DIVERSIONARY DIPLOMACY
DOMESTIC POLITICAL EFFECTS ON US-DIRECTED FOREIGN POLICY IN RUSSIA

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by
CHRISTOPHER PATANE
Dr. A. Cooper Drury, Thesis Supervisor
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

**Diversionary Diplomacy: Domestic Political Effects on US-Directed Foreign Policy In Russia**

presented by Christopher Patane,

a candidate for the degree of master of arts,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

____________________________
Professor A. Cooper Drury

____________________________
Professor Jonathan Kriickhaus

____________________________
Professor Mary Stegmaier
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ABSTRACT

This paper applies the concepts found within diversionary theory to a lower level of international conflict outside the United States. Specifically, it tests whether changes in Russian domestic political contention cause corresponding changes in diplomatic conflict with the United States.

Relying on both a quantitative model spanning 1990-2004 and a qualitative case study of the 2011 and 2012 political protests in Russia, the paper finds evidence for differing short and long-term effects of domestic contention. In the short term, diversionary tactics appear to be a cheap and effective way for a regime to manage domestic contention. However, in the long term, it appears that domestic politics has little impact on Russia-US relations, implying several strategies for the creation of US foreign policy.
Introduction

What effects do domestic politics in Russia have on its foreign policy toward the United States, particularly when the domestic political situation is more contentious? Is a leader like Putin likely to engage in criticism or take confrontational action against the US in order to divert attention from contentious domestic events by taking a stand against a foreign power? This paper argues that as the domestic political environment in Russia becomes more opposed to the leadership—Putin—the government is more likely to engage in conflictual foreign policy toward the United States.

In order to study how domestic politics influences the foreign policy of Russia toward the United States, this paper will look for changes in the contentiousness of Russian domestic politics, and corresponding changes in interaction with the US. Because most existing research about Russian politics relies on qualitative or historical case studies, the paper will attempt to create a quantitative model for the changes in Russian policy. For example, the protests surrounding the trial of Pussy Riot did not appear to be sufficiently large enough to warrant a change in attitude toward the US but the 2011 protests surrounding the Russian elections sparked warnings to the US to avoid interfering in domestic affairs.

Following diversionary theory, a leader should move to more aggressive foreign polices to distract local populations and unite them around a foreign threat. Such a study requires data about domestic and foreign policy actions, and the direction of that action, in this case, from the Russian populace to the leadership and from the Russian foreign affairs decision-makers to the United States. The Integrated Data for Events Analysis
(IDEA), which provides severity and direction of events, should make it possible to illustrate these trends and their correlation.

Because protest and opposition are managed in Russia, and there is a historic separation between the foreign and domestic sections of the Russian government, it is unclear if domestic politics has the same effects—or any effect—as those observed in other systems. Specifically, this paper will test whether Russian leaders become more confrontational toward the US when opposition and protest increases at home. In addition, due to the limited period covered by the data, this theory will be tested with a qualitative case study about the most recent Russian protests.

The formation of more effective US policy requires an understanding of the influences on the leaders the country frequently interacts with, especially on the constraints placed on those leaders by their domestic political environments. Understanding how Russian leaders react to local changes, and if this alters their behavior toward the US, will allow policymakers to enact more effective. It will also serve as a test of diversionary theory—usually focused on the United States—in another country with a different regime type, and if diversionary strategies are common when used for foreign policies less conflictual than war.

**Previous Research**

Studying this question requires looking at three branches of relatively un-integrated research, the studies of Russian politics and foreign policy, the influence of domestic politics on foreign policy, and the research on diversionary foreign policy. All three are inconclusive, with studies showing evidence for different and contradictory effects.
Present-day Russia is characterized by some as a hybrid regime, exhibiting the political characterizes of both a democratic and authoritarian state, where elections are held but opposition parties are not permitted to receive too many votes, and protest activity is managed or suppressed (Robertson, 2011). The Russian government operates with three basic ideas, centering on what they label “sovereign democracy:” democratic practice, material prosperity, and the sanctity of Russian state sovereignty above all other considerations. In practice, this ideology creates a non-democratic government.

Voters do not cast their ballot for individual Duma candidates; the lower house of parliament, instead party leadership chooses candidates, a selection subject to change at any time. In order for a party to qualify for a seat in the Duma, it must win seven percent of the national popular vote. These electoral changes, instituted in 2007, resulted in only half of the existing opposition parties being able to compete against Putin’s United Russia. As a result, it is often difficult to determine if opposition parties are real or simply for appearances, since those parties that receive Duma seats, like the “A Just Russia,” have close ties to the executive. Candidates cannot run as independents, form multi-party blocs, and a representative who switches parties must give up their seat. Under Putin, selection of delegates for the upper house, the Federation Council, and regional governorships became executive appointments. With a judiciary re-structured to defend state interests, a Parliament good for little more than rubber-stamping agendas set by the administration, nominally democratic institutions in Russia function in an authoritarian manner, albeit a less overtly repressive one (Oliker. et. al. 2009).

The modern authoritarian faces different problems from past dictators. Information is much harder to control, the end of communism removed much of the
ideological power of leftist groups and prevents rightists from rallying around a communist enemy, and rulers looking to have a state act in the international system are compelled to justify or couch their actions in democratic language and practice.

Robertson (2011) labels these types of regimes “hybrids” because, in countries like Russia, authoritarian control exists alongside accepted but limited competition for office, which allows limited amounts of public opposition without strict repression. These leaders seek to channel discontent and manage public displays of opposition by creating approved opposition parties, targeting only opposition leaders, restricting media flow, using security forces to block protester access to sites, and creating pro-government social movements that are mobilized as counter-protesters (Robertson, 2009).

Despite controls on domestic politics, protest and opposition exist, and in the current Russian political environment, Putin seems to be losing his personal influence (Frye, 2012). New strategies might be required to maintain power, including diverting opposition by increasing the perception of threat from the United States by looking stronger through being more confrontational toward a greater power and historic rival. The same issues that caused the downfall of the Soviet Union might not drive opposition in modern Russia. Unified elites prevent most challenge from that segment of society, protesters are those left out of the stream of benefits from the government. Social organizations, like the pro-regime “Nashi” youth movement, are a mix of state-sponsored and independent, where pro-regime groups are mobilized to counteract actions by the opposition (Robertson, 2009).

Russia faces a complicated international situation after the end of the Cold War. Once a hegemon in competition with the United States, it is unable to project its influence
very far, but has held on to the same interests it had in the past. The fact that leaders tend to swing wildly between cooperation and aggressiveness makes understanding Russian foreign policy difficult (Legvold, 2007). The official foreign policy statement of the Russian Federation lays out the objectives of the government; ensuring national security, creating favorable conditions for Russian modernization, and the promotion of the Russian image as a democratic state committed to an independent foreign policy. This coincides with the belief that Russia has acquired a “…full-fledged role in global affairs” (Medvedev/MFA of Russia, 2008).

Malcolm and Pravda (1996) quickly dash hopes for increased cooperation between the US and Russia when they find that, despite the increasing democratization of Russia, there is no indication that this translates into a more cooperative stance toward the West. They disregard any direct effect of public opinion in foreign policy decisions since the more democratic Russian government retained a foreign policy administration removed from domestically focused branches of the government and retained an executive given great freedom in carrying out foreign relations (also found in Legvold, 2007). The early post-communist period was one with weak civil society, where the public had a difficult time engaging in domestic politics, leaving little opportunity to make its opinions heard on foreign policy issues (McFaul, 1997). This situation continues under the extended Putin administration. Generally, Russian foreign policy toward the US is less constrained, since the US does not have a large trade relationship with Russia (Oliker et. al., 2009). There are fewer profitable business relationships to maintain, allowing a confrontational stance to be taken at a lower cost and therefore more likely.
The link between domestic politics and foreign policy in Russia is recognized. Malcolm and Pravda (1996), looking at the effects of democratization on Russian foreign policy, find little change as a result of democratic development in Russia—this study was published before the Putin-induced rollback of democratization—and credit this to the tendency of Russian leadership to be unconstrained when making policy. McDonald (in Legvold, 2007) argues that there is little reason to search for a link between Russian domestic politics and its foreign policy because of the history of the country. He claims that leaders see foreign affairs as completely distinct from domestic administration, which exist under separate constraints, caused by the fact that there is little interaction between the foreign affairs arm of the government and the domestic except in the office of the President.

