



PF Topic Analysis January 2015

As our first topic of 2016, Public Forum debaters are faced with “**Resolved: On balance, economic sanctions are reducing the threat Russia poses to Western interests.**” This promises to be another fast-moving topic that will require you to keep your eyes on the news. Those who diligently monitor the situation only a daily (or near-daily) basis will be most likely to succeed.

Before we talk strategy, we need to take a closer look at the resolution itself.

Resolutional Analysis

On balance is a familiar phrase for PFers, so I’m going to skip it here. If you’re new and confused, check out our discussion of it [here](#).

Economic sanctions is one of the major terms in the resolution. Surprisingly, it does not actually have any stable, agreed-upon legal meaning, and is not defined by the UN Charta. However, there are still plenty of contextual sources we can draw on.



The Library of Economics and Liberty [defines economic sanctions](#) thusly:

The term “economic sanctions” encompasses the deliberate, government-inspired withdrawal, or threat of withdrawal, of customary trade or financial relations. (“Customary” refers to the levels of trade or financial activity that would probably have occurred in the absence of sanctions.) In this article, we discuss the use of economic sanctions **to achieve political goals**; in other words, **we exclude** cases of economic sanctions used to achieve **commercial goals**, such as the withdrawal of tariff protection.

The motives behind the use of sanctions parallel **the three basic purposes** of national criminal law: **to punish, to deter, and to rehabilitate.**

WebFinance’s [Business Dictionary](#) concurs:

Economic penalties, such as stoppage of trade and financial transactions, imposed upon a country to force compliance with another country's or UN's or WTO's demands.

The Library of Economics and Liberty, referenced above, goes on to provide more detail on what economic sanctions might look like in practice. This may be beneficial for you to read for clarification:

A “sender” country tries to inflict costs on its target in two main ways: (1) **with trade sanctions that limit the target country’s exports or restrict its imports, and** (2) **with financial sanctions that impede finance (including reducing aid).** Governments that **impose limits on target countries’ exports intend to reduce** its foreign sales and deprive it of **foreign exchange.** Governments impose **limits on their own exports to deny critical goods to the target country.** **If the sender country exports a large percentage of world output, this may also cause the target to pay higher prices for substitute imports,** but only if the sender country also reduces its overall output. When governments impose **financial sanctions** by **interrupting commercial finance or** by **slashing government loans to the target country’s government,** they intend **to cause the target country to pay higher interest** rates **and** to **scare** away



alternative creditors. When a poor country is the target, the government imposing the sanction can use the subsidy component of official financing or other development assistance to gain further leverage.

Total embargoes are rare. Most trade sanctions are selective, affecting only one or a few goods. Thus, the economy-wide impact of the sanction may be quite limited. Because sanctions are often unilateral, the trade may be only diverted rather than cut off. Whether import prices paid by (or export prices received by) the target country increase (or decrease) after the sanctions are applied depends on the market in question. If there are many alternative markets and suppliers, the effects on prices may be very modest, and the economic impact of the sanctions will be negligible.

For example, Australia cut off shipments of uranium to France from 1983 to 1986 because of France's refusal to halt testing of nuclear weapons in the South Pacific. In 1984, however, the price of uranium oxide dropped nearly 50 percent. France was able to replace the lost supply, and at a cost lower than its contract price with the Australian mine. Because Australia was unable to find alternative buyers for all the uranium intended for France, the Australian government ultimately paid Queensland Mines \$26 million in 1985 and 1986 for uranium it had contracted to sell to France.

Financial sanctions, in contrast, are usually more difficult to evade. Because sanctions are typically intended to foster or exacerbate political or economic instability, alternative financing may be hard to find and is likely to carry a higher interest rate. Private banks and investors are easily scared off by the prospect that the target country will face a credit squeeze in the future. Moreover, many sanctions involve the suspension or termination of government subsidies to poor countries—large grants of money or concessionary loans from one government to another—which may be irreplaceable.

Another important difference between trade sanctions and financial sanctions lies in the parties that are hurt by each. The pain from trade sanctions, especially export controls, usually is diffused throughout the target country's population. Indeed, political elites in the target country may benefit from trade sanctions by controlling lucrative black markets. Financial sanctions, on the other hand, are more likely to hit the pet projects or personal pockets of government officials who shape local policy. On the sender's side of the equation, an interruption of official aid or credit is unlikely to create the same political backlash from domestic business firms and allies abroad as an interruption of private trade. Finally, financial sanctions, especially those involving trade finance, may interrupt trade even without the imposition of explicit trade sanctions. In practice, however, financial and trade sanctions are usually used in some combination with one another.

The ultimate form of financial and trade control is a freeze of the target country's foreign assets, such as bank accounts held in the sender country. In addition to imposing a cost on the target



country, a key goal of an assets freeze is to deny an invading country the full fruits of its aggression. In the 1990 Middle East crisis, the U.S. government and its allies froze Kuwait's assets to prevent Saddam Hussein from plundering them.

So, to review the meaningful elements of the definitions above:

- Economic sanctions must be imposed by a government or multilateral organization (although they don't necessarily need to be directed at another government or nation in its entirety; they may sometimes target powerful individuals alone).
- They are reductions or suspensions of trade and/or financial activities intended to cause economic strain and therefore extract concessions on political issues.
- Commercial goals are excluded. (I.e. there must be a political goal; purely economic benefits would not qualify.)
- Economic sanctions can take a variety of forms: blocking exports from the target country, withholding imports from the target country, stripping a poor nation of foreign aid monies, denying the target country loans, freezing the target country's assets held in foreign bank accounts, total embargos of all trade with the target nation, etc.

I imagine the vast majority of pros will advocate arguments that stay cleanly within these boundaries. Regardless, keep them in mind, in case you see something squirrely.

Part of my confidence on that comes from the resolution's use of the word **are**, along with the use of the present perfect progressive verb tense in **reducing**. In this particular topic, this simple choice actually does make a considerable difference from other ways the resolution could have been phrased. "Are" implies that the debate is to be about whether *existing* economic sanctions *are succeeding*, not the desirability of implementing different/further sanctions.



The importance of “are” is further emphasized by the topic’s use of the present perfect progressive verb form “-ing.” At the risk of boring you with a grammar lesson, the use of this tense is significant. Present perfect progressive is used when describing an action that *began in the past, continues in the present, and may continue into the future*. In other words, the pro should be arguing that *sanctions that already exist are successful*, not advocating any change in current sanctions policy.

In fact, changing or increasing sanctions could rightfully be considered con ground. A pro arguing for a change in status quo sanctions, strictly speaking, might not be affirming the topic. If existing sanctions are reducing the threat, they probably don’t need to be changed. The con could argue that the pro is required to defend the status quo, and that any alterations belong to the con side.

Of course, the pro could retort that just because something is working doesn’t mean it can’t be improved upon. I could say “the new attendance policy is reducing tardiness,” but that wouldn’t necessarily imply tardiness has been entirely solved. At this point, the two sides would most likely need to have a topicality debate about the relative importance of framers’ intent, division of ground, fairness, grammar, etc. in order to determine the most appropriate interpretation of the resolution. Most of you probably don’t want to do that. Regardless, it’s something you should be aware of as a possibility.

Another important consideration related to “are...reducing” is that, because it refers to the present, the pro will need to win that status quo sanctions *have already established some degree of progress* towards success. Because it’s common in the literature base, some pros may be tempted to answer con “sanctions haven’t accomplished [x]” arguments by arguing that, although they aren’t working yet, they



will start working if we just stick with them a bit longer. That's a bad tactic. To stay within the boundaries of the resolution, the pro must argue that some headway is *already* being made.

Overall, just remember that, at minimum, pros need to say that existing sanctions have been succeeding in improving things, even if modifications might increase their effectiveness. A bit later in this guide, we'll run through an overview of what kinds of sanctions do exist in the status quo.

One last thing worth pointing out, in case you were snoozing when you read the resolution: it says nothing about the United States. Your debates can and should include discussions of the sanctions put in place by other nations. Strictly speaking, these sanctions wouldn't need to have been imposed by Western countries, so long as they advance Western interests. I do not think that path would be particularly useful, though.

Moving on—the word **Reducing** by itself is fairly simple. To reduce, of course, means to decrease, lessen, diminish, shrink, etc. Reducing a threat, therefore, would mean making it less threatening.

How much less threatening? The resolution doesn't specify. Theoretically, the pro could win by establishing even the teensiest lessening of one threat, and claiming that proves the resolution true. If you frequently face teams who like to be sneaky, it might be worth your time to write a con theory position arguing that such tactics aren't fair. Or just be willing to win that threats have increased due to sanctions.



Conversely, remember that “reduce” doesn’t mean “eliminate.” The pro does not need to win that economic sanctions have eliminated threats from Russia—that would be an impossible burden.

The phrase **threat...poses** is semi-interesting. Could the con argue that Russia poses no threat to Western interests, and therefore a reduction is impossible? Semantically, maybe. That would be a tremendously unstrategic approach, though, since not even Vladimir Putin (maybe especially not Vladimir Putin!) would argue that Russia’s interests do not oppose those of the West in a variety of arenas.

Setting aside that very unwise strategy, this phrase just implies that you need to be discussing ways Russia might harm the West or inhibit the pursuit of its collective goals, values, and geopolitical power. Something has to be oppositional and dangerous to constitute a “threat.”

Russia refers to the country. You know what Russia is. If you don’t, you need more help with this topic than I can provide. Moving on.

Western interests is a term that may be contentious in some rounds. Before we can determine if sanctions are protecting Western interests, we’ll need to agree on exactly what concerns constitute “Western interests.” If we have different definitions, substantive debates can’t really go anywhere.

First, how should we define “**the West**”? The term is definitely not without controversy in IR literature, and is also not a term of art (meaning a term with a specified, precise definition within the law), so you



will not find it used in official documents or the like. Different disciplines tend to focus on different factors when determining the boundaries of the West, but some are more useful than others for our purposes here. Just keep in mind that there is substantial scholarship on this subject, and someone inclined to have a whole debate on this subject would find no shortage of relevant literature.

Since I'm not here trying to write a book on the subject, we'll keep our discussion of it fairly surface-level.

In general, the contemporary understanding of the term typically refers to a collection of nations sharing roots with Greco-Roman civilization, influenced by the Renaissance, the development of Christianity, and the Enlightenment era. This includes nations exposed to these influences through colonialism, rather than indigenous culture.

It is not useful to think of "the West" in purely geographical terms; It is actually united more by certain shared values and elements of culture than by its borders. Concerns typically associated with the West include support for liberal democracy, human rights, pluralism, and the rule of law. Support for globalization and free market capitalism are often included as well. Finally, the presence of a majority Christian population (regardless of the overall secularism of the government or society), which results in the inheritance of similar moral frameworks, is also considered significant.

Sometimes, people use "the West" as an interchangeable synonym with terms like "First World," "global North," or "developed countries," referring to highly prosperous nations, in contrast to poorer nations. This is understandable, but imprecise.



Many the traits listed above can be present in a society within it being part of “the West.” For example, both Japan and South Korea are capitalist democracies that respect human rights, participate in the globalized economy, etc. But they aren’t Western due to their very different cultural heritage. They would, however, be rightfully counted amongst “developed countries,” etc.

Don’t get too caught up in the semantics, though. You’re not likely to have many (if any) debates that hinge entirely on this question. However, a basic understanding of the cultural values that unite “the West” is valuable for getting a clear picture of what “Western interests” might be.

Here’s the shortest-possible takeaway: generally, you should remember that most people agree that the West includes Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and at least some parts of Latin America. (Which parts of Latin America to lump in is a subject of fairly heated debate, but I’m not going into that here.) For the purposes of this resolution, your demands will likely focus on the United States and Europe.

Now that we’ve considered who is included when we say “Western,” we now need to turn to a brief definition of the word “**interests**.” Broadly speaking, a nation’s (or group of nations’) “interests” are their cultural, economic, military, or geopolitical goals.

This is yet another term that international relations theorists like to argue over, but that’s research you can do on your own. Just remember that “interests” may or may not include “soft” concerns like humanitarianism, freedom from discrimination, poverty reduction, etc.



It's also relevant to realize that nearly all scholars recognize that the term is subjective by definition, since various groups within any given society will always quarrel about what priorities and actions are best. In other words, there is no concrete list of things that make up a nation's interests.

So, now that we've discussed both halves of the term, let's put the most important bits together. Based on what we know, we can deduce that "Western interests can be understood as the international aspirations of countries with "Western" values. Under this interpretation, "Western interests" would probably include things like opposition to authoritarianism, terrorism/violent extremism, communism, etc. and support of free markets, liberal values, representative governments, etc. It would also probably include the strategic geopolitical and military positionings seen as important to advancing those goals.

Referring back to a few paragraphs ago, there is disagreement amongst experts regarding whether "interests" should really only refer to the "selfish" aspirations of a nation/nations, or whether humanitarian concerns (pursued only out of loyalty to one's values, not out of a strategic desire to "win hearts and minds," etc.) should also be included. That issue may or may not be relevant to your pro case. For more on this question, look [here](#).

So, in a nutshell: this resolution is asking you to debate whether or not status quo economic sanctions imposed on Russia are successfully mitigating any danger Russia plays to the primary international priorities of the group of nations understood, based on their common cultural and political heritage, to make up "the West."



One last note on resolitional analysis: depose yourself of any ideas about kritiking Western interests, because that isn't going to work here. This topic concerns whether or not sanctions achieve their intended goal of securing Western interests; whether or not Western interests are normatively "good" or beneficial is completely irrelevant.

In addition to understanding the meaning of the words in the resolution, it will also be helpful to understand some of the historical background to the current situation, and to develop a working knowledge of what is going on in the status quo. We'll provide this information in the following section.

Background

For an overview of the context that created the Ukraine crisis and subsequent invasion, I encourage you to refer to our guide to the [2014 NSDA National PF topic](#). The relevant information is on pages 2-4. (Keep in mind, of course, that this paper was written in the midst of the original turmoil, and much has happened since then.)

The Russian economy is faltering now. However, nearly all experts agree that this has more to do with internal factors than the sanctions. Oil prices have been holding at remarkable lows, which is damaging to Russia's extremely oil-dependent economy. The value of Russia's currency has likewise been falling, as it tends to track oil prices. That said, it is also acknowledged that sanctions have exacerbated an already-bad situation, both directly and due to Moscow's attempts at retaliation.



