own role in Ukraine in the manner desired by the senders, or at least that sanctions are not the way to go about it. To do otherwise, or to give into the sanctions, would undermine their great power identity, which requires Russian policy-makers to adopt roles that enable them to take the necessary steps to defend their state's fundamental interests.

As we saw, President Putin adapted Russia's foreign policy role to the response received from Western leaders. Russia initially sought to be

¹¹⁹Putin, "Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly 2016".

¹²⁰Hopf, "Crimea is Ours," 247. Putin is, for Example, Highly Critical of the 1999 Bombing in Yugoslavia and the 2003 Invasion of Iraq. See *Reuters*, "Putin Dials Up Anti-US Rhetoric."

recognized as an equal power, and pursued multilateral partnership with the EU and the US, especially in the aftermath of 9/11. When it became apparent that this role was not respected, Putin shifted Russia's role to an 'alternative power' that asserted its own interests unilaterally when necessary. Consequently, when he believed Russia's vital interests were threatened, he adopted the necessary unilateral measures, at the expense of international values. In response to being sanctioned for that behaviour, Russian representatives position their country as untouchable. They reject the stigma that has been imposed on Russia and have responded with counter-punches, demonstrating resolve. Arguably, lifting the sanctions would be a loss for the EU and the US, as it would hurt their credibility as actors that enforce community norms.

Given the importance of interaction, if the EU and the US are concerned with finding a peaceful resolution to the Ukrainian crisis, they should consider shifting towards strategies that would have a more positive influence on Russian decision-makers. Such strategies would be the promotion of dialogue and communication while recognizing Russia as an equal and respecting its self-image. This would bridge the gap and help Russia no longer perceive them as a threat, which may have the effect of encouraging Russia to demilitarize in Ukraine.

The fact that it is possible to overcome deep-seated enmity through diplomatic channels is demonstrated through the brief shift in the US-Iran interaction that led to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in 2015.¹²¹ This does not mean that the process is easy, as it involves overcoming deep-seated narratives not only about the 'Self' but also about the 'Other'. The caveat is that identities must not be dependent upon a particular role. If under President Obama the US was able to make a strategic shift, President Trump's administration has demonstrated how easy it is to slip into former roles.

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¹²¹Parsi, *Losing an Enemy*.

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