Those trying to construct the basic interests and ideas guiding Russian foreign policy arrive at a few key influences derived from both the country’s history and its current international environment. First, national identity is incredibly important and can guide foreign policy choices when it involves the large Russian ethnic diaspora in the former Soviet republics (Malcolm and Pravda, 1996) which means their presence in the republics turns formerly domestic—to the USSR—issues into foreign affairs issues that directly affect those considered default citizens of the Russian Federation. The minority presence of ethnic Russians in the new republics, and concern over them, coincides with the multicultural makeup of Russia since minority groups from the republics move to the Russian Federation for work while sending home remittances.

While minority groups inside the borders of the federation are nominally Russian citizens, national identity is still largely based on ethnic group; the result of Russian
expansion under the tsars and Soviets and poor integration of other ethnic groups into a coherent national identity. Suny (in Legvold, 2007) argues that this situation is a source of anxiety for Russian leaders, who already perceive themselves as weak after the fall of the Soviet Union, and see ethnic conflict as a potential domestic threat which becomes a foreign threat because those groups match majority populations in the newly independent states.

Following a constructivist framework, he describes how the tsarist empire did not build a coherent nation with strong borders, a trend continued by the communists who built semiautonomous ethnic regions at the country’s periphery where things like internal identification documents listed ethnic origin reinforcing the separation of groups. In addition, only under threat of force and great expense held together the large land area of the Russian and Soviet empires. Because of this national disunity, with these groups existing within Russia and in neighboring states, ethnic conflicts are likely to become foreign policy issues (Suny, 2007). Legvold (2007) and McDonald (2007), also find that the integration of ethnic populations lead to feelings of Russian insecurity; insecurity enhanced by a conflict between restoring past levels of Russian power and a perceived economic and political weakness brought on by the fall of the Soviet Union.

Other constructivist approaches show that regime or governmental policy changes will alter the ideas that form national identities (Snyder, 2005). The time it takes a new power like the Russian Federation to develop the national identities that influence foreign policy, and that the identity uncertainty within these groups makes their foreign policies less predictable since their impact on interests and issues is uncertain (DeBardeleben, 2012). Leader perceptions and ideas also heavily influence foreign policy creation.
Perceptions and ideas become the norms by which a country’s leadership makes decisions. Norms cause policy choice biases, where certain options are ruled out as incompatible with identity and where these options are discarded without consideration, and some decisions are arrived at out of habit (Abdelal et. al. 2006).

General research on the public opinion influences on foreign policy is also inconclusive. Jacobs and Page (2005) find that public opinion does not matter for foreign policy in the US, expert and academic opinion only counts when sought by policymakers, but business interests have a lot of influence. Leaders in the United States are not likely to engage in militaristic foreign policy behavior when presidential approval is low (Moore and Lanoue, 2003). However, if a government has power highly concentrated at the cost of society, and a country is unaffected by changes in the international system, then domestic considerations become less important (Alons, 2007) and domestic issues do not always trade off against international ones except in times of crisis (Farnham, 2004).

Others find evidence that domestic and international politics are interdependent (James and Hristoulas, 1994). Fearon (1998) argues that domestic political issues can cause a state to pursue sub-optimal foreign policies and cultural or leadership differences are relevant for the creation of foreign policy. Bueno de Mesquita (2002) argues that foreign policies are just another way for leaders to gain or lose political advantage. Bureaucratic considerations of public opinion are also unclear, since they observe media reports, elites, and interest groups, but also locked safely away in a structure less accountable to the public because they hold non-elected and non-appointed office (Powlick 1995).
Public opinion’s uncertain effects are probably not the result of public ignorance, though, because while they may be ignorant of details, the public tends to hear about and generate opinions about domestic and foreign policy crises (Baum, 2002b). Jentleson (1992) and Jentleson and Britton (1998) show that public opinion is not just reaction to presidential manipulation, but is rationally decided where the use of force is only preferred when there is a real threat toward the United States. However, Kreps (2010) shows that elite consensus among government and opposition parties in European parliaments has been able to prevent negative public opinion from affecting military intervention abroad.

It also remains unclear whether domestic politics has an effect in a hybrid regime’s foreign policy, and whether this effect exists specifically in Russian politics. Holsti (1992) finds that a leader’s consideration of public opinion is non-constant, elites are difficult to separate from the mass, and consideration may depend on the personality of the leader. In short, there is a debate whether domestic politics matters in foreign policy making, and whether the Russian political system isolates the two sections of government, and while both consider the choices leaders can make, they do not include an analysis of changes in behavior toward another state.

Political trouble may push a leader to engage in diversionary foreign policy to distract the public from the trouble at home, and focus it on an external threat. Usually, this idea applies to a foreign military adventure, but it can also apply to diplomacy, which in most cases is more attractive than war because it can create gains for the initiating state without incurring the costs of war. Other diversionary behavior is possible; foreign threat creation can be employed to label a particular opposition group as unpatriotic if they
challenge the government, elections or selection processes may cause incumbent leaders to engage un diversionary behavior if it is perceived as helpful to retaining office, and weak institutional or political structures or the reliance on a flighty or rebellious elite group may make going outside the local political system for a unifying theme attractive. Keeping tensions high, but short of war, makes domestic policy less critical since the public focuses on the foreign threat, which will lessen the pressure on the leadership to change its domestic positions (Davies, 2012).

Diversionary theory mostly regards US foreign policy. Morgan and Bickers (1992) soften the assumption that a president facing domestic political trouble will not necessarily engage in foreign military conflict, and they might even prefer lowering international tensions in order to alleviate concerns at home, ultimately finding that party support, not public support, is the important determinant of the initiation of foreign conflict. This effect is contradicted by results that show increased party approval makes diversionary force use by presidents more likely (Meernik and Waterman, 1996). Economic factors, though, appear to eliminate the diversionary effect (DeRouen Jr., 2000) indicating that domestic factors can become so important that foreign policy does not matter. Baum (2002a) shows that the public increases presidential support during a crisis, effects regarding general foreign policy are still unclear.

Theory

This paper will apply diversionary theory to a hybrid state where domestic politics are managed, a leader’s absolute power is uncertain and foreign troubles may generate domestic problems. Most diversionary research links the use of force to domestic trouble in the United States, but does not account for this in other states or in non-democracies. It
also does little to account for other forms of conflictual foreign policy outside military action, such as threatening sanctions, blaming another state for local troubles, holding off on agreement negotiations, or engaging in criticizing rhetoric on the international stage.

Generally, Russian policy is not made with the US solely in mind. Instead, recent foreign policy focus has been on furthering the country’s economic recovery, ensuring that Russia recovers its lost international standing, and that the country earns and maintains a level of prestige that keeps it secure and allows it to pursue its interests. However, these goals conflict with a leadership that operates from a position of self-perceived insecurity, even though there are very few real threats to the security of the Russian state (Oliker et. al. 2009). This difference makes it very possible that foreign policy will tend to be more confrontational, especially toward the United States, especially when politics seem shaky at home.

As domestic politics becomes more contentious, there is an assumption that an authoritarian leader will engage in repressive tactics, or engage in foreign conflict behavior. However, following Robertson (2009, 2011), pure repression is not the best strategy for a leader like Vladimir Putin, who runs a regime that incorporates some democratic institutions like elections and opposition parties—although these are sanctioned by the regime—but still needs to maintain power. Since pure oppression is impossible, and the domestic political strategies for dealing with opposition are varied, it is also probable that Russian leaders take some foreign policy actions in order to alleviate domestic political pressures. Because of the historic rivalry between Russia and the US, and the US’s position as the largest world power engaging in interactions with many of Russia’s newly independent neighbors, it is likely that Putin and other leaders will target
their actions toward the United States in order to get the most impact and coverage from their actions. The basic claim in existing research on Russian reaction to political unrest is that the authoritarian leader cannot or is unwilling to engage in strictly repressive tactics, and will therefore respond innovatively. However, most analysis of this response is directed at how the government responds to domestic unrest with domestic policy. Because the line between domestic and foreign politics is unclear in Russia, it is also possible that the government can respond to increased domestic contention with foreign policy actions.