The sanctions were applied by the United States and European Union nations in response to Russia's annexation of the Crimea region of Ukraine, as well as ongoing aggression in that area. The measures do things like restrict the travel and freeze the assets of certain Russian officials and elites, withhold financing from certain Russian companies and banks, and prohibit the trade of technologies and service related to oil exploration and development. For a more detailed description, check out the BBC [here](#).

In response to the West's imposition of sanctions, Russia issued a few of its own. They banned a number of influential Western officials from entering Russia, and created an embargo against agricultural products produced in nations supporting the Western sanctions. As you will likely read during the course of your research, these counter-measures were also partly responsible for Russia's current pain. As to whether or not impacts caused by Russia's own retaliation can be said to be the result of Western efforts, that is up for debate.

Although there are certainly a wide variety of complex factors at play, that should provide the basic context you need to debate this topic intelligently. Now that we understand exactly what we're talking about, let's get on with the substance.

Strategies

As we've already discussed, the focus of your debates is going to be whether or not the sanctions that have been imposed so far have done more good than harm in terms of advancing Western interests (or, more precisely, preventing Russia from doing harm to Western interests). This is a little different from some topics, because it concerns a factual, empirical question. We are evaluating something that has



already happened, and trying to determine whether or not it was “good.” That is a distinct kind of question from debates where we attempt to predict what the outcomes of a new action might be. Keep this distinction in mind going forward.

The first, most basic measure of sanctions’ success would be whether they have lessened Russian aggression in Ukraine. This is their primary goal, so it should be the first thing we think about when trying to determine if, “on balance,” the sanctions have been beneficial.

Obviously, as we discussed in more detail above, Russia has not backed off the annexation of Crimea, and they continue to participate in ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine. However, they also have not dramatically accelerated that conflict since the full range of sanctions were put into place.

From this, we can conclude that sanctions have certainly not been a total success—they didn’t cause Russia to withdraw entirely. However, there is still the possibility that the presence of sanctions constrained the Russian government enough that they prevented things from getting worse than they otherwise would have. The tricky part is, that’s a non-falsifiable argument, so we’re left to speculate. Hence, why we have something to debate!

Recall from our background discussion above that, while Russia’s economy is hurting in the status quo, it will be difficult for the pro to win that this is entirely because of sanctions. Certainly, the sanctions have had a role to play, and the pro may wish to advance arguments about that. However, you likely won’t get very far with cases that attempt to claim Russian economic weakness as its only/primary warrant for why sanctions are working. The con is simply correct that sanctions are, at best, one piece of a complex



problem, and that the Russian economy would have been in trouble today even without them. This is why the pro is going to need to prepare plenty of other justifications for the sanctions.

Here is a small snippet of **evidence** in which three former ambassadors to Ukraine state that the measures have been a success. It is lacking in warrants, but the obvious expertise of its authors might get you somewhere in front of certain judges:

(John E. Herbst- director of the Dinu Patriciu Eurasia Center at the Atlantic Council & American ambassador to Ukraine from 2003-6, Steven Pifer- senior fellow at the Brookings Institution & ambassador to Ukraine from 1998-2000, William B. Taylor, Jr.-executive vice president at the United States Institute of Peace & ambassador to Ukraine from 2006-9, "Investing in Ukraine's Future," New York Times, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/30/opinion/investing-in-ukraines-future.html?_r=0, December 29 2015)

Just over a year ago, President **Obama signed into law** the Ukraine Freedom Support Act, which provided congressional backing to **sanctions on Russia following the Kremlin's illegal annexation of Crimea** and invasion of eastern Ukraine. **Since then, sanctions have hurt Russia's economy and prevented individuals in** President Vladimir V. **Putin's inner circle from traveling to the West. The Obama administration should be commended for sustaining a successful sanctions regime.**

Moving along, as we already noted, a very common argument for the pro is that the sanctions were successful because they prevented things from getting a lot worse. The primary claims made by analysts in favor of this position are:

1. **Sanctions are symbolically important.**
2. **Sanctions change Russia's decisional calculus.**



We'll start with #1.

According to this argument, the reason sanctions are “on balance” good has less to do with their concrete effects on Russia’s economy or regime popularity, but more because they demonstrate to Putin that he cannot just go around acting recklessly and not expect consequences. Most experts agree that armed conflict between the West and Russia would be so hugely costly as to only be plausible in the most extreme situations (e.g. not over Ukraine). However, taking military action off the table leaves few options for signaling displeasure to a foreign ruler. Therefore, economic sanctions are more about the West’s commitment to “putting up a fight” and showing Russia that we won’t just sit idly by.

This is particularly true in the current global context, argue advocates, because currently Putin thinks the West is too concerned about terrorism, Syria, ISIS, etc. to really stand up to Russia. He is betting that Western leaders will give him a pass on otherwise intolerable behavior, because they want to retain decent relations in order to solicit his assistance on priorities in the Middle East. So, sanctions are somewhat about sending him a message that the West will not “bite its tongue” just to lure Russia into cooperating in other arenas.



Here is **evidence** supporting this argument:

(Andrew Foxall, director of the Russia Studies Center at the Henry Jackson Society, "Stick to Sanctions on Russia," New York Times, Op-Ed, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/17/opinion/stick-to-sanctions-on-russia.html>, 12/16/2015)

Whatever Mr. **Putin's** motivations, it is clear that he **sees** the world's **distraction from Ukraine as a sign of the West's weakness. And that only tempts Russia's president** more.

Speaking in March, the president of the European Council, Donald Tusk, said that European Union sanctions imposed on Russia after its invasion of Ukraine last year would not be lifted until there was "complete implementation" of Minsk II. But that was before **the terrorist attacks in Paris led France to reach out to Russia**. Mr. **Putin is wagering that the West will trade an alliance in Syria for** concessions on **Ukraine**.

The European Union cannot allow sanctions to lapse. If that were to happen, the union would concede, in effect, that Russia might invade and destabilize any territory it pleased. Russia would have triumphed over the world order imposed by the West after the Cold War. And **Moscow's authoritarianism will have defeated** Brussels' **liberal democracy**.

The warrants behind the "symbolism" argument are fairly similar to those of #2 on our list: that sanctions are good because they impose costs that change Moscow's cost-benefit calculus.

That argument suggests that the intent of sanctions was never to completely destroy the Russian economy, but rather to create a kind of constant, ongoing pressure by shifting the considerations Russian policymakers are forced to confront. The sanctions inhibit the pace at which Russia can grow and develop its economy, as well as isolate Russia from much of the international community. Especially given the strains in the Russian economy caused by the current low price of oil, the inability to modernize industries, get help from allies, etc. imposes long-term costs. Supporters argue that this changes how Moscow must weigh its choices, and deters further aggressive or unpopular actions.



Here is **evidence**:

(Nikolay Pakhomov, Russian International Affairs Council expert & political consultant, “The Truth About Sanctions Against Russia,” The National Interest, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-truth-about-sanctions-against-russia-14789>, Jan 4 2016)

The extension of sanctions against Russia by the EU and their expansion by the United States demonstrated that the restrictive measures will remain in place for the foreseeable future. However hard for the Russian economy, the **sanctions** have not delivered a devastating blow, which could have led to a significant change in Kremlin policy. These measures **were** arguably **not created to ruin the Russian economy, which is too large and important for the world to do without. The sanctions were designed to warn Russia against foreign policy actions that the West does not agree with.** Instead, they became a crash course for Russian policy makers and elites, reminding them that for Russia to truly secure an independent standing in international relations it should be ready and able to withstand international pressure, especially in the economic sphere.

Since the start of Western sanctions against Russia it has been obvious that the **measures are not as severe as they could have been—and for good reason. Consider the sanctions** leveled **against the Russian energy sector**: among other things, they have been aimed at reducing financing options for Russian energy companies and preventing them from developing complicated offshore and Arctic projects. Both spheres play a very important role in strategic planning for these companies, but **the restrictive measures did not harm much** of their **current operations. The reason is** simple: **Russian companies supply**, according to different estimates, up to **a third of the EU’s natural gas and oil demand. In such situation**, any immediate or **devastating measures** against these companies **can hardly be expected.**

At the same time, with sinking oil prices, it would be difficult to argue that the sanctions do not harm the strategic perspectives of Russian energy companies and, as such, put a drastic pressure on the Russian economy as a whole—which is still very dependent on energy exports, although less than before. **More importantly, after the sanctions were confirmed** by the United States and the European Union **at the end of 2015 it became clear that this pressure is here to stay.**

Only a few months ago, several Russian and foreign insiders thought that with the fragile ceasefire more or less holding in eastern Ukraine, and with many European companies discontented by profit loss due to the sanctions, the restrictive measures would be lessened—at least by the EU. One can recall the Paris talks in the “Normandy Four” format in October, which de facto confirmed the continuation of the Minsk process into 2016. At the same time, the leadership of Lugansk and Donetsk People’s Republics postponed their elections, opening the possibility of holding them within the Ukrainian legal space. The latter would be a step in the direction of reconciliation. But, when extending and expanding the scope of sanctions, the EU and the United States did not take into consideration the improvement and stabilization of the situation in Eastern Ukraine.

It should come as no surprise: the political elites in Europe and the United States have attached so much political significance to the sanctions that the sanctions have become irreversible, at least without a significant move on the part of Russia. Since there are no signs that Moscow will, for example, reverse its decision on Crimea, one cannot expect an end to Western sanctions against Russia any time soon.



This means that for the Kremlin, the sanctions have become a permanent factor in decision making, and make other domestic and international problems more severe. Those include the question of whether Russia has loyal allies who can help. It has become obvious that, on the one hand, even Russia's business partners in Europe cannot assist it in dealing with the sanctions. In the last months of 2015, the world saw how Germany wanted to have it both ways, attempting to continue implementing North Stream 2 while keeping the sanctions in place. Italy, deprived of natural gas from the South Stream after the crisis in relations between Russia and the West started in 2014, became frustrated by German actions, but to no avail.

On the other hand, **it is not clear how much support Moscow will receive from Beijing** on various issues. Certainly, China might need Russian natural gas and oil, but how far can this cooperation go? Even in terms of expanding buyers for Russian energy resources, Moscow needs to diversify its partners in Asia—if China becomes the chief client in the region and cooperation with the Europeans decreases, will Beijing be able to dictate the terms of cooperation to Moscow?

In Russian domestic policy, **Western sanctions also increased pressure on the Kremlin to act on many fronts.** For years, businessmen, officials and experts have been discussing the investments needed to modernize Russia's energy sector. But with high oil prices there was no major incitement to modernize: why bother when profits are easy and high? **Now, not only has the price of oil gone down, but Western sanctions, including the ban on energy-related services, equipment and technologies, are not going anywhere.** Only in November 2014, after Western sanctions were imposed, did the Russian government approve a plan of measures to decrease the Russian energy sector's dependency on imports. This was done after years of discussion and a broad consensus that the measures were long overdue. Would have they been implemented without the presence of sanctions? As of December of 2015, subsequent measures, necessary to support the domestic production of equipment for offshore production, were still being discussed. The United States and the European Union may expand the list of sanctioned services, equipment and technologies anytime. Therefore Russian companies, with the support of their government, should act fast to get the necessary technologies (maybe through cooperation with Asian companies) and use them to modernize.

Furthermore, **the majority of sectors that Russia needs to develop and grow its economy can fall prey to Western sanctions. Are they ready to withstand this kind of pressure?** Do Russian companies in those sectors have enough partners in Asia, in case they need access to international know-how or services if they become the target of Western sanctions?

There is a broader question: How mature is the Russian economy to weather further Western reactions to a more assertive Kremlin foreign policy? **In the twenty-first century, it is impossible to build a strong economy providing decent living conditions for one's population while in international isolation. This fact is understood in the Kremlin**—during a meeting with business leaders on December 24, President Putin said: "To expand the capabilities of national businesses we also intend to develop economic ties with other countries and take part in integration processes." But this task will be far more difficult to achieve against the pressure of Western sanctions, which do not seem to be going anywhere.

The curious student of history and international relations may still wonder what is the real reason for these sanctions: disagreements over Ukraine, or Western concerns over a more assertive Russian foreign policy and the prospect of Russia becoming a full-scale power center in international relations? In reality, such alternative reasoning does not exist: Russia's expectation of having its position on Ukraine acknowledged by the West shows that a more assertive Russia is already here.

After Russia claimed its right to a more assertive foreign policy, its economy has found itself in a far more challenging international environment. So far, it has not been completely broken, and Russian society seems ready to endure harsher economic conditions for the benefit of a more ambitious foreign policy course: at least 59 percent of Russians support the country's foreign policy. But this endurance challenge is set to continue at least for the coming year. The



Kremlin has no choice but to further implement the measures necessary to build an economy adequate for a country aspiring to be a true power center in current international relations.

The pro arguments we've discussed thus far share the common theme that "no news is good news." In other words, for the West, the lack of further negative developments should be considered a victory. Importantly, also, this view sees containment of Russia as a long-term project, not a quick "surge" kind of campaign. Sanctions are succeeding, in other words, because the world has not seen further escalation.

Below is some **evidence** conveying those points:

(Iana Dreyer & Nicu Popescu, former Associate Analyst at the EUISS + Editor-in-Chief of borderlex.eu & Senior Analyst at the EUISS, "Do sanctions against Russia work?," European Union Institute for Security Studies, http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Brief_35_Russia_sanctions.pdf, December 2014)

Whereas military actions can have shortterm consequences, **economic sanctions are designed to make an impact in the medium to long term**. In this current crisis, Russia has acted like a sprinter, and Europe, a long-distance runner: the **sanctions are about turning the confrontation over Ukraine from an unwinnable dash into a winnable marathon**. Expecting to measure the effects of sanctions within a few months is akin to gauging a marathon runner's pace based on the first 100 metres – difficult, to say the least. Another important factor is that **sanctions can be preventive**. Accordingly, **non-events are their biggest success**, although, of course, they cannot be proven. EU **sanctions** on Russia **are designed to curb further Russian aggression** in Ukraine or in other post-Soviet states **in the future**. Perhaps **the non-escalation of the conflict** across Ukraine or its non-extension to, say, Moldova **can be considered the greatest achievement of the restrictive measures**.

Another common claim made by supporters of the pro side is that sanctions are eroding Russian citizens' support for Putin. Again, this point takes the long-run view: regime destabilization does not happen overnight. Just because we have not yet seen rebellion against Putin, pros making this argument



can claim, does not mean cracks aren't beginning to form in the foundation of his leadership. Although Russian citizens do still seem to be riding high on nationalism for now, increased economic strain is beginning to foster discontent, which will grow and eventually boil over.