The MFA statement asserts the Russian Federation’s right to a full role in international politics, economic integration with the newly independent states, denouncement of attempts by the West to contain a new Russia, and fighting the reduction in state sovereignty (Medvedev, 2008). Action on these stances is influenced by conflict between past and present Russian power and its vague conception of what constitutes foreign and domestic while leading the country to take an ideologically confrontational stance toward the West and the United States. Because of these links, it is expected that Russian leaders facing opposition at home will become more confrontational toward the United States in light of its current power and historic position as a rival. The combination of Russia’s state as a hybrid regime, and the possibility of diversionary foreign policies, the following hypothesis will be tested:

\[ H_1: \text{As domestic politics in the Russian Federation becomes more contentious—through protest, electoral challenge, or negative public opinion—the government is more likely to engage in confrontational foreign policy toward the United States.} \]

**Data and Research Design**
The primary data for testing the hypothesized relationship come from the Integrated Data for Events Analysis (Bond et. al. 2003), which automatically codes Reuters news stories from 1990-2004. This dataset includes internal and external events, so it provides consistent measurements of the two needed sectors that are supposed to correlate. Measuring domestic and international conflict relies on a scale that ranks the foreign policy events from cooperation to conflict (Goldstein, 1992). The expected relationship is that as the domestic political environment becomes more hostile, Russian leadership will also become more hostile toward the United States in order to distract public attention with an external threat towards a country viewed as a historic and present rival, making the regime look stronger.

The IDEA data run from 1990 to 2004, covering the last year of the Soviet Union, the election of Boris Yeltsin in June 1991 to the 1999 accession of Vladimir Putin, and the first four years of his administration. Since the data record specific news reports, they are coded by the day. Because there are gaps, stretches of time where no events are recorded and because it takes time for the government to react to protests and design the actions or statements it will make toward the United States, a monthly period is employed in this analysis. While it may be appropriate to treat government statements and responses to the protest, at least internationally, as daily events, this does not work for the measurement of protest and domestic response by the government. While individual or organizational statements from Russians criticizing the government act as distinct events, larger scale events like protest occur over the period of a few days or weeks, meaning that a subsequent day of a protest is the same event that occurred the previous day, and cannot be treated as a unique event.
It is possible to collapse these data by year, which makes it easier to include relevant controls like unemployment and education levels that may alter the effects of domestic political contention. However, a yearly period is far too wide to capture the relatively short-term swings in contention that I expect to condition Russian behavior toward the United States. Protests tend to last only a few days or weeks, with a government response coming a day or two after the beginning of the protest and, since Russia is not a full electoral democracy that allows freedom to protest, it is likely to use arrests and other tactics to break up a protest that goes on for too long.

The regime’s strategy to minimize future protest, the desire to participate in protests, and appear stronger by appealing to foreign threats is also one that should happen close to the onset of a protest. This allows the regime to divert attention to an outside power, the United States, which may take some of the impulse away from the protesters, reducing future participation. For example, only a few days after the 2011 protests against Vladimir Putin and Duma election practices began, government officials were declaring that the participants were receiving aid from Western countries seeking to destabilize the country. Because a yearly analysis would not capture the small changes brought on by protest and the government’s response, allowing variation in domestic and international politics month to month is appropriate.

The IDEA data code for source and target states and sectors. This allows for case selection based on who is doing what to whom. Domestic Russian actions directed at the government occur alongside Russian foreign policy actions toward the United States. However, IDEA does not contain a measure for how conflictual or cooperative these events are. The Goldstein weights apply a scaled measure of conflict for each type of
event coded in the data. Negative weights imply a conflictual action, sitting at an extreme value of -10, representing military conflict. Positive weights imply cooperative actions, with a maximum of 8.3, which corresponds to military assistance. Neutral actions are those closer to zero, with zero itself indicating simple explanation of state policies or future positions. For this analysis, the weights are applied to each event occurring between Russia and the United States, as well as those with both Russian sources and targets. These are filtered into the variables that make up the model described below.

The dependent variable consists of the monthly mean of the Goldstein weights for all Russian actions by government actors where US government actors are the target. Since it only includes government-to-government actions, it captures foreign policy behavior. Since the US government is the official and public face of US actions in or directed at Russia, it is likely that Kremlin leaders seeking to look strong will get the most impact out of targeting the US government. While it is easy to label government-to-government actions as foreign policy, actions toward other groups may include events or other actions unrelated to foreign policy decision-making, or part of behavior directed at groups for reasons other than foreign policy. While this may cut out events like a criticism of an American firm’s business practices, these cases are uncertain in their link to foreign policy, and are left out.

The primary independent variable consists of the monthly mean of the Goldstein weights for all actions of Russian individuals and organizations directed at Russian government actors. Since these groups are the most likely to engage in protest and open criticism of the Russian government. Although this leaves out events like protests against business, the actions directed against the government and leadership should be the first
noticed by government actors. These actions are perceived by the regime as the most threatening, the most indicative of a loss of public support for the regime, and one that—if allowed to persist—could lead to a decrease in stability. Although it will have domestic strategies matching those described by Robertson (2011), direct government threats should be the most likely to generate a diversionary action against the foreign target.

The primary control variable includes the monthly mean of the Goldstein weights for all actions of US government actors toward Russian government actors. This is designed to control for all US foreign policy oriented toward Russia, with the expectation that this is responsible more most of the foreign policy Russia makes regarding the United States. Given the history of rivalry between the two states, the continued interactions after the end of the Cold War, and the historic separation between domestic and foreign politics in Russia, it is necessary to make sure that any observed effects from Russian domestic politics remain unbiased by diplomatic changes in the relationship originating from the United States.

A second control variable, the monthly mean of the Goldstein weights for Russian government actions toward Russian individuals and organizations was coded. This was meant to control for the effects of domestic government response to internal conflict, such as arresting protesters, appeasing opposition leaders, or whatever measures the government took to control internal politics. It is possible that the government manages internal political conflict with purely internal strategies and does not rely on a diversionary foreign policy to maintain control, washing out any relationship between Russian-US foreign policy. However, the data only contained twenty-one cases matching
the specified conditions for domestic control. Therefore, it is excluded from the final analysis.

Since the IDEA data code sources and targets for each case, filtering the combinations of these is necessary to generate the appropriate variables. Each variable is the result of a combination of four indicator variables that match the conditions described above. The dependent International Conflict variable was coded as “1” if the country name of the source and target were Russia and the US, respectively, and if the source and target sectors were government actors. If the addition of these individual indicators equaled four, the variable was recoded as the international conflict dependent variable. US foreign policy, the control variable, was coded in a similar manner, instead using US government actors as the source sector and country, and Russian government actors as the target country and actors. A sum of four for these indicators was recoded as the US Foreign Policy variable. The independent variable, domestic Russian political conflict is the four-part combination of Russian source, Russian target, government actor target, with individuals or organization as the sources. Any event that contained a summed indicator value of four was kept as the Domestic Conflict variable.

In order to generate monthly measures of international and domestic conflict between the US and Russia, all variables are collapsed at the mean of the Goldstein weight by month. This yields an average conflict scale for each month-year, where negative values indicate conflictual behavior, zero indicates neutral, and positive values indicate cooperative behavior. This process yielded a collapsed mean data set for each variable, which were merged to create the final data used in the model estimation. Collapsing the weight scale around the minimum and maximums, to check if it was peaks
in, instead of the overall, relationship between domestic and international conflict that caused Russian governments to become more confrontational toward the United States had no effect on the direction or significance of the variables.

Table 1 presents basic summary statistics for the three variables, collapsed by the mean of the Goldstein weights for each year in the data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>International Conflict</th>
<th>Domestic Conflict</th>
<th>US Foreign Policy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1.673</td>
<td>-0.094</td>
<td>1.902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>1.854</td>
<td>0.370</td>
<td>3.242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>2.077</td>
<td>-0.388</td>
<td>3.484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>2.145</td>
<td>0.766</td>
<td>3.568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>1.867</td>
<td>-0.709</td>
<td>2.097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>2.646</td>
<td>-3.280</td>
<td>2.387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1.426</td>
<td>-1.422</td>
<td>2.330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>0.719</td>
<td>0.174</td>
<td>3.273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>1.452</td>
<td>0.782</td>
<td>1.999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>0.521</td>
<td>-0.380</td>
<td>2.520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1.819</td>
<td>-1.652</td>
<td>2.248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>0.813</td>
<td>0.373</td>
<td>2.896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>-0.965</td>
<td>0.600</td>
<td>0.752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>-2.395</td>
<td>-1.886</td>
<td>1.343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>-2.744</td>
<td>-2.812</td>
<td>-0.396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Years</td>
<td>0.861</td>
<td>-0.637</td>
<td>2.243</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the monthly level is used in the final analysis, showing summary statistics for each year provides a good general view of the data. Interestingly, international conflict between Russia and the United States was positive until 2002, indicating that for most of the period included in the data, Russia-US relations were mildly cooperative, approaching neutral in the late 1990s until 2001. The international conflict variable only becomes negative, indicating a conflictual Russia-US relationship in the last three years of the data. Domestic politics, on the other hand, is neutral for most years under
consideration but displays some shifting between neutral and conflictual. Overall, domestic politics in Russia is far more conflictual than Russian relations with the United States. Similar to Russian actions toward the United States, US action toward Russia is positive and cooperative for all but two years. It becomes neutral in 2002, and is only just barely negative in 2004, the last year of data. This basic analysis seems to indicate, that at least on a yearly basis, Russian foreign policy toward the United States and US foreign policy toward Russia was largely devoid of conflict while domestic politics within Russia experienced almost continual conflict.

These summary statistics are of limited utility, however, since they only display yearly means for the three variables. The monthly means of the weight scale display much greater variation within the variables. Plots of these variables over time are very noisy—often the conflict scale jumps between highly negative and highly positive values month-to-month—making it difficult to see any obvious relationship between domestic conflict and foreign policy outside the model estimation. They show, however, that the conflict scales for each variable are not nearly as stable as the yearly summary statistics imply.

**Statistical Model and Empirical Results**

The model estimates the effects that domestic political contention in Russia has on its foreign policy toward the United States while controlling for the foreign policy of the United States toward Russia. The dependent variable, the monthly mean of the conflict scale for Russia-US actions varies with the change in the monthly mean of the conflict scale for domestic events and the change in the monthly mean of the conflict scale for US-Russia actions.
Because the data are time-series, there is good reason to expect serial correlation, where present measures of domestic and international conflict are correlated with their measurements in previous periods. Theoretically, there is reason to expect this relationship within the data. Both the Russian and US governments probably make the bulk of their foreign policy choices based on the past relationship between the two countries. These relationships are conditioned by general, every-day interaction between the foreign policy structures of the two countries, so cooperation or conflict in the past is likely to have some impact on cooperation or conflict in the future. Domestically, present levels of political conflict may depend on previous levels if there is no attempt by the government to reduce it. For example, a protest that is not met with repression but results in no policy change by the Russian government may provide the incentive for future protests on that issue, since it seems to participants that a repressive response is unlikely.

In order to correct for the possible serial correlation, all models use Prais-Winsten estimation.

Table 2 reports a constant-only, bivariate, and controlled model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DV: International Conflict</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.331</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.184)*</td>
<td>(0.194)*</td>
<td>(0.231)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Conflict</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.129</td>
<td>0.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
<td>(0.085)</td>
<td>(0.074)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Foreign Policy</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>(0.072)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.133</td>
<td>0.822</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. * indicates significance at p=0.05
The estimations show that the domestic conflict and US foreign policy variables are correctly signed. As the domestic scale becomes more cooperative, Russian actions toward the US become more cooperative and as they decrease, Russian actions become more conflictual. However, neither the domestic conflict variable nor the US foreign policy control variable are statistically significant, indicating that domestic Russian politics has no effect on how the Russian government acts toward the United States, providing no support for the presented hypothesis. It also appears that US foreign policy actions have no effect on Russian foreign policy. F-tests for overall model significance indicated that neither the bivariate nor the controlled models were significantly better estimators of the variation in Russian actions toward the United States than a constant only model.

It is possible that the Russian regime is not reacting to domestic politics and US actions within the same month and instead generates its foreign policy with previous periods in mind. Since it takes time to formulate official responses to protests, decide whether to blame or divert attention towards a foreign power, and time for those policies to be implemented, a lagged version of the control model was also tested. In addition, because these data code across, except for the last few months of 1990, the Yeltsin and Putin presidencies, and each president may be responsible for different effects on domestic political contention and foreign policy contention. A simple test, where years after 1999 are coded into a dichotomous variable where a “1” represents the Putin presidency, is reported below.

Neither the dichotomous model of international conflict and the domestic political contention from the previous month nor a model with lagged domestic contention and US
foreign policy yielded any statistically significant relationship. A bivariate model testing possible effects of the Putin presidency on domestic political conflict in Russia shows that there is no significant effect from Putin relative to Yeltsin. Although the coefficient is negative, indicating that there are more conflictual politics during the Putin years, it is indistinguishable from zero. However, the Putin indicator was statistically significant in explaining Russian conflictual behavior toward the United States. Table 3 reports the effects of the Putin presidency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>DV: International Conflict</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.716</td>
<td>1.590</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.218)*</td>
<td>(0.255)*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Conflict</td>
<td>0.108</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.082)</td>
<td>(0.072)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Foreign Policy</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>0.044</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
<td>(0.071)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putin</td>
<td>-1.215</td>
<td>-0.882</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.376)*</td>
<td>(0.346)*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=149            N=132
R² 0.080          0.055
p 0.002           0.064

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. * indicates significance at p=0.05

In both models, Putin’s time in office has a negative and significant effect on Russian relations with the United States, although domestic political conflict and US foreign policy continue to have no significant effect. An interaction effect between Putin’s regime and domestic conflict also proved insignificant. These analyses show that there is no effect of Russian domestic political conflict on Russia-US relations. An increase in protest, opposition to the Russian leadership, and general political contention is not met with a corresponding increase in hostility by the Russian government toward
the United States, and US actions do not appear to have an effect on how the Russians make foreign policy.

However, the significant relationship of the Putin presidency, where all foreign policy towards the US is less cooperative, indicates that something is different since he took power. It is possible Putin is simply more opposed to the United States on a personal level, which is reflected in his foreign policy, or that there is some other, more recent, effect that is causing Putin to become more confrontational with the US. Further quantitative analysis is not possible since the data end relatively early into Putin’s first term. The final coding in these data comes long before the most recent, and large, wave of protest that surrounded the Duma and presidential elections in 2011 and 2012. In addition, observations about the decline in Putin’s personal influence did not become apparent until early in 2012 (Frye, 2012) and the string of new legislation restricting the activity of foreign NGOs and instituting stricter internet censorship did not begin until 2012. Therefore, it is quite possible that there was not sufficient domestic contention to threaten Russian leadership until after the data end, and that the larger protests of 2011 and seeming increase in opposition to the Putin regime generated diversionary strategies. The following section will provide a brief case analysis, relying on Western and Russian media sources to determine whether this diversionary effect exists after new developments within Russia.

The 2011 Duma and 2012 Presidential Protests

Because the available data do not code past 2004, any analysis of the recent protests and foreign policy responses in Russia require a qualitative analysis. This most recent wave of protest, concerns over the stability of Putin’s hold on power, and the
accompanying response toward the United States began in December of 2011. Smaller protests occurred in 2012 after Putin won his third term as president, after which the Russian government instituted a host of new laws restricting foreign organizations and regulating domestic behaviors. In order to remain somewhat consistent with the events coding undertaken in the generation of the IDEA data, this study primarily uses Reuters stories, supplemented with other journalistic sources where needed. In addition, sources from *Russia Today* (RT) are used to gain some sense of how these events were reported within Russia. This is meant to capture how Russians outside the larger cities get their information, and if the Russian state tends to reports these events differently on these channels. RT was set up and is funded by the Russian Ministry of Communications, which may exert control on its content and reporting (Berry, 2013), even though it presents itself as a news organization along the lines of the British BBC and American PBS.

After a brief overview of the protest events themselves, and progression over the following years, this study will present the Russian government’s domestic and international responses, focusing on how the Putin regime speaks about those who participated in the protest, while accounting for reported US statements about the protests inside Russia. Reuters and other non-Russian media reports will be presented alongside reports from similar dates from RT reporting, in order to detect any difference in the presentation of these events. Domestic-directed responses by the Russian government and statements about the protests by the United States government are meant to act as a form of control, to ensure that any discussion of the Russian foreign policy response is
observed in the context of its domestic responses and US actions, resembling the quantitative study as closely as possible.