When making this kind of argument, pros will want to be careful not to phrase reduced support for Putin as a possible future consequence of sanctions, but rather as a slow-burn process that has already begun, and that is ongoing today. The reason, of course, we have already discussed: the pro needs to win that status quo sanctions *are succeeding now*, not that sanctions might work *someday*. The key is explaining destabilization as a process, not just a terminal result.

Here is **evidence** on this point:

(Jack Farchy, Moscow & Central Asia Correspondent at Financial Times, "Russians Fearful Over Jobs And Income," International News Magazine, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/magazine/money-matters/86111-Russians-fearful-over-jobs-and-income>, Jan 4 2016)

Only a few **months ago**, Vladimir **Putin was boasting about the resilience of the** Russian **economy**, telling an international investment forum in October that "the peak of the crisis" had passed and the country was on its way to renewed growth.

Now, that optimism has evaporated. This week, the economy ministry reported that the Russian economy contracted month-on-month in November for the first time in five months. **The rouble is** once again **sliding**, trading at its weakest level since a panic **last December** when **the currency's collapse nearly caused a bank run.**

The darkening mood is reflected on the streets. Lyubov Mikhailovna, a 67-year-old pensioner shopping at a central Moscow supermarket, said: "I live on my pension. Prices have gone up, but my pension is the same."

Asked how the economic situation had affected her, she pointed to a basket of mandarins, a traditional New Year snack for Russians: "Look at that - 165 [roubles per kg]. Last year I bought some, this year I'm not buying them."

Yuliya Izotova, a travel agent, said she used to travel abroad to Europe regularly. "Now it's once a year," she sighed.



While the economy ministry is still forecasting a return to slight growth in 2016, few share its view. The World Bank this month trimmed its forecast to a 0.7 per cent contraction. The Russian central bank envisages a 0.5-1 per cent contraction should oil prices recover to an average of \$50 a barrel next year, but a 2-3 per cent recession under a "stress scenario" where oil prices are at \$35 - only just below current levels.

Chris Weafer, a partner at Moscow-based consultancy Macro-Advisory, said authorities had to manage expectations coming into 2016, pointing to parliamentary elections due in September.

"The last thing you want to do is be talking about Russia being in recovery **as people are becoming even more fearful about their income and their job security**," he said.

Some **officials have been warning the population to brace for the worst**. Alexander Novak, energy minister, and Alexei Ulyukayev, economy minister, have appeared on state television warning of a protracted period of low oil prices. Mr Novak blamed low prices on an increase in production from Saudi Arabia, which he said had "destabilised the situation on the market".

"We cannot say the peak of our problems has passed," said Aleksei Kudrin, a highly-respected former finance minister, in an interview with Interfax. "Some time ago, many experts, myself included, believed that we had reached the bottom, or as they say, had passed the peak of the crisis. But today we see some further deterioration." While Mr Putin still enjoys sky-high popularity ratings of more than 80 per cent, **the decline in ordinary Russians' economic situation is a source of concern for the Kremlin**, analysts say.

A protest by truck drivers from several Russian regions **over a** new electronic **toll system has flared up** in the past two months, in **a rare sign of open discontent**. **A poll** published yesterday by Levada Centre, a leading Russian pollster, **found that 63 per cent of Russians supported the truckers'** position.

Mr **Kudrin, who advises Mr Putin on economic matters** and has long been rumoured to be due to return to government, **warned that 2016 "will bring a serious challenge"** for the country. He said that in some parts of Russia consumer demand was down 30 per cent ahead of the new year holidays.

Mr Ulyukayev said of the fall in consumer spending: "We haven't seen anything like this since 1999. Many of those who are working today simply haven't experienced anything like this."

Mr Weafer said **the Kremlin's response** to the shooting down of a Russian jet by Turkey in November - restricting Russian tourism there and banning the import of a range of Turkish products - had **combined with falling oil prices to deal a hefty blow to consumer sentiment**.

"There was this general confidence that this would be a one-year recession," he said. "Turkey and oil prices have led **people** to **reassess the reality of the situation, and** they **found there was much less reason for optimism** than they had previously assumed."

Some **government actions have not helped the** domestic **economy**. The restrictions on Turkish **and** Ukrainian imports is likely to contribute to higher inflation. **The EU recently extended sanctions** against Russia over its actions in Ukraine, saying it had failed to implement its ceasefire obligations.

"Geopolitical priorities are making the situation worse," Mr Weafer said. "The key point for 2016 is: will the concern about a deteriorating economy start to have a moderating impact on foreign policy or not?"



More **evidence**:

(Jill Dougherty, researcher at the International Centre for Defence and Security & former CNN Moscow Bureau Chief, "Could Russian economic turmoil lead to Putin's downfall?," CNN, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/12/14/world/europe/dougherty-moscow-mood/>, December 14 2014)

A new Russian **poll shows** that **Russians are losing confidence in the future** and are making plans for only a few months in advance. In that poll, by VTsIOM, 51% of those questioned said they are confident in the future, down from 61% in the spring of this year. Nearly half said "life is difficult, but bearable."

The U.S. and Europe imposed economic sanctions in response to President Vladimir **Putin's** actions in Ukraine and Crimea, but Putin blames the West for trying to weaken Russia. His fellow citizens, by and large, agree; Putin's latest public approval rating is an overwhelming 82%.

But some, especially among **Russia's** beleaguered political **opposition, see[s] a silver lining** in the economy's woes: **the end, sooner or later, of the Putin regime.**

"My prognosis? In three years the situation will change," Dmitry Stepanov of the liberal RPR-PARNAS Party told me at an opposition conference in Moscow. "**The country is in economic crisis and no one in the government knows how to solve that.**"

The economy will tank, Stepanov predicted, "and **this will elicit mass dissatisfaction among the public. That will activate political battles, and that will lead to a peaceful change of power.**"

Several people I spoke with at the conference said **there's a perfect storm brewing that could sweep Putin from office: low oil prices** resulting in plunging profits for Russia, Western **sanctions, and a faltering economy**. But no one I spoke with wanted that "perfect storm" to end in revolution.

The conference, "Crisis in Russia-E.U. Relations: Causes and Ways Out," was held on December 12, Russia's Constitution Day, and brought together approximately 200 members of the opposition along with some liberal European politicians.

It was co-sponsored by Russia's liberal opposition party, RPR-PARNAS -- short for the Republican Party of Russia/Party of People's Freedom -- and the transnational European party, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

One of the hosts: Mikhail **Kasyanov**, co-leader of RPR-PARNAS, **who served as** minister of finance from 1999 to 2000 and as **Russia's prime minister from 2000 to 2004**. Putin fired him, along with his Cabinet, shortly before running for and winning a second presidential term.

The current Kremlin policy, Kasyanov told me, is "leading nowhere," and he predicted growing economic and political problems.



"We want to force the present leadership of the country, using pressure from society, to change its aggressive course in its international as well as domestic policy and abide by the Russian Constitution," he said.

Clearly, to win the "sanctions kill support for Putin" debate, pros would need to win that the public perceives the sanctions as a problem. Here is some **evidence** supporting that claim:

(Pew Research Center, Katie Simmons- assoc. director of research, Bruce Stokes- director for global economic attitudes, and Jacob Poushter, "NATO Publics Blame Russia for Ukrainian Crisis, but Reluctant to Provide Military Aid," <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/06/10/2-russian-public-opinion-putin-praised-west-panned/>, June 10 2015)

Russians express increasingly negative views about the economic situation in their country.

Roughly **three-quarters** (73%) **say the Russian economy is bad**, with only around a quarter (24%) saying it is good. In the months following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, positive economic attitudes had risen to 44%. But the fall in the price of oil and **Western sanctions have led to a 20 percentage point drop in positive economic sentiments in the past year**, despite recent signs that the economic downturn might be less severe than anticipated.

Young Russians, those ages 18 to 29, are the most likely to hold positive views about the economy, yet only 32% say it is doing well, compared with 19% of Russians ages 50 and older.

Most **Russians agree that** Western **sanctions are having an effect** on the economy, but there is a split as to whether it is those sanctions or falling oil prices that are the main culprit for the economic downturn. In all, 45% of Russians say sanctions are having a major effect on the economy, with a further 41% saying they are having a minor effect. **Only 8% say they are having no effect** at all.



Pros will also need to be prepared to win that popular sentiment is turning on Putin. Here is **evidence** on this point, discussing both the impact of sanctions and the Kremlin's apparent uneasiness about public dissent:

(Owen Matthews, contributing editor and former Moscow and Istanbul Bureau Chief for Newsweek & lecturer on Russian history and politics at Columbia University's Harriman Centre and St Antony's College Oxford, "RESTLESS IN RUSSIA: THE KREMLIN BRACES FOR A POSSIBLE SPRING OF DISCONTENT," Newsweek, <http://www.newsweek.com/2016/01/15/restless-russia-411530.html>, Jan 5 2016)

Predicting a coming Russian revolution has been a favorite hobby of Russia watchers for years now. But since President Vladimir Putin's annexation of Crimea in March 2014, the doomsaying has intensified, as plunging oil prices and Western economic sanctions wreak havoc on the Russian economy. Yet even **though** the ruble has lost over half its value, inflation has risen from 5 percent to 16 percent and Russians' purchasing power has dropped to 1990s levels, **Putin's approval ratings have so far remained** close to a near-miraculous 80 percent **thanks to** a heady mix of military adventures and a barrage of **patriotic propaganda**. **There are gathering signs, though, that the Kremlin is bracing for a possible end to this period of national togetherness and is preparing for a possible wave of unrest.** "If **2014 was the year that Russia went rogue, 2015 was the year that the costs of that course became manifest** for Russians," wrote Brian Whitmore recently on U.S.-funded Radio Liberty's influential The Power Vertical Blog. "And **next year should be when we learn whether Vladimir Putin's regime will be able to bear those costs.**" **In December, the Russian Duma rushed through a bill that allows state security officers to shoot at women** (except, bizarrely, if they "appear pregnant"), **children and disabled people "in cases of a terror act or armed attack."** **The law also hands the officers the right to enter private property to "maintain public security in emergency situations and during mass civil unrest."** **The OMON riot police, deployed in the tens of thousands during mass protests** against Putin's return to the presidency in 2011, **has seen its budget ring-fenced, while the rest of the police downsizes** by 10 percent. At the same time, **Russia's Interior Ministry has quintupled its order of a brand-new version of the RGS-50M grenade launcher, which was designed during the dying days of the Soviet regime in 1989 to fire tear gas and rubber bullets.** "They are cheap to produce and effective to use," an enthusiastic spokesman for the Degtyarev factory told the Russian news agency TASS, which ran the story prominently. **On December 15, a new barbed-wire fence was installed around Ostankino, Moscow's central TV studio, making it harder for crowds to break in, as they did during anti-Kremlin protests in October 1993. Authorities also swapped the studio's regular security guards for elite troops from the KGB's successor agency, the Federal Security Service. Television has been crucial to creating the wave of patriotic fervor that has**



kept Putin popular even as prices rise and living standards fall—what Russians call the battle between the television and the refrigerator. Right now, the refrigerator seems to be winning: According to a recent poll by the independent Levada Center in Moscow, Russians’ trust in the TV news has slipped from 79 percent in 2009 to just 41 percent today. “Of course, [the Kremlin] understands that this is going to be a hard year, politically and economically,” says Anton Krasovsky, a blogger and former anchor at NTV television in Russia who was fired last year after announcing he was HIV-positive. “There is no more money for social spending, no money for increasing salaries to teachers, doctors, firemen.... But the priority is to prepare the way for Putin to remain president after [elections] in 2018.” So far, the Kremlin has kept discontent at bay with the age-old expedient of providing a steady diet of enemies to blame for Russia’s problems—the Americans, the Ukrainians and now the Turks. Three-quarters of Russians still blame the West for their economic woes, according to a recent study by the Institute of Sociology, part of Russia’s Academy of Sciences—but the authors warned that within a year to 18 months this collective delusion will probably wear off, and people could begin to blame their rulers instead. Sixty percent of respondents reported that their standard of living had declined over the last year, and just 38 percent said they were willing to “make further sacrifices to defeat Russia’s enemies.”

Over the past few weeks, there have been increasing indicators of discontent. Truckers went on strike in December to protest new tolls administered by Putin cronies, bringing Moscow traffic to a halt. Doctors and teachers also went on strike over pay and conditions in Central Russia. Shocking allegations about a business empire of the son of Yury Chaika, Russia’s prosecutor general and a close Putin ally, were circulated broadly on the Internet. And prominent businessman Dmitry Potapenko during the Moscow Economic Forum, an annual gathering of Russia’s top business leaders, publicly accused Kremlin-protected state bureaucrats of strangling businesses through massive corruption at the Moscow Economic Forum. “You can expect a visit from men in uniform the moment your business takes off,” said Potapenko, who runs a chain of supermarkets and a carpet factory. “Now there’s less money, and the budget has to be plugged with something. [State officials] already muscled in on property a long time ago. Now all that’s left are the businesses in the service industry.” Nearly 2 million viewers watched his speech online. That kind of public dissent appears to have rattled the Kremlin—and the Kremlin appears to be responding. In December, the Federal Guard Service—Putin’s personal praetorian guard—was repurposed and deployed to all of Russia’s provinces to act as an early-warning system for social unrest. Irina Makiyeva, a former state bank executive, has been drafted to head a working group to identify potential trouble spots for industrial unrest around Russia. The service will be conducting polling to assess citizens’ levels of discontent, Makiyeva told the Russian cabinet in a televised session: “We’re ready for things to get worse in some sectors. We conduct constant monitoring, especially in the problem cities.” Makiyeva’s team has developed a green, yellow and red classification system to identify potential unrest. It has also worked out a velvet glove–iron fist package of emergency economic aid and heavy police action to identify and arrest agitators should any protests arise. “Every action of [Kremlin chief of staff] Vyacheslav Volodin is based absolutely on this so-called closed polling,” says Mikhail Zygar, former editor-in-chief



the opposition Dozd TV and **author of** the best-selling *All the Kremlin's Men*, **a study of the Putin regime**. "These polls confirm that everything they're doing is right, that Putin is popular and the people love him. And the polls are absolutely consistent. [The Kremlin is] sure that there will be no uprisings." If that's true, why is the Kremlin taking so many pre-emptive security measures? Mark Galeotti, a Russia expert at New York University, argued in a recent article on Russia, the independent online magazine, that the Kremlin's real purpose is to create a "theater of tyranny. A style of governance which actively encourages the appearance of being tougher and nastier than it really is, and at the same time enthusiastically telegraphs that it could be tougher and nastier still." Just as Russia's foreign policy in Syria, for instance, is all about projecting ruthlessness and great-power status by using a tiny military force, so its domestic policy is all about cowering protest before it happens. "Both depend on making Russia appear not only stronger than it is, but more ruthless, unpredictable and downright crazy, so it seems easier to accommodate than challenge it," wrote Galeotti. "And it works really well." Theater or not, some very real victims have been scapegoated to discourage future protest. A handful of activists arrested at mass protests in 2011 and at isolated demonstrations since have been sentenced to prison terms ranging from two to four years. And just in case exiled oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky had planned on making trouble in Russia, prosecutors last month charged him with murder, effectively ensuring that he won't return to his homeland. **But for the Kremlin to truly stifle** any chance of **unrest** once and for all, **Russia would have to become prosperous again**. In an era of low oil prices, that would mean becoming competitive—which would require the state to create a functioning and fair judicial system and suppress the predatory instincts of the bureaucratic and securocratic class. But that would mean dismantling the very basis of the kleptocratic system that Putin has built. So the Russian president is left with two basic tools: repression and patriotic fervor. They have served him well so far. The question is whether the Russian people will continue to believe the television after the refrigerators stand empty.