The Sunday of December 4, 2011 marked an interesting turn for elections in Russia. The previous September, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin announced that he would seek a third term as President of the Russian Federation, again swapping jobs with Dmitry Medvedev who would take on the role of Prime Minister.\(^1\) Although unprecedented, this change did not appear to stir up much protest from Russian voters. However, the election results showed that dissatisfaction with Putin and his ruling United Russia party was growing. The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), usually dismissed in Russia as a party of nostalgic and elderly holdouts, doubled its gains in the Duma to twenty percent of the seats, while United Russia’s vote share slipped from 64% to just over 50%.\(^2\) Despite this jump in vote share for the communists, these new votes were not driven by a renewed interest in communist governance; instead, they were the result of voters looking for the only available and legitimate opposition party. Since many consider other opposition parties like the strongly nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) and A Just Russia to be under the influence of Putin and United Russia, a vote for the communists seemed the only viable alternative.\(^3\)

Not all Kremlin opponents chose the communists, however. While some voters were motivated by stability, crediting Putin with bringing economic growth and political stability, others chose the LDPR and liberal Yabloko party—liberal in the democratic

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\(^3\) Ibid.
sense, and not just adopting the term as the LDPR did.⁴ Some however, refused to vote at all, arguing that anyone with a real opposition stance to Putin, including liberal democratic groups were barred from participating.⁵

Simultaneous with the drop in support for Putin’s party, allegations of electoral corruption began piling up. The day following the election, the Communist Party accused police of preventing its election observers from entering polling places and stuffing ballot boxes before the start of voting.⁶ European election observers confirmed these accusations, citing procedural violations and manipulation of results, particularly through ballot-box stuffing.⁷ They also argued that the campaign itself was slanted toward a United Russia victory, poll workers actively campaigned for United Russia, while cyber-attacks shut down the website of Golos, a Russian election monitor reporting locations of election violations.⁸ The next day, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton voiced concerns about ballot stuffing, voter roll manipulation, and other “troubling practices” while other Department of State spokespeople called upon the Kremlin to investigate the accusations of election fraud.⁹

The first large-scale protest about the Duma election followed the day after the elections, December 5, in Moscow and St. Petersburg, escalating and spreading across Russia in the following weeks. In Moscow alone, 5,000 people showed up to protest, with smaller numbers doing the same in St. Petersburg. The police response saw around 300 people arrested. That Tuesday, police response was far more robust, with 50,000 police

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⁴ December 4, 2011. “From the streets: Russian voices on the election.” Reuters.
⁵ “Russians vote in election test for Vladimir Putin”
⁶ de Carbonnel, 2011.
⁸ Grove and Guterman, 2011.
and 2,000 Interior Ministry (MVD) troops deployed around Moscow while MVD armored vehicles paraded through the city center. Despite this show of force, and a pro-Putin youth rally that drew hundreds of its own supporters, protesters still marched in Moscow and St. Petersburg; resulting in the arrest of another 250 participants. Later that day a Putin representative said that while approved demonstrations would be allowed to continue, any unsanctioned protests would be stopped. From the United States, Senator John McCain tweeted to Putin, “Dear Vlad, The Arab Spring is coming to a neighborhood near you.”

On December 8, Putin made his first public announcement about the Duma elections and the protests surrounding the results. Claiming that foreign states spent “hundreds of millions of dollars to influence Russian elections,” he also directly accused Hillary Clinton of encouraging “‘mercenary’” opposition groups and signaling them to begin opposing the Kremlin. These accusations did little to stem the protests. On December 9, protests were taking place in a dozen Russian cities, including Vladivostok on the Pacific coast. Despite the growing dissention, protesters in Moscow had permission to assemble from the Kremlin, and contemporary opinion polls still showed that Putin was the most popular Russian politician.

December 10-11 marks the peak of the protests. In addition to being at its widest distribution among Russian cities, it was the largest overall protest since the fall of the USSR, with around 40,000 people participating in Moscow alone. The government response was also less disciplined, with the Interior Ministry denying the size of the

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11 Ibid.
protests, while regime figures declared that the opposition was using propaganda to fool simple-minded people into participating, and threatening to conscript anyone arrested while participating.\textsuperscript{14} While the protests were never this big or widespread again, they continued on a relatively consistent scale in Moscow for the rest of December. It is unclear how far into 2012 protests about the Duma elections continued, but if they continued into January, they were not of a sufficient size to reach the notice of Reuters reporting.

Following this peak, the Kremlin response grew, state media (RT) began producing pro-Kremlin leaning stories, and more confrontational stances were taken towards the US. The Russian Foreign Ministry declared that US police forces exercised unjustified cruelty in their handling of the concurrent Occupy Wall Street protests.\textsuperscript{15} December 22 saw President Dmitry Medvedev calling for reforms to the Russian political system during his state of the nation speech, but ignoring opposition demands to invalidate and run a new Duma election.\textsuperscript{16} This speech, however, came after Medvedev dismissed criticism on the elections from the European Parliament.\textsuperscript{17} At the same time, RT published an article highly critical of the new US Ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul, arguing that his appointment was meant to increase Western media attention on Putin and prevent him from returning to the presidency, and to increase the funding of foreign democracy promoting NGOs to interfere more efficiently with Russian politics. RT further criticized the United States for reinstating an arms supply deal with Georgia,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Amos, Howard. December 10, 2011. “Russian Protests: December 10 as it happened.” \textit{Daily Telegraph}.\textsuperscript{14}
\item December 14, 2011. “Russia blasts West for ‘unjustified cruelty’ against OWS.” RT.\textsuperscript{15}
\item Heritage, Timothy and Alexei Anishchuk. December 22, 2011. “Russia’s Medvedev tries to appease protesters.” Reuters.\textsuperscript{16}
\item December 15, 2011. “‘Europe should consider own problems’ –Medvedev.” RT.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
arguing that it will promote violence against the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which were the causes of the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia.¹⁸

Shortly after President Medvedev’s speech calling for political reform, Prime Minister Putin announced that he was ready to begin a dialogue with Russian opposition, but could not go forward because there was no leader with whom he could begin talks. He also claimed that questions about the protests were secondary to energy deals, all while still in the lead to win the upcoming March presidential election.¹⁹ The same day Putin reached out to the opposition protesters, though, the Russian Foreign Ministry released a report citing the United States for destroying the freedoms of Americans. It also argued that the US electoral system violated human rights norms by preventing independent candidates from running in elections, and the appointment of senators by state governors in the case of an early vacancy robbed voters of their rightful electoral choices. The report of this Foreign Ministry action by RT also blames NATO for widespread civilian deaths during the intervention in Libya.²⁰

The 2011 Duma protests acted as the first real domestic political shock to the Putin regime, and came shortly before he was to run for a third term as president. As the largest protests in Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union, their escalation over much of December caused significant concern in the Kremlin. Although the United States government announced early in the period that it was concerned with the process of the elections, and there were incidents of negative comments made by other actors within the US government, there is little evidence that the US actively worked for the overthrow of the Kremlin government. However, the Kremlin’s statements toward the United States,

¹⁸ December 21, 2011. “American re-arming of Georgia will spark new aggression S. Ossetia.” RT.
and the statements about the protesters as agents of US foreign policy actors was far more conflictual than statements made by the US.

The government’s actions, as reported by Reuters, early in the period of protests match what Robertson (2011) describes for hybrid regime reaction to domestic political opposition. The Kremlin announced that it would allow protests that had gotten permission to assemble from the government, while threatening and detaining protesters who attempted to form without receiving prior permits. In addition, pro-regime rallies were organized and permitted to march in counter-demonstrations while government statements cast the opposition as under the influence of foreign actors. However, the government did not limit itself to controlling these protests through domestically oriented responses.

The statements made by the government and Kremlin about US involvement in support of the protests and increasing the criticism of the United States in general, show some support for the hypothesis that the Russian government is likely to be more confrontational in times of domestic political conflict. As protests got worse after the Duma elections, rhetoric toward the United States by Medvedev and Putin got more conflictual, mostly by accusing the United States of hiring mercenaries to interfere with the regime. In addition, the Russian Foreign Ministry began issuing reports about the US fomenting conflict with neighbors in Russia’s near abroad, and accusing American leaders of violating human rights. These criticisms were widely reported by state supported media while Reuter’s sources limited their reporting to statements coming directly from Medvedev and Putin. Although these were rhetorical confrontations directed against the US government, and it is uncertain that they had any effect on the
actual occurrence of protests, it is likely that since most Russian citizens outside the major cities get their news from places like RT. Therefore, the confrontational rhetoric by the government and criticism of the electoral system of the United States helped generate the idea that Putin was still a strong leader. More importantly, it established that the protesters did not deserve further support since their foreign role model was little better at human rights and electoral function than Russia, thereby not an example worth citing when calling for reforms.

Even though the protests appeared to dissipate shortly into January 2011, the March victory of Putin in Russia’s presidential election sparked additional, but smaller protests. While rhetoric toward the United States did not become as nasty as it had during the Duma election protests, a similar change in statements were observed after Putin re-took office including real policy change by the Russian government.

Despite the protests surrounding the Duma elections, few predicted that Vladimir Putin faced any real electoral threat during the presidential elections in the March of 2012, where he took around 64% of the vote. Reflecting behavior during the Duma elections, the Communist Party and liberal opposition figures denounced the outcome, and allegations of election fraud, such as the 100% vote share for Putin with 100% turnout in the Chechen polls, emerged from domestic and international election observers while some noted that many of those attending Putin’s victory speech were bussed in from outside Moscow.\(^{21}\) The Monday following the election, protesters again took to the streets of Moscow; opposition leaders declared that 20,000 people came to participate in calling for new elections and the opening of the political system; only 3,000 were

reported in St. Petersburg. As it did during the 2011 Duma elections, the US Department of State did little more than call for an investigation into the alleged election violations, although the US Ambassador took to Twitter to express concern about the rights of Russian citizens. The Russian police response is unclear; the opposition claimed 1,000 protesters were arrested while the police only claim 250 arrests out of an attendance of 14,000.22

Reuters does not report any confrontational rhetoric or actions by the Russian government, or Putin, directed at the United States. In contrast with the government’s actions during the Duma protests, the regime’s response in the days following the election appeared domestically focused. President Medvedev, who would remain in office until May, ordered state prosecutors to re-examine criminal cases against business elites arrested after falling afoul of Putin, like the former head of oil company Yukos, Mikhail Khordorkovsky, and investigate some of the election fraud accusations.23 Putin also invited opposition party members and candidates to talks.24

Russian media also refrained from directing criticism at the United States during this period. Instead, RT countered allegations of election fraud by citing arguments from Serbian and Bulgarian election monitors who declared that the Russian presidential elections were fully democratic and transparent, and that Russia had finally achieved a “full level of democracy.”25 It also reported that Moscow police only responded with detention when protesters refused to leave the protest site at the end of the day, again

contrasting this apparently peaceful and professional response with violence used in the US against Occupy Wall Street protesters. This sentiment was reinforced by now President-elect Putin, who said police only responded when protesters broke the limits on what they were permitted to do, and did not include the United States when asked about his future foreign policy plans. Even in an op-ed piece published the week after the elections blaming Western media for trying to depose Putin, did not direct criticism against the United States.

Several differences separate the Duma protests and reaction in 2011 from the 2012 presidential election, despite the fact that the limited US response was the same for both periods. The higher protest turnout in 2011 was met with more detention and a more confrontational rhetorical response from the government and supporting media than the protest around the 2012 election. Several reasons for this are possible, mainly that the scale of the 2011 protests was much larger and caught the regime off guard. The electoral gains of the Communist party, accusations of fraud, and large-scale protests were a new experience for the Putin and Medvedev regime, and it was the first time serious opposition presented itself. It also happened only a few months before a second election was due, this one also controversial because Putin had recently announced his bid to return to the presidency. These factors served to make the reaction of the government harsher and far more conflictual than 2012, where protests were smaller in scale, limited mostly to Moscow, and expected by a regime that already had a secure majority in the Duma and had just re-secured executive leadership.

26 March 6, 2012. “Cop crackdown on protests legal –PM spokesman.” RT.
27 March 7, 2012. “‘Get serious’: Putin’s message to protesters.” RT.
In the first case, the government responded to US calls for investigation with conflictual rhetoric like counter-accusations of human rights abuses and the equivocation of electoral problems between the two states. In the second case, there is next to no mention of the United States as a supporter of the opposition, or much criticism about US behavior in general. While this leads to some further insight about when and how conflictual international rhetoric is used when facing domestic political trouble, the 2012 election case that did not see diversionary activity during the course of the protest. It was only after protest had largely ended and the third Putin presidency seemed secure that confrontational rhetoric returned.

Three new pieces of legislation passed the Duma and were signed into law by Putin in 2012 that, while not directed solely at the United States, were passed within a cloud of rhetoric critical of US positions and marketed to secure Russia from foreign influence; the same influence blamed for the severity of protest surrounding the 2011 Duma elections. Restrictions on foreign NGOs, new internet censorship requirements, and a ban on US adoptions of Russian children illustrate the Kremlin enacted foreign policies directed at outside actors, conflicting with the United States during the attempted “reset” of relations, while rhetorically becoming confrontational with an outside power; all to shore up domestic positions.

Late in July of 2012, Putin signed into law regulations forcing any NGO participating in political activity and receiving funding from international sources to register as foreign agents. As part of this new regulation, the Russian Foreign Ministry also announced that it was expelling the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), accusing it of attempting to influence the political process and alter civil

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society. In November, new internet regulation went into effect, allowing the state media-monitoring agency to create a blacklist of internet sites that promotes child pornography, drug use, suicide, or for any reason by court order. It also mandated blocking the site in its entirety whenever any offending material was found. Sites that supported the political opposition or reported on government corruption fell under allegations of publishing child pornography and had their IP addresses blocked. In the most directed action, Putin, citing widespread abuse by American families, enacted a blanket ban on adoptions of Russian children by US citizens, sparking additional protests in Moscow.

The Kremlin also backed legislation banning public displays of homosexuality, viewed by some in the government and the Russian Orthodox Church as part of the assault of Western values on Russian citizens that led to the promotion of the protests in 2011-2012. The Kremlin also cancelled law enforcement cooperation agreements against drug and human trafficking, claiming that it was breaking its dependence on excessive US influence. Finally, early in March 2013, Russian authorities executed part of the NGO regulation by raiding the offices of hundreds of foreign and domestic NGO offices, aimed at forcing them to register as foreign agents.

32 Farivar, Cyrus. February 8, 2013. “Russia, in adding to new blacklist, blocks site used by dissidents.” Ars Technica.
In all of these cases, the United States expressed concern for the recent increase in confrontation coming from the Kremlin, especially in the case of expelling USAID, which had maintained a presence in Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union. The execution of these actions and creation of new legislation came months after Putin secured his third term as president and protests began to die down, implying that the regime is trying to prevent any further domestic opposition whether it is influenced by outside powers or not. Even though there is little evidence that the US government is actively working to overthrow the regime, the Kremlin perceives the domestic threat that first appeared during the 2011 Duma protests as dangerous to the stability of the regime and country. As a result, the Kremlin is casting any who oppose it as foreign agents, using it as justification for the passage of more restrictive regulations on domestic behavior aimed at keeping future opposition from coalescing. In addition, it continues to claim that the opposition is controlled from the outside becoming more confrontational with the US by throwing out government agencies and breaking agreements in order to cement power. Its goal is to project an image of control over internal affairs and independence from the West, even going so far as to argue that the West is preparing to tip the military balance of power against Russia. These statements do not seem to correspond in their tone with the simple statements made by the US government calling for investigations of election fraud. This supports the idea that international confrontation is motivated partially by perceptions that by looking stronger and less dependent on US cooperation and approval while undermining electoral and human rights positions.

38 Anishchuk, Alexei. February 27, 2013. “Rusia’s Putin tells army to shape up for foreign threat” Reuters.
through equivocation between the states—at least in the eyes of the Russian public—will allow the regime to gain domestic support and secure the regime’s position.

Those opposed to Putin observed these effects as well. Muscovite protesters against the adoption ban claimed that the Kremlin’s new stance toward the United States, while meant to discredit them, was also meant to make the government look strong to those living outside the city since they rely on the Kremlin for most of their political information. Others argued that the United States is the target of Putin’s power consolidation because it is a safer option than appealing to Russian nationalism. Because the government is worried that nationalist rhetoric will give credit to breakaway regions like Chechnya, the link between US democracy and the ideas chanted by the protesting crowds allow Putin to secure his rule without risking crises in Russia’s near abroad. Because the United States does not seem to have huge foreign policy goals in the Russian Federation, and because the trade relationship is so small, confrontation and criticism of the United States is a relatively safe option that has the added benefit of discrediting opposition movements.

These cases show some evidence for the hypothesized relationship between Russia-US relations and domestic political contention within Russia. As protest and opposition movements grew out of corrupt election practices in the hybrid system, increasing the level of confrontation with the United States allowed the Kremlin to look strong to those who did not participate in the elections. Measures like banning adoptions and throwing out USAID made the government look more independent and more capable of handling domestic issues itself. Criticism of US protest and electoral conditions also

39 Berry, 2013.
40 February 16, 2013. “Russia and America: The Dread of the Other” The Economist.
helped to equate events in the two countries, adding democratic legitimacy to the regime. Increased confrontation with the United States also provided Putin with the rhetorical legitimacy necessary to pass the new regulations, like internet censorship, which provided concrete reinforcement of his power. Although the qualitative study shows that, at least recently, there is some form of diversionary effect gained by becoming more confrontational toward the United States, it does not match the longer-term analysis that does not find evidence in support of the hypothesized relationship.