Here is another piece of **evidence**, which further argues that Putin himself and his government perceives that they are in trouble due to the economic situation caused by Western sanctions:

(Thomas Fedyszyn, professor of national security affairs at the Naval War College, "What Russia Said About NATO and Why It Matters," The National Interest, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/what-russia-said-about-nato-why-it-matters-14790>, Jan 3 2016)

National Security Strategies (NSS) of great powers have many audiences. Vladimir **Putin's** latest effort, "About the **Strategy of National Security** of the Russian Federation" **was issued on New Year's Eve 2015**. He should hope that this forty-page publication will be read by his local citizenry because the international audience will neither be surprised nor enlightened by it. Official Russian sources argue that Putin is embarking on a "proactive" foreign policy in order to prevent Russia from being "closed off from the rest of the world." In fact **the tough tone of the document hides a very clear defensiveness along with the suggestion that Russia will not be able to compete with its newly labeled adversaries in the long-term. This alone could lead to trouble.**

The Western press is highlighting that this assessment names the United States and its NATO allies as Russia's principal security threat, with relations reaching a new low after Russia's annexation of Crimea. However, this theme is merely a reiteration of Russia's Military Doctrine (December 2014) and Maritime Doctrine (July 2015). It does up the ante of Obama's NSS (2015), which labels Russia just as an aggressor in Ukraine and Crimea, without honoring Moscow as a principal threat. NATO's most recent Summit Declaration (Wales 2014) also falls short of 'threat' terminology but does 'condemn' Russian actions in Ukraine and Crimea.

The new NSS's discussion of the situation in Ukraine and other so-called 'color' revolutions is instructive in the Russian belief that not only are the intelligence services of the United States behind them, but that radical social, nationalist and religious groups are being joined by international NGOs and private citizens. Should this sweeping and comprehensive alliance exist in any members of the former Soviet Union, there probably is good reason for Russia to expect many more such 'color' revolutions.

Russia's View of NATO

Russian proof of NATO aggression is the development of its Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) and the fact that additional Western troops are being stationed on the alliance's eastern borders. There is no mention that NATO bolstered its RRF in direct response to Russian revanchism in Crimea and Ukraine, several months after the aggressions occurred. Further the troop buildup in Poland and the Baltics is composed of rotational—not permanently-stationed—forces and their numbers are dwarfed by Russian counterparts



across the border. Clearly the document authors citing “NATO’s military buildup” paid little attention to the pitiful response made by NATO members of increasing each member’s defense expenditures to at least 2 percent of GDP. Russia is more than double this percentage.

A Nuclear Option?

While there is lip service offered to curbing Russian nuclear potential in the NSS, the qualifications that follow make it clear that this is empty verbiage and no fundamental change from the Gerasimov Doctrine. The document offers that Russia will continue to maintain its nuclear arsenal as a deterrent and would resort to the nuclear option “only if all other non-military options failed.” Of course, Russia retains the prerogative to make this determination.

Russia’s Economy

Perhaps it is in the realm of non-military affairs that Russia watchers should pay particular notice. The document acknowledges that **Russian economic stability is in danger due to its “low level of economic competitiveness and its resource-dependent economy.”** It notes **a “lag in the development of advanced technologies, the vulnerability of the financial system. . . the economy going offshore.** . . . the strength of the shadow economy.” **It indirectly acknowledges the effect of Western sanctions** by labeling “ensuring Russia’s food independence” a strategic task and calling for increased government support for agriculture. **Even looking through rose-colored glasses, one sees a faltering system** refusing to enter the global economy—a system **that has lost attractiveness to** outside **investors and cannot keep pace with even middling competitors.**

As we will discuss in our con section, the pro will not necessarily have an easy job winning that sanctions harm Putin politically. This is a potentially complex area of discussion for both sides.

The pro can gain some extra traction by developing some uniqueness in the form of a “things are different now/tables are turning” argument. The goal is to counter the con narrative that pain from sanctions is causing Russians to rally around Putin by suggesting that some new event is changing that dynamic.



One way the pro might advance this point is by discussing Russian actions in Syria, which many analysts believe are intended as a kind of “bargaining chip” to get the West to drop sanctions. The **evidence** below explains why this is a risky gamble for Putin:

(Amanda Taub, human rights lawyer & foreign policy contributor to Vox, “Putin has a big problem in Syria that no one is talking about,” Vox, <http://www.vox.com/2015/9/30/9426333/putin-syria-russia-problem>, Sept 30 2015)

Putin has a big problem in Syria — one to which Western coverage of the Russian military intervention in Syria has not paid much attention.

Namely, the intervention is not at all popular with Russians themselves. Because **Putin's personal popularity is key to his political longevity**, that could be a very serious matter indeed for the Russian leader.

A recent poll by Moscow's Levada Center **shows** that **only a small minority of Russians** support giving Bashar al-Assad direct military support. Only 39 percent of respondents said they **supported Russia's policy toward the Assad** regime. When asked what Russia should do for Assad, 69 percent opposed direct military intervention. A tiny 14 percent of respondents said that Russia should send troops or other direct military support to Syria.

It's clear that Putin is taking those concerns seriously. In what seems to be an attempt to shore up public opinion among Russians who are worried about casualties in a faraway war, the Kremlin has already promised that only volunteers, not conscripts, will be sent to Syria, and that the military intervention will consist only of airstrikes.

But Putin's public opinion problems on Syria could be just the beginning. Russia's economy is already struggling, and a new war will be an expensive additional burden. If Russia's presence in Syria makes its forces a target of terrorist attacks there, or, worse, if it coincides with attacks at home, **that could damage public opinion even further.**

Russians' skepticism of Putin's Syria policy is especially stark when contrasted with the overwhelmingly positive response to his actions in Ukraine. That was a huge boost to Putin's popularity, helping his regime weather Russia's 2014 economic problems with high public support. But the Ukraine intervention led to **sanctions on Russia**, which **proved unpopular with** the Russian **elites**.

That's a problem for Putin, because he needs to keep elites happy in order to maintain their vital political support for his regime. If, as some commentators have suggested, **the Syria intervention is an attempt to gain leverage to force the West to lift sanctions**, then Putin may find that it simply exchanges one problem for another: Instead of public popularity and elite frustration, he would have happier elites **but** a less supportive public.



And that's assuming it works, which it might not. For one thing, **it's not clear that Putin will be able** use Syria **to gain leverage** at all, **which could mean** that **he is left with a less enthusiastic public and** still has **no sanctions relief to offer elites.**

Even if Putin does manage to pull it all off, using his unpopular intervention in Syria as a bargaining chip to reduce Western sanctions on Russia, the trade-off might not be worth it.

As Russian analyst Alexander Verkhovsky explained to me when I met with him in Moscow last spring, **Putin's popularity is his "principal resource."** As long as Putin is popular, his position is fairly secure. But **if his popularity ratings falter,** then **he risks being pushed out** of office **by** Russian **elites in favor of someone** else **who can better protect their interests** — as Verkhovsky put it, he can be "changed for another guy, even someone from the same [Putinist] circle." So even if Putin is able leverage the intervention in Syria to offer elites the sanctions relief they want, that may come at too high a political price.

To be clear, none of this means that Syria will be enough to overcome Putin's reportedly sky-high approval, nor does it mean that one unpopular Mideast adventure is going to bring the downfall of the Putin government. But **Putin's hold on power, as solid as it might look from the outside, isn't; it's beset by** a number of **problems** and, at the moment, is premised in large part on overwhelming public support. With elites alienated, **a hit to his poll numbers is also a hit to his basic legitimacy. That's a precarious position to be in, particularly given Russia's current economic downturn.** No single unpopular policy is going to bring it all crashing down, but the point is that he's not in a position to go gambling with his popularity, and yet he's just done exactly that.

In other words, while it may look like **Putin is pursuing a** grand, brilliant **gamble** in Syria, the reality is that he may have just made the worst kind of bet: **one in which he'll be the big loser** at home, **no matter the outcome in Syria.**

So, the pro might argue, sanctions have succeeded in preventing escalation, and are creating a climate that complicates Putin's abilities to make strategic political decisions in the long-term. First, sustained economic pain harms ordinary Russians and particularly angers elites, who are key to the survival of the regime. Second, Putin's attempt to use military action in Syria to convince the West to compromise on sanctions is deeply unpopular with the Russian population at large. Together, these dynamics create two different breeding grounds for discontent, both caused by sanctions: the economic impacts of the sanctions themselves, and the disapproval of his use of Syria as a "bargaining chip." Diversifying the internal link structure in this manner can be highly strategic for the pro.



Remember that pros going for “oust Putin” arguments will need to further develop that point with impacts. What is the benefit to the West’s interests of getting rid of Putin? Even if the answers to that question seem obvious to you, make sure to articulate them clearly during your debates. Remember, the pro’s burden is to establish that sanctions are successfully protecting Western interests. Without explaining why removing Putin from power is in the West’s interests, you will have fallen short.

Now, before we move on to the con side of the debate, here is one last piece of useful **evidence** that neatly summarizes all of the main pro arguments we’ve discussed so far:

(Iana Dreyer & Nicu Popescu, former Associate Analyst at the EUISS + Editor-in-Chief of borderlex.eu & Senior Analyst at the EUISS, “Do sanctions against Russia work? ,” European Union Institute for Security Studies, http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Brief_35_Russia_sanctions.pdf , December 2014)

The camp in favour has an equally compelling set of arguments. Advocates believe that **sanctions have** already **had an impact** in the short term **and will continue to do so** in the medium term. First, **they made Russia** seriously **factor in** possible **Western responses to its actions** in Ukraine, **which seems not to have been the case prior** to the annexation of Crimea. **The sanctions**, in other words, constrained Russia as they **deterred Moscow from seizing** even **bigger** chunks of **territory**. The separatist areas of the Donbas form only a tiny part of what is called by nationalist elements of the Russian public Novorossia. The coastal city of Mariupol was not seized by Russia, when it easily could have been. There has been no attempt by Russian forces to forge a corridor bridging mainland Russia to Crimea, let alone Odessa and Transnistria. In other words, **a useful effect of the sanctions is that, even if they do not help** the EU much in its policy **on Crimea, they do minimise the risk that Russia will** seek to openly **destabilise other parts** of Ukraine or, say, Moldova and Georgia. At a global level, finally, **sanctions** also **signalled to other actors that** unilateral military **ventures will come at a cost**. Equally (if not more) important is that **sanctions shattered Putin’s ‘contract’ with the Russian people**: namely, **improving collective prosperity in exchange for** accepting **authoritarianism** and the siphoning off of Russia’s riches by elites. **The** restrictive **measures**, combined with the other factors now hitting the country’s economy, **are forcing Putin to** tentatively **replace his model with nationalism** and anti-Westernism. **However**, as **Russian history suggests, patriotism might not last long in the absence of** tangible **economic prosperity. The collapse of the Russian empire in 1917 occurred in the wake of the initial patriotic boost of [WW1]** the First World War. **The USSR crumbled**



after its economy collapsed in the 1980s. And **support for** Yeltsin and liberal **democracy in the 1990s**
plummented after reforms failed to yield economic dividends.

With the pro side of the debate covered, we'll now move on to discuss how Pfers might successfully negate.

Ideally, con debaters will want to both respond to major pro arguments and advance some compelling external reasons why sanctions fail to advance Western interests.

We'll start with a piece of fairly generic "sanctions fail" **evidence** (although it does reference Russia sanctions specifically at one point). This evidence is useful primarily due to it being written by a former UN Secretary-General, although it does also contain a few worthwhile warrants:

(Kofi Annan- former secretary-general of the united nations & Kishore Mahbubani- Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore "rethinking sanctions," New Europe, <http://neurope.eu/article/rethinking-sanctions/>, Jan 5 2016)

Today, the United Nations Security Council **has more sanctions** regimes **in place than at any time in its history**. During the 1990s, the maximum was eight; in the 2000s, the peak rose to 12; now it stands at 16. And these totals do not include sanctions imposed by the European Union and the United States. **Judging by this escalation, one might conclude that sanctions have proved** a remarkably **effective** tool in promoting international peace and security. Unfortunately, **that is far from being the case.**

In fact, **academic studies suggest that** sanctions have had limited success. Thomas Biersteker of the Graduate Institute in Geneva estimates that **sanctions are effective only about 20% of the time.** According to Oxford University's Adam Roberts, **"There are very few cases where you can definitely identify sanctions as having had a success**, except sometimes in combination with other factors." **For example, while US and EU sanctions on Myanmar may have contributed to the country's decision to open up its economy and engage in gradual political reform, fear of becoming overly reliant on China may have been a bigger consideration.**



But the potential problems with sanctions regimes extend far beyond ineffectiveness. There is also evidence that **sanctions can be counterproductive,** such as when targeted regimes enrich themselves by controlling black markets in prohibited goods. In Haiti, to take just one example, the military regime facilitated the trade of black-market oil across its border with the Dominican Republic during the oil embargo on the country in 1993 and 1994.

The risks intensify when the targeted country is in a strong position to retaliate, because affected constituencies can turn against their leaders for imposing the sanctions. **When the US and the EU imposed sanctions on Russia in response to its annexation of Crimea, Russia retaliated by banning food imports** from Western Europe, spurring farmers in Brussels and elsewhere to protest against falling prices.

Even when sanctions are not having the intended impact, however, they often remain in place. One reason is that, once sanctions have been adopted, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council can “reverse veto” attempts to lift them. Thus, although sanctions regimes are subject to periodic review, this means little as long as at least one permanent member is committed to maintaining them.

This occurred with the US-backed sanctions imposed on Iraq in the 1990s. The sanctions had serious consequences not just for Saddam Hussein and his regime, against whom they were aimed, but also – and more important – for huge numbers of innocent people. Joy Gordon of Loyola University in Chicago has estimated that the sanctions led to 670,000-880,000 excess child deaths. To be sure, the international community, recognizing the suffering that sanctions caused in Iraq, has moved toward targeted or “smart” sanctions. But it remains unclear whether today’s targeted sanctions are actually more effective than the comprehensive sanctions of the past. As Gordon has pointed out, black-market trade can still undermine arms and oil embargoes. Moreover, sanctions targeting specific industries can damage the wider economy in ways that hurt the livelihoods and wellbeing of ordinary citizens, though those consequences are often overlooked.

Sanctions targeting specific individuals, such as asset freezes and travel bans, do better at avoiding such broad collateral damage. But innocent people can inadvertently appear on these lists, though the process of identifying targets has improved in response to litigation brought by those who have been affected.

Of course, sanctions do serve some purpose. As Columbia University’s Michael Doyle puts it, “Sanctions can be justified if the alternatives of inaction or armed force are worse, which they sometimes are. Inaction might involve tolerating a human-rights abuse or...engaging in purely verbal criticism (‘cheap talk’). Armed force is both disproportionate to some abuses and often more costly in human and material terms.”

The problem arises when leaders depend excessively on sanctions. Harvard’s John Ruggie frames the issue succinctly: “Sanctions are an instrument of coercive diplomacy – except that policymakers have forgotten about the diplomacy part.” Indeed, it **often** seems that **leaders**, unwilling or unable to put in the time to pursue genuine political engagement, **use sanctions as a** kind of **shortcut**. As Harvard’s Kenneth Rogoff has noted, “The effects of sanctions are often fairly disappointing – so much so that many scholars have concluded that **such measures often are imposed so that governments can appear to domestic audiences to be ‘doing something.’**” That was certainly the case with the severe sanctions imposed by the US on Cuba, which were both cheap and ineffective (in fact, they may have delayed reforms). Unfortunately, **getting sanctions right has** generally **been a less compelling goal than getting sanctions adopted.** But, given the disputed impact of sanctions, a new approach is needed. After all, **public policy should be guided by evidence, not intuition and emotion.** And the evidence indicates that, in order to achieve success and avoid unintended consequences, carefully calibrated sanctions must be pursued in tandem with political engagement. Imposing sanctions may feel good. But if they are actually to do good, we must refine how they are used.



The next piece of **evidence** argues that sanctions have not checked Russia's behavior, which has continued to violate Western interests. Indeed, it points out, the annexation of Crimea took place *after* the first round of sanctions were implemented. It also draws on empirical academic research to draw the conclusion that sanctions in general are rarely effective, and can succeed only in limited situations (situations different from the one presented by Russia):

(Emma Ashford, Visiting Research Fellow at the Cato Institute, "Not-So-Smart Sanctions," Foreign Affairs, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2015-12-14/not-so-smart-sanctions>, Jan/Feb 2016)

In fact, however, Western policymakers got lucky: the **sanctions coincided with the collapse of global oil prices**, worsening, but **not causing, Russia's economic decline. The ruble's exchange rate has tracked global oil prices** more closely than any new sanctions, and many of the actions taken by the Russian government, including the slashing of the state budget, are similar to those it took when oil prices fell during the 2008 financial crisis. The sanctions have inhibited access to Western financing, forcing Russian banks to turn to the government for help. This has run down the Kremlin's foreign reserves and led the government to engage in various unorthodox financial maneuvers, such as allowing the state-owned oil company Rosneft to recapitalize itself from state coffers. **Yet the Russian government has been able to weather the crisis by providing emergency capital to wobbling banks, allowing the ruble to float freely**, and making **targeted cuts to the state budget** while **providing fiscal stimulus** through increased spending on pensions. **Even with continued low oil prices**, the International Monetary Fund expects that **growth will return to the Russian economy in 2016**, albeit at a sluggish 1.5 percent. **Nor are the sanctions inflicting much pain on Russia's elites**. Although Prada and Tiffany are doing less business in Moscow, the luxury housing market is anemic, and travel bans rule out weekend jaunts to Manhattan, these restrictions are hardly unbearable. **One target, the close Putin adviser Vladislav Surkov, has dismissed them as harmless**. "The only things that interest me in the U.S. are Tupac Shakur, Allen Ginsberg, and Jackson Pollock," he said. "I don't need a visa to access their work."

And **when** the sanctions are **judged by** the most relevant metric—**whether they are producing a policy change—they have been an outright failure. Since** the United States imposed **the sanctions, Russia has not backed down in Ukraine, and there is no reason to believe** that **they will** force it to do so anytime soon. In the meantime, **however, the sanctions are harming U.S. economic and geopolitical interests. If Western leaders want to** resolve the Ukraine crisis and meaningfully **constrain Russia's bad behavior, they should abandon** their **failed sanctions-centric policy and focus on other measures** instead, such as efforts to aid Ukraine economically, obstruct Russia's military modernization, and increase European energy independence.

Whatever punishment the **sanctions have** inflicted on Russia, it has **not translated into coercion. The Obama administration** appears to have expected that it would have by now: in February 2015, for example, Christine Wormuth, the



U.S. undersecretary of defense for policy, admitted that the sanctions had “not changed so far what Russia has been doing on the ground, and that is the great concern.”

Indeed, after the initial round of sanctions, the Kremlin’s aggression only grew: Russia formally absorbed Crimea and upped its financial and military support for pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine (including those who most likely shot down the Malaysia Airlines flight). It is possible that the sanctions may have deterred Russia from even greater aggression in Ukraine, but it is equally possible that all Russia ever wanted to do there was create a slow-burning insurgency. And at any rate, the sanctions have failed to force Russia to withdraw from Crimea and stop meddling in eastern Ukraine. This should not be surprising: as the most comprehensive study of sanctions found, they fail to achieve their goals in 66 percent of cases, and they fail 79 percent of the time when designed to discourage military misadventurism.

The Kremlin’s aggression has persisted in large part because the West’s targeted sanctions have succumbed to the same problem that plagues traditional comprehensive sanctions: the targeted regime shelters its cronies, while the rest of the population suffers. It wasn’t supposed to be this way. Modern sanctions are designed to avoid replicating the flaws of the comprehensive embargo placed on Iraq during the 1990s, which served only to enrich Saddam Hussein’s regime and impoverish the Iraqi people. With Russia, the U.S. government made sure not to bar overall trade and instead imposed asset freezes and financing restrictions on individual politicians and companies. In theory, members of Putin’s inner circle would use their influence to convince the president to reconsider his bellicose Ukraine policy. In practice, however, the sanctions have had the unintended consequence of inflicting widespread punishment on the Russian economy and population. By restricting access to international financing during a recession, the sanctions have compounded the fall in oil prices, requiring Moscow to slash spending on health care, infrastructure, and government salaries, which has created economic hardship for ordinary Russians. The crash of the ruble, meanwhile, has not only destroyed savings but also increased the monthly payments of those who hold mortgages denominated in foreign currencies. The government, in turn, has pressured struggling Russian banks to convert such debt into rubles and absorb the losses, which has rescued homeowners from default but run down banks’ capital reserves.

Adding to the pain was the Russian government’s decision to issue its own set of sanctions, which have barred the import of Western foodstuffs. Although the move has hurt eastern European farmers and exporters, it has also created shortages and increased food prices inside Russia. Then there was the unforeseen credit crunch among ordinary consumers. Fearful of a legal backlash, many U.S. and European banks cut off not only billionaire bank owners but also many of their customers. In March 2014, for example, Visa and MasterCard suspended all transactions from four Russian banks in response to sanctions placed on its owners, effectively canceling the credit cards of ordinary Russian consumers. The U.S. government had to intervene to convince the companies to start processing payments again.

At the same time that the sanctions have punished the population at large, the Kremlin has sheltered key supporters from their impact. For example, from March to December 2014, companies linked to the Putin cronies Arkady Rotenberg and Gennady Timchenko received 12 percent more in government contracts than they had during the entire previous year. The government also stripped Russia’s largest private bank, Alfa-Bank, of a lucrative contract to service the country’s electricity market, awarding it instead to Bank Rossiya.



The Kremlin has also managed to circumvent the sanctions, partly **by turning to China**. In May 2014, Putin visited the country to seal a 30-year, \$400 billion gas deal with it, **demonstrating that Russia has alternatives to European gas markets**. That October, **Moscow and Beijing also agreed to** a 150 billion yuan **currency swap**, allowing companies such as Gazprom to trade commodities in rubles and yuan—**and thus steer clear of U.S. financial regulations**. Even in **Europe**, Russia **has** been able to find **loopholes to** avoid the **sanctions**: in order to obtain access to Arctic drilling equipment and expertise, Rosneft acquired 30 percent of the North Atlantic drilling projects belonging to the Norwegian company Statoil. It is tempting **to believe that the sanctions will eventually work**—say, after a few more years—but that **is wishful thinking**. U.S. and European negotiations with Russia have focused on the near future, including the implementation of the Minsk II agreement, an armistice with a deadline of December 2015, and with good reason: a drawn-out insurgency is the worst-case scenario for Ukraine and its Western backers. The sanctions were intended to compel Russia to cooperate with this international diplomatic process and withdraw from Crimea; if it doesn't do so before the Minsk deadline, it is unlikely to in the future. Indeed, as **academic studies suggest, the longer sanctions are in place, the less likely they are to produce** a policy **change**. And **in the case of Russia, if the price of oil rises again** in the next few years, **as is likely, their impact will diminish further**.

The above evidence, you may have noticed, also contains some warrants about how Russia might circumvent the sanctions. We'll return to that idea later.

More importantly, as one expert points out in the evidence below, sanctions can only be called “effective” if they have created *policy change*. Therefore, the con might argue, the pro can only win the debate by establishing that Russia did indeed change its policies in a favorable way in response to sanctions. Just proving that the sanctions hurt the Russian economy is not enough:

(Emma Ashford, Visiting Research Fellow at the Cato Institute, “IF SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA ARE FAILING, WHAT’S NEXT?,” Newsweek, <http://www.newsweek.com/if-sanctions-against-russia-are-failing-what-next-408666>, Dec 23 2015)

Unfortunately, as I show in a study published in the January/February edition of *Foreign Affairs*, **sanctions on Russia have been largely unsuccessful**. **The Russian economy is certainly hurting, but** most of **this damage was done by** the extraordinary drop in **oil prices** over the last year:



The ruble's exchange rate has tracked global oil prices more closely than any new sanctions, and many of the actions taken by the Russian government, including the slashing of the state budget, are similar to those it took when oil prices fell during the 2008 global financial crisis.

And **economic damage itself isn't necessarily the best measure for sanctions' success.** Ultimately, **sanctions are a tool of economic coercion and statecraft. If they do not cause a policy change, they are failing:**

After the initial round of **sanctions, the Kremlin's aggression only grew: Russia** formally **absorbed Crimea and increased its financial and military support for pro-Russian rebels** in eastern Ukraine (including those who most likely shot down the Malaysia Airlines flight).

Here is another short piece of **evidence** predicting no policy changes from the Kremlin:

(Clifton B. Parker, "Sanctions against Russia may inflict some pain, Stanford scholars say," Stanford News, <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2014/may/ukraine-sanctions-russia-050714.html>, May 7 2014)

With the Ukraine in upheaval, U.S. economic **sanctions against Russia may not stabilize events on the ground** but they could damage Russia's economy in the long run, according to several Stanford scholars.

"Sanctions will not alter (Russian President Vladimir) **Putin's policies," said** Stephen Krasner, **a Stanford professor of international relations** and a senior fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies.

"Annexing Crimea and loosening Kiev's control over the eastern Ukraine have **strengthened Putin's domestic position."**

Earlier in this paper, we covered the current economic situation in Russia, and how low oil prices have independently caused considerable damage. The con might want to include some of this line of analysis in order to hedge against pro claims that sanctions are successfully weakening Russia. If the pro's case relies on winning that sanctions are draining the Russian economy, but the con can convince the judge that Russia's economy would be deeply damaged either way, then it will be hard for the pro to win that the sanctions themselves were successful.



Besides questions about economic performance and military deterrence, some cons will also want to dig in on the question of Putin's popularity. There are plenty of experts who argue that the Russian government has succeeded in channeling any public anger over the state of the economy purely against the West, increasing Russian determination to resist the demands of an "adversary."

Here is a short piece of **evidence** on this point:

(Emma Ashford, Visiting Research Fellow at the Cato Institute, "Not-So-Smart Sanctions," Foreign Affairs, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2015-12-14/not-so-smart-sanctions>, Jan/Feb 2016)

But it is **in the realm of Russian politics** that the **sanctions have been most counterproductive**. The sanctions have had a "rally round the flag" effect **as the Russian people blame their ills on the West**. According to the Levada Center, a Russian research organization, **Putin's approval rating increased from 63 percent** during the invasion of Crimea **to 88 percent** by October 2015. In another poll, more than two-thirds of respondents said they thought the primary goal of the sanctions was to weaken and humiliate Russia. State propaganda is of course playing a role, but **the sanctions have made it easier for Putin to sell his anti-Western narrative. They allow him to deflect blame away from his own economic mismanagement and toward what he has called "external factors."**

The sanctions are also having the perverse effect of **enabling Putin to further consolidate his power**, because he has rewarded his closest cronies at the expense of other elites. According to data from Forbes' list of billionaires, Russia's 15 richest citizens lost an average of 20 percent of their wealth in 2014, before regaining 12 percent in the next six months as the market stabilized. These fluctuations track the broader Russian economy, but after one breaks down the data, some telling disparities emerge. On average, those billionaires who held stakes in sanctioned companies lost less than three percent of their wealth between January 2014 and June 2015, whereas those who did not lost nine percent. It requires no great leap of logic to see that the Kremlin has shielded those with connections to the ruling circle from the pain of the sanctions, thereby shifting the burden to those without such ties.