**Discussion and Policy Implications**

The model presented above, over the long term, failed to find any support between levels of conflict between Russia and the United States when domestic politics became more conflictual. However, an analysis of the short-term rhetoric and legislative activity after the recent election cycle found that there was significant confrontation with the United States, even after considering the actions of the US government. Three broad possibilities explain the different findings. First, Putin, simply by nature of his personality and leadership style, could be more antagonistic toward the United States. Second, this diversionary effect might be the result of the shock to support generated in 2011, one that did not exist before these elections when the government believed it had wider support. Finally, and the one most supported by both analyses, is that the diversionary effect is a short-term reaction to domestic troubles; useful when power needs to be cemented, but that there is no long-term relationship between levels of domestic contention and US directed foreign policy.

The long-term model shows the significant and negative relationship between Putin and US relations, even though there is no effect between his regime and Russian
domestic conflict. This relationship is consistent even when controlling for US foreign policy, leaving the only cause something about a difference in the regime or Putin himself. Putin may simply be more anti-American than Yeltsin, his predecessor, or something in the way he runs his foreign policy apparatus is inherently more conflictual when dealing with the United States. In the case study then, this would mean that the criticism of the United States and policy changes were nothing more than the result of his latent anti-Americanism. However, this explanation is uninteresting and does explain anything other than a vague indication of a single leader’s personality.

The worst of the criticism toward the United States came during the earliest protests in 2011, when the opposition was at its strongest and most organized. In 2012, there was next to no increase in confrontation with the US, but the protests were smaller, contained largely to Moscow, and Putin was quicker in his promise of future electoral changes and the offering of talks with opposition leaders. Confrontation with the United States only came after the presidential election protests had dissipated. Then, Putin initiated policy changes like the revocation of USAID’s privileges and tighter controls on NGOs, using the same rhetoric from the 2011 elections about US support for the destabilization of his regime to garner support from residents outside Moscow. The result was the passage of the new legislation through a pliant Duma, the strengthening of his power, and appearance of being able to stand up and get the United States to leave Russia alone.

The case analysis noted that the 2011 protests were consistently the largest experienced in Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union, and the first large scale protests since Putin took power in 1999. Therefore, it is quite possible that the diversionary
effects observed were the result of the protests acting as a shock, driving the regime to take drastic new measures to ensure stability. While the regime was accustomed to allowing some protest, and relied on the usual hybrid management tactics in the 2011 protests, the large number of participants distributed through most of the cities around Russia was unexpected. Increased hostility toward the United States, then, was a new strategy developed out of panic to prevent the continuation and future growth of protests by discrediting participants and shoring up the appearance of control with his supporters.

The policy changes after Putin’s re-election as president, and their target of perceived US behaviors in Russia, were simply a later manifestation of this reaction and desire to prevent future challenges to the regime.

This explanation is able to show why the long-term analysis of domestic conflict does not show a significant relationship with Russia-US relations, and why the summary measures for domestic conflict were so low alongside a generally cooperative, but degrading, relation with the United States. Essentially, the domestic political situation after 2011 is fundamentally different from that in 1990-2004, requiring expanded strategies from Putin to maintain his hold on power. However, it fails to explain how the long and short-term analyses are linked. It requires a different treatment for each period; even a different treatment between Putin presidencies, while implying that the Kremlin realized only in 2011 that diversion by increasing confrontational rhetoric and actions toward the United States was a viable strategy for cementing power.

The only explanation supported by both analyses is one that in the short-term, domestic political contention can greatly shape how confrontational the Russian regime is toward the United States, but that this effect exists only in the short term. Overall, and
over the long course of relations between the two states, the relationship is somewhat cooperative but largely neutral, reflecting the diminished rivalry that comes from the end of the Cold War, lack of large trading relationship, and few large foreign policy objectives either state has for the other. The likelihood of this scenario is illustrated in the data. From 1990-2004 there was no relationship between Russian domestic political conflict and Russia-US international conflict. In 2011, unprecedented protests coincided with a more conflictual Kremlin stance toward the United States, which fell off with protest size in 2012, but increased as Putin worked to cement his position against the possibility of future opposition.

Part of the driving force behind the short-term change in international contention may rest in the nature of the protests themselves. It is important not to make too much of the fact that the 2011 protest were the largest since the Soviet fall. At their peak on December 10, 2011, only 40,000 people participated in the Moscow protest; a city of 11.5 million. While that day saw protests in other cities around Russia, none of them was as large as the one in Moscow, and they did not continue for long periods in those cities. Subsequent protest in 2012 and those surrounding the new legislation passed in the beginning of Putin’s third term were largely limited to Moscow. In addition, at no point in this recent period of protests did Putin’s popularity with the general population decline significantly.

With this in mind, it appears that most of the opposition to the Putin regime is limited and isolated to Moscow, with some presence in St. Petersburg. Therefore, there is little systemic protest risk in the rest of the Russian Federation. This makes it possible that, in the short term when protests are large, the reinforcement gained from becoming
more confrontational toward the United States is only needed temporarily. Since the active and vocal sections of the opposition are limited to the two big western cities, Putin may be able to write them off in the long term as long as his support from the rest of Russia remains strong. Given that most of the country gets its political news from media organization close to the Kremlin, like RT, and lives outside Moscow, the gain in support he receives for looking stronger against the US likely far outweighs the support he loses from those small numbers in the cities that do not believe his rhetoric.

Once the protests have died out or been sufficiently managed, there is less need to garner support by looking strong against the United States. This, combined with the fact that a little extra confrontation may not have a large effect on relations with the United States, allows relations to return to their relatively neutral state over the long run. Although the policy changes discussed as the most recent examples of confrontation with the US are concerning, it is only their justification that is directed at the US. Except for the expulsion of USAID, all of the new laws primarily target Russians and their activities, and do not make any mention of foreign policy.

It is necessary to note, as well, that even at the height of the rhetorical conflict against the US during the 2011 protests, no major foreign policy actions originated from either side. Certainly, no military conflict began and, at least from the available sources, confrontation from Russia remained mostly at the rhetorical level, it did not move into actual changes in foreign policy behavior by either side. The United States did not appear to alter its foreign policy behavior at all during this recent period of protests, instead relying on calls for investigation and voicing concern about the treatment of protesters. Because the rhetorical responses during the protests and in justifying the legal changes
appear far more confrontational than anything said by US foreign policy actors does, it is very unlikely that the Kremlin statements were generated solely in response for US positions.

Given that the data and case analysis show the most support for a diversionary short-term relationship but no long-term effect from domestic contention on Russia-US relations, some thought is required about which has the biggest impact, and how US policy-makers should react given these relationships. Because the confrontational examples cited in the case study largely consists of rhetoric, and appear to be driven not by foreign policy considerations but by domestic political considerations, it is unlikely that the Russian government would be willing to allow long term foreign relations to suffer.

The benefit to having little trade relationship, a great distance between states, and little desire on either side to engage in any sort of large scale conflict, means that the Kremlin has quite a bit of freedom to engage in harsh rhetoric against the United States for the sake of looking strong in the eyes of its citizens. In addition, the United States is not obligated to respond with similar confrontational rhetoric, and appears to have largely ignored most of the statements coming out from the Kremlin during the 2011-2012 protest period. The American president may be able to shrug off many verbal attacks from the Russian president as long as there are no long-term foreign policy effects that would make American foreign affairs look troubles.

Alternatively, the Russian president is free to be as incendiary as necessary to shore up support until the protests are managed, since it is unlikely the United States will react in a manner that causes long-term foreign policy trouble. The long history of
interaction between the two countries is also important, given the legacy of the Cold War. In a sense, both sides are accustomed to hearing confrontational rhetoric tailored for domestic populations while maintaining less conflictual real foreign policies toward each other. Neither side is dependent on the domestic public statements of the other to gauge how well a diplomatic issue can be resolved as there are plenty of other interactions occurring between the governments on a daily basis. Therefore, given the great distance in real and foreign policy terms plus the general lack of importance of rhetorical statements for the overall function of diplomacy between the two states, the short term diversionary relationship found in the case study is less important than the long-term neutral state of affairs between Russia and the United States.

This finding has two policy implications worth noting. First, in the short-term, an increase in confrontational statements and policy from Putin or the Kremlin is likely not designed to alter general relations with the United States, instead it is meant to garner the support of populations outside Moscow and St. Petersburg while protests and political troubles are managed there. Second, it means that the presence of domestic political trouble, when the Kremlin becomes more confrontational toward the US, may not mean an overall shift in long-term relations. Since there is tentative evidence that the hypothesized diversionary effect exists only in the short-term, US policy-makers can expect relations to return to normal, becoming more neutral as time goes on and Putin’s regime looks more secure. At the start of protest in Russia, then, the United States can expect to become the target of increased confrontation. This may then require holding off on larger foreign policy issues that require Russian cooperation, like a vote in the UN Security Council or other international actions where Russian cooperation may look like
regime weakness to domestic populations when occurring concurrently with domestic political protests.