Another piece of **evidence** on how sanctions have stoked Russian anger against the US and rallied them around the flag:

(Dr. Dan Steinbock, Senior Fulbright scholar & Visiting Professor of international business at Helsinki School of Economics, Research Director of International Business at the India, China and America Institute, Director of the New York office of Academy of Finland, "For Whom The Bell Tolls, Really The Impact Of The Sanctions Against Russia," <http://www.valuwalk.com/2015/08/russia-sanctions-economy/>, August 24 2015)

In March 2014, Washington and Brussels initiated sanctions against Russian individuals and interests in response to developments in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. For 1.5 years, **the hope has been that sanctions** and the Ukraine crisis **would quash** President **Putin's popularity**. **In reality**, Ukraine has been pushed close to default, while the **sanctions have united Russians behind Putin**.

Before the Ukraine crisis, **diminished economic prospects caused Putin's approval rating to plunge to 61 percent**; the lowest since 2000. **In 2014, the sanctions** and the annexation of Crimea **galvanized public opinion behind Moscow**. **Today, Putin's approval ratings remain at 87 percent**, according to Levada Center.

Currently, some 56 percent of Russians support Putin's "Unified Russia" Party, while communists, militant and nationalists, and social-democrats together have about 15 percent, according to the Russian Public Opinion Research Center.

In the US, many observers suspect that putinism and statism are on the rise because barely 65 percent of Russians support the prime minister and the government, and just 45 percent are behind the parliament. However, that's a tricky argument. After all, in the US, the approval of the Obama administration and the Congress is about 40% and 15%, respectively, according to public polls and Gallup. In other words, president Obama's support in the US is barely half of that of Putin's in Russia. Even worse, the support of the parliament in Russia is three times higher than that of Congress in the US.

Yet, **the West continues to rely on the idea that "Putin is the problem, Russia is with us."** **In reality, Putin's actions reflect the wishes of the Russian people, including the moderate majority and the emerging middle classes**. Before the global crisis, the latter accounted for almost fifth of the population; today, only a half or a third of that.

Months of **sanctions have hardened sentiments across-the board and on all sides**. **In Russia, moderate centrists have turned into assertive nationalists** and informed social-democrats into passionate communists.

Before the sanctions, more than half of Russians held positive views of America. **Today**, that figure has plunged to **just 15 percent**. Similarly, support for President Obama in Russia has fallen from 40 percent to barely 11 percent, according to Pew. In turn, the number of Americans who see Russia as US's greatest enemy has doubled to 18 percent.

These findings come amid rising, but diverging tensions between Russia, Ukraine, the US and Europe. Brussels is not eager to extend further sanctions in the near term but nor will it readily remove them.

Moreover, cons can argue, Putin has skillfully manipulated this popular anger with the West into a growing sense of nationalism and support for the regime. In other words, sanctions are directly helping Putin solidify his support with citizens.



Here is **evidence** expressing this argument persuasively:

(Jill Dougherty, researcher at the International Centre for Defence and Security & former CNN Moscow Bureau Chief, "Russia's middle class: We don't blame Putin," CNN, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/10/europe/russian-middle-class-putin/>, December 10 2015)

Russia's middle class has had a tough time recently, but they aren't blaming President Vladimir **Putin** for it.

No more winter charter flights to sunny Turkey; Putin's government banned them after Turkey shot down a Russian warplane in Syria in late November.

No more Turkish fruits, vegetables, or meats either. They're also banned.

And forget about Brie, Camembert and other imported European cheeses. They too disappeared from shelves, after the Kremlin banned them in retaliation for European sanctions over Russia's annexation of Crimea.

Then there's the sinking Russian currency. The ruble has lost more than half its value since last year.

Some of Putin's critics predict it's just a matter of time before frustrated Russians rise up and punish him for their economic woes.

But it's not happening. In fact, **Putin's poll ratings are in the stratosphere, hovering between 85% and 90%, according to** the Levada Center, **an independent** Russian **polling company.**

"To think that living standards go down and people, what, **revolt? It's too simplistic,**" says Maria Lipman, a Moscow-based political analyst associated with George Washington University. "That would follow the logic of 'it's the economy, stupid.' But it's not just the economy, stupid."

Russians may not be able to buy Turkish tomatoes, but there are other tomatoes to buy -- **and when** many **people open their refrigerators, they're not empty.**

"One of reasons the Soviet Union collapsed so quickly **was that the Soviet economic model could not** properly **feed people,**" explains Fyodor Lukyanov, Editor-in-Chief of the Russia in Global Affairs journal.

"There was a real problem with scarce goods. **Today,** the assortment, the amount of cheese, is shrinking, but **it's not a question of** starvation or **hunger or even a big problem to get** some **food. And it will not happen because today's Russia can produce food.**"

When Russians look for someone to blame for their economic problems, **many point to the countries that imposed sanctions** in the first place -- the U.S. and Europe. Fed by a steady diet of government-controlled anti-western media, **they feel their country is under attack** economically, politically, and militarily.



"There is a siege mentality," says Maria Lipman. "There are **enemies all around, but we stand proud,** and we will not bend, **we will not surrender** to oppression. We are invincible."

This mood is captured **in a new poll** by the Levada Center. **Seventy percent** of respondents **said they had a negative view of the United States.** Sixty percent were negative about the European Union.

And there's another factor at work: **Russians feel a growing pride in being Russian. Many** of them have come to **see** the decade after **the Soviet Union collapsed as an aberration, a period when they were** a weak, **humiliated,** and toothless former super-power.

The annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014, reviled in the West, **was overwhelmingly popular** in Russia, says the Levada Center's Denis Volkov.

Writing in the Vedomosti newspaper, he says Crimea was a turning point: "As a result, many **people felt the rebirth of Russia's greatness** that was lost after the fall of the USSR."

In focus groups conducted by the Levada Center, **Russians put it this way:** "We bared our teeth"; "**We forced them to respect us**"; "If they don't love us then at least they fear us."

Putin's government "intentionally exploited post-imperial complexes" that Russians still felt, Volkov says, "obviously **calculating that reuniting Crimea** to Russia **would strengthen support** for the regime." **But the strength of that effect -- and how long it has lasted -- have surprised even the Kremlin.**

Russia's current military action in Syria has only intensified those emotions. State media air video of sophisticated new Russian weapons being deployed in Syria, of terrorist headquarters destroyed by massive bombing raids -- and it's having an effect: A December Levada Center poll shows that 85% of Russians are proud of their armed forces; 68% are proud of their country's political influence in the world; and almost 60% think Russia is better than the majority of other countries.

It's not a black and white picture, however. Asked about Russia's economic achievements, only 27% said they were "very proud" or "somewhat proud."

Nevertheless, **this growing patriotism and support for their president -- combined with assurances by Putin that the current economic crisis is "complicated but not critical" -- "makes it easier for people to put up with economic hardships and for Putin to preserve his** high legitimacy and **high approval rating,"** according to Maria Lipman.

Even if Russia's middle class turned sour on their president it would not mean a profound change in his approval rating, says Fyodor Lukyanov.

Russia's middle class, according to the Russian business journal Kommersant, has remained stable for the past 15 years at approximately 20% of the population. Citing government statistics, the journal predicts that the current economic crisis will reduce the percentage of Russia's middle class to 15%.

"The impact of the middle class on Russian public opinion," Lukyanov says, "is visible and quite important, but limited."

Western-oriented economists often describe the middle class as a product of a market economy which, in turn, leads to demands for democracy. But Lukyanov says that's only part of Russia's middle class.

There's been a "renaissance" of engineers and personnel working for Russia's defense industry, he says, an elite class in the Soviet Union that fell apart in the chaos of the early post-Soviet period. Now they're back, and the Kremlin is paying attention. The group has almost nothing to do with the market economy, Lukyanov says, and they support Putin.



Among these Russians, **the Kremlin** media apparatus **has been** quite **successful in transforming Western sanctions into a plus**. Lukyanov explains: "Putin was very skillful **to create the idea that we are experiencing trouble but the rest of the world is treating us as real competitors**, a real force, not like before. And for middle class it's important to feel that **you are a citizen of a very important country.**"

Neither Lukyanov nor Lipman can predict how long Russian consumers will soldier through these economic difficulties without blaming Putin. But the overall mood in Russia seems clear.

The Kremlin, through state media, **has created an atmosphere** in society **which makes all losses** and suffering in society **less painful**," says Lukyanov. **"The feeling of being surrounded by hostile powers creates** another **feeling: that security is more important than prosperity.**"

If the con wins that sanctions improve Putin's popularity, this is creates two problems for the pro: first, they can't win their regime change story, and second, it allows the con to argue that an emboldened Putin will be even more dangerous to Western interests. In other words, this argument both invalidates a common form of pro solvency *and* presents an external disadvantage to sanctions.

Here is **evidence** that explains this threat, while also continuing to develop some of the other con arguments we've discussed:

*(Alexander Verschoor-Kirss, senior advisor at Booz Allen Hamilton and MA in international relations from University of Chicago, "Sanctions Against Russia Will Not Work," *Diplomaatia*, No. 133, <http://www.diplomaatia.ee/en/article/sanctions-against-russia-will-not-work/>, September 2014)*

When it comes to adjudicating whether or not economic sanctions will be successful in coercing Vladimir Putin and the Russian government to stop their aggressive foreign policy actions in Eastern Ukraine and Eastern Europe more generally, it is important to analyse the individual factors at play in the Russian case before determining a priori whether or not sanctions will be effective. **Due** primarily **to Russia's authoritarian government, nationalist underpinnings and the inability to credibly couple sanctions to military action, it is unlikely that sanctions will have much effect. In fact, they may backfire and solidify**, rather than weaken, **Russia's opposition to Western Europe and the United States**.



The classic argument that economic sanctions are an ineffective tool of coercion is Robert Pape's 1997 analysis of 115 separate uses of sanctions from 1914 to 1990. Pape found that in only 5 cases (4% of the time) sanctions caused a target government to alter their policies substantially.¹ While some scholars have argued that policy change is not an adequate measure of the "success" of sanctions,² the lesser barriers that such scholars propose, such as cost imposition or rallying of domestic support, do not seem an adequate substitute, especially in the case of the current debate over Russia. The main goal of such sanctions appears to be policy change, not some lower standard. More **recent evaluations** of the effectiveness of sanctions **have reinforced Pape's conclusions** about their ineffectiveness **and** further **added that "smart" sanctions**, which target individuals or select groups, **are also ineffective.**³

Still, there may be individualised factors that make sanctions successful in a particular case without breaking the general rule of their overall ineffectiveness. Some of the major factors that appear to affect whether or not sanctions are successful in an individual case are: 1) the regime type in the target country; 2) the level of nationalism in the target country; and 3) whether or not sanctions can credibly be linked to the threat or actual use of military force. With regard to regime type, democratic governments are often thought to be more susceptible to sanctions since they are responsive to the suffering and needs of their citizens.⁴ Furthermore, **sanctions**, like other forms of coercion, **often trigger outpourings of nationalist sentiment that inhibit the effectiveness** of sanctions **since** such outbursts make **people [are] more willing to endure the** suffering that comes with **sanctions.**⁵ Finally, it is supposed that sanctions will be more effective if they serve as the precursor to potential or actual military action.⁶

How might these individual factors influence the effectiveness of the recent round of sanctions against Russia? In each case it would appear that **Russia is a uniquely inappropriate environment for sanctions to succeed.**

With regard to democratic governance, it is clear that **the authoritarian nature of the Russian government** headed by Vladimir Putin **contrasts strongly with the ideal responsive democratic government that would cave** under sanctions. The **Putin** government, while certainly interested in maintaining its grip on power, **cares more about regime security than the well-being of the Russian population.** Certainly the two are connected in so far as domestic unrest caused by sanctions might eventually grow to challenge Putin's government. Still, such an occurrence seems unlikely. **Authoritarian governments**, including Putin's, generally **rule through a combination of fear and a stranglehold** on government functions. Assuming that rival elites have not been completely eliminated, authoritarian governments depend on either the explicit or implicit consent of other elites to stay out of politics. While it is tempting to imagine that the effect of sanctions on broad sectors of the economy will disproportionately hurt Russian oligarchs, thus bringing them into conflict with Putin, this is unlikely. Authoritarian governments, such as Saddam Hussein's in Iraq, have generally been able to limit the impact of sanctions on themselves and those in their immediate circle.

High levels of **nationalism** in Russia **will also contribute to the ineffectiveness** of Western-led sanctions. **The aggressive foreign policy moves** undertaken **by Putin**, such as the decision to annex Crimea, **have been couched in nationalistic terms that enjoy wide support within Russia.** Even if the Russian government is generally not responsive to public opinion, it is clear that **if public sentiment aligns with government** goals and propaganda **then it will make it easier to stay the course.** Nationalism surges as a result of sanctions **since suffering can be easily blamed on external forces. This triggers the population to band together on the basis of shared identity against the external foe.** Nationalism helps explain why populations can endure great suffering in war that far exceeds the level of violence brought about by sanctions.⁷ Even if sanctions do cause discomfort or suffering in Russia, **this might actually contribute to the failure** of sanctions **by solidifying public support behind**, not against, **the Russian government.**

The relationship between the use of military force and sanctions is a complicated one. Some authors have suggested that sanctions either serve as a first step towards the use of military force or have a negative effect on the military preparedness of a target nation,



thus accelerating their collapse if force is used.⁸ Other authors, however, dispute the positive connection between sanctions, the use of force **and** policy change.⁹ **It is extremely unlikely that the** United States or countries in **West**ern Europe **are** seriously **considering** the use of **military force** in Eastern Ukraine. Apart from the considerable logistical challenge of such action, the risk of escalation to a large-scale conflict between the West and Russia is far too great. **No author suggests that removing the threat of military force increases the efficacy of sanctions.** Therefore, even if it is an open question whether the use of military force increases the effectiveness of sanctions, it is likely that its removal as a policy option will decrease the effectiveness of sanctions. **If the Russians know that there is an upper limit to actions that the West is willing to take, then they know that the suffering they will have to endure is similarly limited.**

There may be other individual factors that inspire greater optimism regarding the effectiveness of sanctions against Russia, such as the large number of countries that have signed up to the sanctions, the interconnectedness of the Russian economy to that of Western Europe, and the ultimate low salience of future aggression as part of Russian political plans. External events, such as the downing of flight MH17 by separatists in Eastern Ukraine, might also shift the circumstances surrounding the crisis in ways that bring about the desired goals of sanctions without requiring that sanctions themselves be effective. Nevertheless, given that much of the debate surrounding sanctions has focused on rhetoric rather than analysis, it is important to recognise the very real challenges that the sanctioning countries will face in engendering policy change. **The potential costs of future Russian aggression** in Eastern Europe **are high enough that such a policy should be vigorously**, and perhaps violently, **opposed**. If sanctions are not going to be effective in blunting Russian ambition and goals, then other measures need to be put on the table rather than continuing to debate ineffective measures because such measures are easier to propose.

More **evidence** on how resentment might embolden Putin and decrease Russian will to compromise.

This card is particularly strong for the con, because it explicitly states that even perceived “success” of sanctions may actually wind up benefitting Putin overall. That directly turns the pro:

(Dimitri A. Simes, Center for the National Interest, “5 Things You Need to Know about Putin's Popularity in Russia,” The National Interest, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/5-things-you-need-know-about-putins-popularity-russia-13380?page=show>, July 21 2015)

Some analysts have argued that once sanctions hurt the average **citizens, Russians would** lose enthusiasm for Putin's actions in Ukraine, and perhaps even **protest** like they did in 2011 and 2012, **forcing Putin to** choose between **backing down** on Ukraine or facing a potential revolution at home.

But this has not occurred. From September 2014 to June 2015, **Russians who claimed to be** “very seriously” or “somewhat seriously” **affected by sanctions rose** from 16% to 33%, **whilst** the number of people who claimed to have suffered no negative side effects from sanctions fell from 35% to 13%. **During this same time period, Putin's popularity continued to grow.** **With** 66% of **Russians believing that** Western **sanctions are meant to** “weaken and humiliate” Russia, many have rallied around the flag and embraced Putin as a **“father protector” defending the country against foreign onslaught. Instead of blaming Putin** for their economic woes, many **Russians blame the West**. Nearly half of all Russians say that sanctions are intended not



only to cripple elite circles, but also to punish ordinary Russians. **Many thus regard sanctions as assaults on them and their families, in addition to** being an attack on **their country.**

While it is conceivable that this could change in the face of greater economic hardships, it would be reckless to assume that it will. If it does not, then **Putin may find himself under pressure from the Russian public not to appear surrendering to the West, making it more difficult for him to make concessions.**

5. On Ukraine, **even some in the opposition support Putin:**

While Putin's actions in Ukraine have undoubtedly further bolstered him in the eyes of his conservative base, his 89 percent approval rating would not be possible without broader support. In fact, several prominent opposition leaders have spoken up in favor of the current policy towards Ukraine, and in certain cases urged Russia to go beyond. Sergei Udaltsov, a key firebrand during the 2011 mass anti-Putin protests who was sentenced to 4.5 years in prison for his role in those protests, celebrated the result of the Crimean referendum, proclaiming, "I am a Soviet patriot, and consider the destruction of the USSR a great mistake and crime, so I regard the return of Crimea as a small but important step towards the rebirth of an updated Union." Likewise, Eduard Limonov, a longtime Putin foe who has spent time in jail for his political activities, called for military intervention not only in Eastern Ukraine, but also for the Black Sea Fleet to be sent to Odessa.

But left-wing nationalists are not the only members of the traditional anti-Putin coalition to hold such sentiments. In an interview with Snob magazine, liberal journalist Ksenia Kirillova bemoaned the endorsement by many in the middle class intelligentsia of Putin's stance on Ukraine, concluding, "Even if they did not believe in the 'Nazis in Ukraine', most of them sincerely believe in the hostility of the West." Admittedly, such views are not the consensus in opposition circles; however, these statements demonstrate that **there isn't much prospect in a united front** by the opposition **against Putin's** Ukraine policy. **Furthermore, the growing prevalence of such sentiments even amongst the opposition has made liberal activists reluctant to advocate for ending the conflict on terms favorable to the West.** For example, both popular blogger Alexei Navalny and oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky have asserted that they wouldn't support returning Crimea to Ukraine.

Taking all of this into account, even if the West succeeds in further weakening Putin economically, it may up end up strengthening his position domestically. Putin has an 89% approval rating not merely due to the populace's enthusiasm about his annexation of Crimea, but **because Western sanctions have helped stoke nationalist fervor and inspire personal feelings of resentment towards the West.** Rather than serving as a revitalizing spark for the opposition, **the situation** in Ukraine has further divided it, and may produce further polarization of it should relations with the West continue to deteriorate. Finally, the Ukraine crisis and the ensuing sanction **has lead many to overlook the** apparent **flaws in the political system because of their grievances with the West.** Whatever next step Western policymakers decide to take in dealing with Russia, it is important that they think hard about how punishing Moscow may affect Russians beyond Putin himself.

Besides the risk of emboldening Putin, there are also a number of additional potential external disadvantages to sanctions which the con like want to develop.



First, the sanctions don't bring economic pain to Russia alone; they also threaten the health of Western economies. Here is some **evidence**:

(Emma Ashford, Visiting Research Fellow at the Cato Institute, "Not-So-Smart Sanctions," Foreign Affairs, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2015-12-14/not-so-smart-sanctions>, Jan/Feb 2016)

It is true that the sanctions have allowed the Obama administration to claim that it is doing something about Russian aggression. From the White House's perspective, that might be an acceptable rationale for the policy, so long as there were no downsides. In fact, however, **the sanctions carry major economic and political costs for the United States and its European allies.**

The brunt is being borne by Europe, where **the European Commission** has **estimated that the sanctions cut growth by 0.3 percent of GDP in 2015.** According to the Austrian Institute of Economic Research, **continuing the sanctions on Russia could cost over 90 billion euros in export revenue and more than two million jobs over the next few years.** The sanctions are proving especially painful for countries with strong trade ties to Russia. Germany, Russia's largest European partner, stands to lose almost 400,000 jobs. Meanwhile, **a number of European banks**, including Société Générale in France and Raiffeisen Zentralbank in Austria, **have made large loans to Russian companies, raising the worrying possibility that the banks may become unstable, or even require bailouts** if the borrowers default.

In the **United States**, **banks** are taking much of the impact. U.S. financial institutions **have been required by law to freeze and manage tens of millions of dollars in assets of sanctioned individuals.** As a result, the banks have had to hire additional legal and technical staff to not only monitor their own accounts but also review any financing arrangements with Russian entities. Failure to comply with the sanctions can be extremely costly: **just one error**, such as processing a single payment from an interdicted individual, **can carry a penalty of up to \$250,000, and** the penalties **can quickly multiply.** In 2010, the Dutch bank ABN AMRO was fined \$500 million for violating U.S. sanctions against Cuba, Iran, Libya, and Sudan.

U.S. energy companies, for their part, **have had to abandon** various joint **ventures in Russia, losing** access to **billions** of dollars of investments. Thanks to prohibitions on the provision of technology and services to Russian companies, **Western firms have been kept out of** unconventional drilling **projects** in the Arctic and elsewhere. **ExxonMobil, for example, has been forced to withdraw from** all **ten** of its joint **ventures** with Rosneft, **including a \$3.2 billion project** in the Kara Sea. Because that project was in its early stages, the cancellation will not cost ExxonMobil in immediate profits. But it will cut access to upstream development projects inside Russia, **putting the company's future profits and stock valuation at risk** and raising the possibility that the money already invested will be permanently lost. **A similar dynamic may harm European energy security, too. Because the**



sanctions prohibit Western companies from **financing** Russia's largest energy firms, the **Russian companies** **have cut** back on upstream **exploration and development**. In this, the sanctions may achieve their intended goal of reducing state revenue, but that will come as a result of shortfalls in supply. The energy consultancy IHS Cambridge Energy Research Associates has predicted that if the sanctions persist, Russian oil production could decrease from 10.5 million barrels per day now to 7.6 million barrels per day by 2025—**bad news for Europe**an states, which **[who]** receive one-third of their oil from Russia. They **are** even **more dependent on Russian gas, which, since it relies** more **on fixed pipelines, is** **harder to replace.**

There is also an argument to be made that the economic costs to the West are damaging US-Europe relations and transatlantic solidarity. Here is **evidence**:

(Joseph J. Schatz, editor of the POLITICO Pro Europe Brief, "The transatlantic cost of Russia sanctions," POLITICO, <http://www.politico.eu/article/transatlantic-unity-russia-sanctions-united-states-europe-ukraine/>, 12/9/2015, updated 12/11/2015)

Since day one, maintaining unity on **Russian sanctions hasn't been easy, according to U.S. and EU officials**. While countries like Poland and the U.K. want a tougher line against Russia, some governments want the sanctions to end soon. It's taken a mix of EU cash for affected industries, political wrangling by Germany, and reassurance by American officials that U.S. companies are also suffering as a result of the sanctions.

Behind the scenes, **Obama administration officials** often **find themselves pushing back against a storyline** they say has emanated from Moscow over the past year: **That the U.S. is making its European partners bear the economic brunt of a sanctions** regime that has little impact on the United States.

The U.S. response? We feel your pain.

"There is a false narrative out there that the U.S. is taking advantage.... There are such things as facts. U.S. trade and European trade both have been hit," a senior U.S. official told POLITICO, noting that U.S. financial institutions have lost business and U.S. energy companies have been frozen out of Russian Arctic and shale drilling projects thanks to the sanctions aimed at cutting off financing to some Russian companies.

A drop in the (Atlantic) ocean?

Analysts agree that the impact on the EU and U.S. economies has been relatively minimal. But there are clear differences. According to Commerce Department data, U.S. exports to Russia dropped from \$11.4 billion (€10.4 billion) in 2013 to \$10.8 billion (€9.9 billion) in 2014 — a 3.5 percent decline — with a 10 percent drop in two-way trade. The decrease is on track to be far larger from 2014 to 2015.

The **European Union's trade with Russia, which was** roughly **10 times the size of U.S.-Russia commerce, dropped by 13 percent** from 2013 to 2014, according to the European Commission.

So far, Europeans have resisted what some see as Russia's efforts to win sanctions relief in return for military help in Syria. But **sanctions experts say that the dynamics could become more difficult. In France, the far-right National Front, whose leader Marine Le Pen is** **opposed to** Western **sanctions** on Russia, **is** a party **on the rise** following



its first place showing in Sunday's regional elections. Elizabeth Rosenberg, **a former senior advisor on sanctions policy** at the Treasury Department and now a fellow at the Center for a New American Security, calls U.S.-EU unity on sanctions a success. But she **sees an "inflection point" coming.**

"We've already seen European business leaders and thought leaders who would like to see Russia welcomed back" she says, as well as European governments who seem inclined to find ways to circumvent sanctions. "There is a lot of confidence that the European Union will roll over sanctions in January — there's not much confidence about what the EU will do when it comes back [to the issue] next summer."

Over here, under pressure

Adam Szubin, the acting U.S. Treasury undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, is visiting Italy, Germany and the U.K. this week to talk about a range of sanctions issues, including the fight against ISIL and the Iran nuclear deal. From some quarters, he may also hear concerns on Russia sanctions.

Marietje Schaake, a Dutch member of the European Parliament, said that **when Daniel Fried, the State Department coordinator on Russia sanctions, met with MEPs** in Brussels last week, part of **the discussion dwelled on how "the economic impact has weighed more heavily on Europe"** an companies and citizens."

Still, Schaake says that "most people feel very strongly that the reasons sanctions are in place unfortunately have not changed. ... No one likes sanctions, and they are not a goal in and of themselves, but hopefully they encourage the Kremlin to act according to international law."

That wasn't always the case. Although Russia invaded Crimea in early 2014, **it wasn't until after the downing of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 that Europeans rallied behind sanctions.**

Earlier U.S. calls for tougher EU action had run into European resistance, including from German business interests. U.S. Vice President Joe Biden argued in a 2014 speech that "it was America's leadership and the president of the United States insisting, oft times almost having to embarrass Europe to stand up and take economic hits to impose costs."

German Chancellor Angela Merkel soon took the lead in pushing the sanctions through, drawing on her personal relationship with Vladimir Putin to become the EU — and the U.S. — point person on Ukraine.

"It was not an easy assignment — all of them act differently," Peter Wittig, the German ambassador to the United States, told POLITICO in a recent interview. "I think the Ukrainian crisis was for us a signature moment, because it propelled us into a leadership role that the chancellor had not sought — it just happened by events," Wittig said. "We wanted to make sure that the U.S. and Europe were in sync."

U.S. officials like to say that the Russia sanctions program is larger than all other sanctions programs combined. So the goal for the EU and the U.S. was to write a joint sanctions program that would hurt Russia's economy by cutting its banks and energy companies off from Western financing — but not so much that it would disrupt the global financial system, or European and American economies. "It's not an end in itself. It's a tool to achieve a political result," Wittig said. "We don't want to bring Russia down to its knees economically. We don't want a more nationalist Russia. We want a Russia that is part and parcel of the common European order."

Few dispute that damage has been inflicted. Russia's GDP in October fell 3.6 percent compared to a year before. The International Monetary Fund has projected that "prolonged sanctions could lead to a cumulative output loss over the medium term of up to 9 percent of GDP."

That said, Russia hasn't pulled out of Crimea.

For the U.S.-EU alliance, the bigger issue has been managing the fallout for European economies.

Of course, cons wishing to make either of these arguments will need to clearly explain why economic strain and/or loss of US-EU relations constitute a problem that threatens Western interests. Do not assume those arguments are self-evident.



Next, refer back to the earlier card that argued that the Russian government is seeking ways to circumvent the effects of the sanctions. One of their major strategies is to focus on working to create a BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa) development bank, which is intended to work as an alternative to the World Bank and the IMF. The result would devastate the West's ability to create effective economic pressure and diplomacy in the future.

Here's **evidence** on this:

(Emma Ashford, Visiting Research Fellow at the Cato Institute, "Not-So-Smart Sanctions," Foreign Affairs, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2015-12-14/not-so-smart-sanctions>, Jan/Feb 2016)

The **sanctions have also encouraged Russia to create its own financial institutions, which**, in the long run, **will chip away at** the **United States' economic influence**. After U.S. senators and some European governments suggested that the United States might cut off Russia's access to the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) payment system, the Russian Central Bank announced that it was going to start negotiations with the other BRICS states—Brazil, India, China, and South Africa—to create an alternative. To lessen its dependence on Visa and MasterCard, **Russia has** made moves toward setting up its own credit-card clearing-house. And it has **moved ahead with the** proposed **BRICS development bank**, which is **designed to replicate** the functions of **the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund**. Although none of **these initiatives** has come to fruition yet, they **raise the** worrying **possibility that the United States will someday have a harder time employing economic statecraft. Even though sanctions have failed with Russia, they can work against smaller states, which, since they lack the cash reserves and ability to ramp up domestic production, cannot so easily compensate** for the cutoff of foreign trade and investment. **But in a world where more institutions fall outside the reach of the United States and its allies, those targets can more easily circumvent U.S. sanctions.** The recent **measures** directed **at Iran for its nuclear program, for example, would have been less likely to drive the regime toward the bargaining table had it been able to turn to alternative organizations for transaction and financing support. Likewise, Russia's shift away from trading in the dollar could make future U.S. sanctions less effective, since transactions structured as currency swaps do not require access to the U.S. financial system.**



If the United States continues to insist that the sanctions against Russia need more time to work, then the costs will continue to add up, while the likelihood of changing the Kremlin's behavior will get even slimmer. The West does indeed need to respond to Moscow's adventurism, but it should do so largely through other means.