Despite the interesting findings between the long and short-term analyses, it is troubling that what appears to be such a strong relationship in the short term does not appear in a time-series analysis, especially one that relies on highly varying monthly data. This problem implies several theoretical and empirical alterations, discussed below.

**Extensions for Future Research**

Empirically, several changes to data and model specification may account for the problems this model had in explaining the effects of domestic political contention on Russian foreign policy, especially given the findings of the case analysis. First, more current events data may pick up recent changes in the relationship of the variables. The data end in 2004, before the end of Putin’s first term as president, which means there is no accounting for changes occurring later in his time as president, the evolution of the hybrid democracy, consolidation of Putin’s government, and the protest shocks of 2011 and 2012.

Second, problems with event coding may have hurt the analysis. As seen in the case study, Reuters often reported different events than RT, while missing other important developments in Russia. In addition, sensitivity to Russian events may have changed over time, with more recent events more likely to be reported, since earlier events might have needed to be extreme in order to catch the international attention of Reuters. Because it takes time to set up reporting infrastructure, and advances like Internet proliferation make the spread of information now easier than in the early 1990s, it is quite possible that protest events and changes in Russian foreign policy remained
unreported by Reuters and therefore not coded into the data. This problem may also exist within the case study, for example, Reuters did little reporting on the passage of Russia’s internet law, and often ran multiple stories with very similar content on the same day during the period of protests.

Third, it may be necessary to use daily instead of monthly time intervals. Originally, monthly units were expected to give enough variation to show a relationship while allowing enough time for Russian leaders to react to domestic political conflict while formulating their diversionary response toward the United States. However, it became apparent in the case analysis that a protest, US statement about the protest or condition leading to its occurrence, and a diversionary response happened within hours of each other. These kinds of rapid changes in the levels of conflict in the variables are not captured by the monthly mean of the conflict scale, indicating that a daily mean or very specific count model of the types of events that theoretically apply to each variable may provide a better estimation.

Theoretically, the long-term model restricted the international variables to government actions against other governments, and restricted the protest variable to just those originating from individuals and organizations. However, given the wide cast of Russian statements about the United States, referencing both government and protest actors like Occupy Wall Street, and its eventual adoption of restrictions against non-governmental organizations, it is possible that the diversionary effect is present among non-governmental US actors. For example, the Russian government may take action against a US firm that operates inside Russia instead of going after the US government, in order to look like it has control over the penetration of foreign business into Russia. This
may be conditioned by the type or location of protest, where protests over employment or resource issues are more likely to bring diversionary responses against foreign business while political protests are more likely to bring diversionary responses against government actors or civil society NGOs.

The target of protests within Russia may not be limited to the government. While this condition worked for the sake of the case studies, it relied on the fact that the largest recent protests happened to be about political issues. However, given the mixed nature of business in Russia, where there private, semi-private, and public firms all operate and often have links to the Kremlin, non-government targeted protest may generate diversionary effects as well. For example, protesters may assemble against a large Russian firm. Since much of the present Russian economy relies on exports, protests, strikes, or interruptions against the operation of these firms can be perceived by the government as a threat to stability. As a result, diversionary effects directed against American labor NGOs, position on workers protections, or the government in general may result as the Kremlin moves to manage the protests.

Another theoretical extension is an application and test of this theory to the more general case of Russia’s entire foreign policy space. It seems that long-term foreign relations with the United States have no relationship with domestic political contention within Russia, which may be due to distance and lack of overlapping interests within each state’s territory. As a result, a diversionary response against a country that is not much of a threat to the internal lives of Russians may not provide much of a boost to the image of Kremlin control over the country. Since Russia faces challenges with its near abroad in the former Soviet Republics, and shares a long militarized border with the
People’s Republic of China, these states might be more likely to experience a diversionary foreign policy response when the Russian government is dealing with internal dissent. Since these countries have closer, and often conflicting, foreign policies with each other, it is quite possible diversionary effects are most apparent in more proximate states. In addition, because many of these states have ethnic minorities in Russia, and Russia tends to conflate internal ethnic issues with foreign policy, it is possible that the Kremlin perceives domestic political contention as partially driven by ethnic conflict, leading them to confrontational foreign policies with the countries that contain those ethnic populations.

The final theoretical consideration arises from an observation in the analysis of the legislative changes made by the Kremlin after the end of the 2012 protests, one that is not considered in the original theory. In this case, diversionary rhetoric did not occur during the protests surrounding the election. Instead, the Kremlin and President Putin increased their confrontational statements when marketing and justifying new legislation that particularly restricted behavior of opposition groups and their possible support networks. These measures, like the restrictions on NGO activity and the increased censorship of the Internet, were clearly designed to go after the perceived and actual means the protesters in 2011 used to escape the management structures set up by the Kremlin. Since Russia is not a complete dictatorship and Putin still required some support from the population in order to establish these restrictions. By couching them in terms of preventing US and other Western interference with Russian internal affairs, while increasing confrontation to stir up the concept of conflictual activities by the United
States and associated organizations, the government was able to legitimize its new legislation.

Although the tests of the relationship between Russian domestic politics and foreign policy with the United States conflict, showing a short-term but no long-term effect, it is possible that empirical adjustments may be better explanations. More recent events data over a longer period, sourced from multiple places may be able to capture more accurately protest and response events within Russia. In addition, adjusting the time interval down to the daily level, or relying on a count of relevant events may better detect the apparently rapid changes in the three variables. Theoretically, a loosening of the restraints on what counts as protest and foreign policy should capture missing events perceived by the Kremlin as challenges to the stability of the regime. Additionally, casting the diversionary effect to more proximate foreign policy partners with Russia may detect a relationship since those states may be more important in the security considerations of Russia and the regime’s confidence in its ability to preside over a stable state.

**Conclusion**

This paper argued that the level of political contention inside Russia conditions the Kremlin’s foreign policy toward the United States. Following a basic diversionary framework, where states engage in foreign conflict in order to distract from domestic problems, it hypothesized that as political contention increased inside Russia, relations with the United States would become more conflictual. A long-term quantitative analysis found that there was no apparent link between domestic conditions in Russia and its behavior toward the United States, although President Vladimir Putin consistently
displayed more confrontational behavior than his predecessor did. However, a qualitative analysis of the 2011 Duma election protests, the 2012 presidential protests, and the succeeding tightening of domestic restrictions showed significant increases in confrontation toward the United States.

The discrepancies between these analyses imply that two different effects are present in Russia-US relations. In the short-term, diversionary tactics are very useful and relatively low cost for the Kremlin. In 2011 and 2012, they allowed the regime to discredit the opposition protesters, look stronger to those who were outside the opposition, and establish an image of independence and strength in the face of foreign interference. However, in the long term there is no evidence that domestic and international politics have any relation for Russia. This may be the case because there are relatively few opportunities for large international conflict between the United States and Russia, many avenues for negotiating issues, and a great distance between the states.

Understanding this effect, and the times in which it is operating, provide some basic implications for the operation of United State foreign policy as well. First, an increase in contention is not necessarily a response made to US actions against Russia, and therefore not under the influence of American foreign policy behavior. Second, while this kind of diversionary behavior means that cooperation between the two states is less likely, knowledge that it only exists in the short term provides some reassurance that relations will not be permanently strained. Finally, these effects make it more likely that US foreign policy actors will be able to use the level of domestic political contention in Russia to judge when the political environment is best to approach the subject of international cooperation between the two states.
Several avenues for expansion exist that may provide a better explanation of the hypothesized relationship. Empirical changes would broaden what is considered domestic contention and foreign policy, allowing the variation in the levels of conflict for these events to encompass more of the domestic political arena and discuss a wider range of the Russia-US relationship. Theoretically, the use of diversionary rhetoric in the creation of new legislation in response to unprecedented and organized opposition expands the understanding of the behavior of hybrid regimes. While the strategy is used to improve the management of contention inside the state and prevent a similar form of opposition in the future, it is not solely domestically oriented behavior. Instead, it utilizes diversionary foreign policy behavior—in the past applied only to the United States and other democratic countries—to discredit the opposition and establish an image of control and independence from a foreign power.
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