To start, the Obama administration should make one final attempt to obtain some benefit from the sanctions, offering to lift the most onerous restrictions on Russia's financial and energy sectors in exchange for Russia's implementation of the Minsk agreement. If the offer were accepted, it would constitute at best a minor success for U.S. sanctions policy: the Minsk agreement has been primarily the result of persistent diplomacy by French and German leaders, and U.S. sanctions were aimed at securing not just peace in eastern Ukraine but also unconditional Russian withdrawal from Crimea. Given the Kremlin's past unwillingness to compromise, however, such an offer would most likely be rejected. In that case, **the United States should cut its losses and unilaterally lift the majority of the sanctions** on Russia.

Let's dig into the issue of BRICS for a minute, as it is likely to be new to some of you. In short, the World Bank and IMF provide financing to less-wealthy nations, which they use for various types of development. One way the West has historically been able to exert pressure on adversarial governments is by denying or threatening to deny access to WB/IMF funds. Without that money, leaders might not be able to fund critical efforts, so they may relent and "fall in line." If there is an alternate international development bank, though—such as BRICS—that strategy becomes much less compelling. A nation could ignore the West's demands, bypass WB/IMF, and go to BRICS. As a result, the West loses one of its best methods of applying non-military pressure on foreign governments. Clearly, then, this is not in the West's interests.

I want to clarify that the BRICS argument is not incompatible with "sanctions don't work," if the two are explained correctly. The Ashford card above points out that, although sanctions are structurally ineffective against large, relatively-advanced economies such as Russia's, they are often very effective when dealing with smaller states, those without large cash reserves or significant natural resources, etc. So, the con might argue that the West is essentially breaking a tool that *does* fix things elsewhere, by "smashing it" against a problem it *can't* fix.



The **evidence** below provides a short, easy summary of most of the main problems with sanctions the con might want to point out:

(Iana Dreyer & Nicu Popescu, former Associate Analyst at the EUISS + Editor-in-Chief of borderlex.eu & Senior Analyst at the EUISS, "Do sanctions against Russia work?," European Union Institute for Security Studies, http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Brief_35_Russia_sanctions.pdf, December 2014)

The case against revolves around several points. One is that, **despite the sanctions, Russia is still** deeply involved **in Ukraine and has stepped up** its **military engagement** in the Donbas even after the restrictive measures were announced. **The sanctions**, in other words, **did not coerce Russia into reversing its posture. Moreover, sanctions help Putin** domestically **by uniting Russians behind him** (at least in the short term) **and allowing the Kremlin to tighten the screws at home** – on elites and ordinary citizens alike. **In the event they fatally weaken the Russian president**, it is arguable that **any possible alternative may be worse, as nationalists are likely to come to power**. It is also argued that, **by decreasing trade turnover, sanctions also decrease future Western leverage, hurt Western exporters and cost jobs in an already fragile economic environment. Finally, sanctions are pushing Russia into the arms of China, speeding up the formation of a non-Western global financial infrastructure which poses an alternative (and a challenge) to the existing Western-dominated system.**

Beyond those, cons who like to go for aggressive impact stories could also argue that the sanctions will cause armed conflict between Russia and the West. To do this strategically, though, you don't want to just throw out some vague "relations tank -> war" scenario. You will need to provide a little nuance.



One argument is that the US and Russia are currently engaged in a proxy war in Syria, which both sides would prefer to de-escalate, but which is stressed by their rivalry and the mutual distrust seen in their respective domestic populations. This creates a “powder keg” situation between the two countries.

The evidence below sets up the potential problem: the US and its allies are tired of war and militarily overstretched, and therefore will pursue sanctions instead of any kind of armed confrontation. However, Russia knows that its economy is not comparatively strong enough to pose a credible threat to other powers. Russia has, however, been beefing up its military while other nations have focused their efforts elsewhere. This force build-up has also renewed Russia’s focus on nuclear weapons. Taken together, these factors create a situation in which the US and Russia face the serious possibility significantly bumping heads, in which Russia has a strong incentive to take military action, but America lacks the political will. The more strained relations become, and the more the West uses up what little non-military options they have, the larger the threat becomes.

(European Council on Foreign Relations, Commentary by Mark Leonard- Director of ECFR & Jeremy Shapiro- Research Director at ECFR, “Thirteen trends for 2016,” http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_thirteen_trends_for_2016, January 5 2016)

One of the more underreported stories of 2015, **has been the scale of the conflict between** the two former Cold warriors in Syria. Such inattention suits both sides, and **Washington and Moscow** are keen to play up the prospects of a political consensus emerging **on Syria**.

But the facts on the ground remain unaltered by such diplomatic niceties: on the ground in Syria, **rebel groups holding weapons supplied** to them **by the US are firing on Syrian** armed **forces** supported and **supplied by Russia**.

Both sides genuinely **fear** getting dragged into **the** Syria **quagmire** and want de-escalation. **But their own domestic politics and the ever worsening** regional **rivalry** between their respective allies, Iran and Saudi Arabia **mean** they are unlikely to achieve those goals. **The danger of escalation is very high**, and indeed quite likely in the coming year. 2. Hardening of attitudes to refugees This is perhaps the least surprising prediction. There is a growing sense in European countries that their governments have lost the ability to control their borders and the flow of people into Europe. And this loss of control is feeding into a growing politics of fear. And this fear is subtly morphing itself country-by-country to prey on pre-existing worries. In Germany, increasingly local (and national) authorities fear that their hospitality to refugees will threaten Germany’s

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vaunted balanced budget approach. In France, security worries interweave with decades-old concerns about threats to French laïcité. Even in Sweden, long the champion of a liberal refugee policy, asylum seekers face new restrictions and hardening attitudes. 3. The slow erosion of consensus on Russia in the last few weeks of 2015, there were rumblings at the EU council meeting that hinted towards the difficulty of renewing sanctions on Russia. With sanctions needing renewal every six months, these early signs point to the increasing difficulty of maintaining European solidarity on Russia. There is an old rift in European politics on the subject. Eastern and central Europeans remain united in their support for sanctions, but some southern European states, with Italy as their mouthpiece at the last council meeting, remain unconvinced that the diplomatic and political gain from Russia sanctions is worth the economic pain. The sanctions on Russia may well survive the year, but even if they do the internal European debate will grow increasingly difficult and divisive. 4. Britain re-enters Europe... In the pre-Christmas period the British commentariat zeroed in on David Cameron's difficulties with party management ahead of the UK's "In-Out" referendum, anticipated for 2016. This isn't anything new. Successive British governments – Labour and Conservative – have been engaging in Europe with one hand tied behind their backs, fearful of a potentially hostile public opinion and scheming backbenchers. This might be about to change. On balance, it seems likely that the British will vote to remain in Europe. And if it does, it could signal a new era of engagement for Britain in Europe, with London returning to the European mainstream, potentially offering some leadership in difficult times. On its traditional areas of strength, such as defence and foreign policy, Britain has recently shown conspicuous support to its EU partners. 5. ...As European solidarity erodes The immigration crisis, coming quickly on the heels of the Ukraine and euro crises, has opened up a new and potentially more dangerous type of division within the EU. In the coming year, European solidarity will further erode as divisions on how to deal Europe's fiscal mess and troublesome neighbourhood relations among the member states. In this sense, Poland may be a harbinger of things to come. Under the previous Civic Platform government, Poland was a stalwart and effective pro-European voice, but the recent election win of Law and Justice (PiS) seems to have changed all that. In the coming year, Poland may well be hamstrung by domestic tensions, as controversy over recent reforms to the constitutional court rumbles on. And the Eurosceptic rhetoric issued by Law and Justice members may well drive a wedge between Poland's government and the European mainstream. The first casualty of this failure of solidarity may be EU foreign policy. European leaders will struggle even more than before to find meaningful consensus positions on critical foreign policy issues such as Turkey, Russia, and Syria. 6. Europe's mainstream Canutes In nearly every European country, the old established political parties are closing ranks to keep out increasingly popular populists. In the Spanish parliamentary elections, two new parties – Podemos and Ciudadanos ripped chunks out of the big parties' vote and in France, tactical withdrawals from the Socialists were all that kept the Front national from electoral success in regional polls. But the more the mainstream parties engage in electoral sleight of hand to try to turn back the populist tide, the more potent the message of exclusion becomes. Populists will breach the mainstream's defences at some point. But if they do, they may find governing and populism incompatible, as Syriza have shown in Greece. 7. The nihilistic trend in extremist Islam This worrying trend has its roots in the strategy practiced by Islamic State (ISIS) in Syria and Iraq, namely elevation of violence as a strategy instead of securing popular support. While other significant terror organisations like Al-Qaeda certainly deploy violence for political purposes, such violence is often targeted towards building support amongst a core Muslim support group. What ISIS has proven in the last few years is that such PR concerns are not the be all and end all. Their violence is not aimed at securing mainstream or even widespread popular support, but at maintaining a steady flow of angry recruits to bolster their forces. Almost everywhere in the Middle East, ISIS is extremely unpopular, but the universality of their violence means this doesn't really matter. Even if ISIS is forced onto the back foot militarily in 2016, this message has already been taken up by other terror groups, many of whom profess to be ISIS affiliates. 8. Germany becomes the US... As Germany becomes more and more overwhelmed by the refugee crisis and faces up to intensifying domestic pressure, we will likely see it take on the foreign policy character of the US from previous decades. It has already shown in recent times its readiness to flex its domestic and economic muscle to leverage European partners and, in the coming year, we will see this power deployed more frequently to assemble coalitions of the willing (and not-so willing) in Europe to serve its ends. 9. ...As the US becomes Germany As Germany becomes like the US, the US will move in the other direction. Increasingly, America's foreign policy will become more and more defined by its own direct interests and it will hasten its move away from global watchdog. In the American presidential campaigning thus far, we have seen very little internationalism, particularly

amongst the Republican candidates. There is a growing sense that the US has seen little return from its long tradition of assertive foreign policy. **Countries** around the world **want to strike** out **at each other, but war-weary** governments and **publics mean military action is (in the most part) off the cards. So these countries are turning to alternative means of aggression that use** the interconnectedness of the global system as a conduit. **Sanctions**, economic boycotts, cyberattacks, public divestment campaigns and the development of alternative multilateral grouping will all be seen in force in 2016. Even the movement of people is becoming a weapon, as Turkey's effective wrangling with the European Union in early December proved. 11. ...**Except in Russia**

Russia does use geo-economic tools and has, for example, imposed extensive sanctions. But **can't really compete with the biggest dogs in this area, limited** as it **is by its comparatively modest economy. Russia's comparative advantage remains its military, and unlike almost every other country in the world it is strengthening its armed forces. It is in the midst of long process of military modernization which will continue. This** modernisation **includes an emerging doctrine of tactical nuclear use** and this will spook the West in ways it hasn't before.

Now, US-Russia war—especially the nuclear kind—is always a somewhat difficult scenario to sell, due to it being perhaps the largest and most destructive war imaginable in today's world. There is ample



reason to believe both sides would have every incentive to avoid that outcome; the Cold War can be seen as proof of this. However, numerous scholars have penned recent articles starting that the threat of US-Russia war today is greater than ever before, including during the height of the Cold War. If you want to follow this line of argumentation, I'd advise you cut some of those cards.

Finally, before we close, I'll briefly present one last, completely different kind of con strategy. Rather than arguing that sanctions are bad, perhaps some cons will want to argue that sanctions are good, but status quo sanctions are inadequate. We touched on this before, in the resolitional analysis. As we've already discussed, this resolution seems to demand that the pro defend that existing sanctions are working. If existing sanctions are doomed because they are too limited, but larger, more aggressive sanctions might succeed, that is ostensibly con ground. With this type of case, the con's position would be that the problem is not with the concept of sanctions, but rather with the degree of restraint exercised by the West so far. Essentially, it boils down to "the status quo is failing, and the solution is to ramp up our efforts."

Here is **evidence**:

(Andrew Foxall, director of the Russia Studies Center at the Henry Jackson Society, "Stick to Sanctions on Russia," New York Times, Op-Ed, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/17/opinion/stick-to-sanctions-on-russia.html>, 12/16/2015)

But **simply renewing existing sanctions will not be enough**. Nor will setting new cease-fire deadlines if Russia breaks the existing ones.

The European Union must tighten its enforcement of its sanctions. Its diplomatic service should examine how sanctioned individuals and entities have been able to circumvent restrictions in particular member states.

For Ukraine and **the West, the primary objective should be** to ensure **adherence to Minsk II** — starting with Ukraine's regaining control over all its borders, which is supposed to happen by the end of the year. **To achieve this, the**



West must demonstrate both a willingness to talk to Mr. Putin **and a readiness to ratchet up sanctions until Russia meets its commitments**. Many senior Russians, including Mr. Putin himself, with financial interests in the West have yet to be sanctioned.

Punishing Russia for bad behavior is not enough; the West must do more to help Ukraine. Were Mr. Putin to escalate the war, Kiev's army would not be able to defeat the elite troops and conscripted forces of the oil-fueled giant — even if Russia is also fighting in Syria. The West must continue sending military advisers to Kiev, training Ukrainian forces and shipping military equipment, if only to increase the costs to Mr. Putin of any new intervention.

Without such measures, European **governments** that are considering allying with Russia in Syria **risk encouraging** Mr. **Putin**'s renewed war in Ukraine.

It should go without saying that you would never want to combine this argument with any sort of “sanctions bad” strategy. Choose one or the other.

That brings us to the close of this discussion. However, your research isn't done yet! The best debaters don't stop reading until the topic is over. Getting the edge in those ultra-close debates often comes down to who has worked the hardest. Don't forget to keep your eyes on the news, stay curious, and pursue any ideas that interest you.

Remember also that you can always email completed cases to **Rachel.Stevens@NCPA.org** for a free, confidential case critique! Even the best cases can benefit from a look from another set of eyes. Once you submit them, we'll get them back to you, with personalized comments, as soon as we can.