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Russian Grand Strategy:
Cultivating National Will and Military Modernization

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Abstract

Does the Russian Federation in the Putin-Medvedev era follow a grand strategy, and if so, what does it look like, and how can we discern the making of Russian grand strategy?

However, Russian grand strategy is neither formally codified nor readily accessible, and it remains opaque at best. In this milieu, this project seeks to discern Russian grand strategy through the perceptions from within the Russian Military Industrial Complex (MIC), broadly defined as a domestic institutional configuration—an overlapping network of institutional appendages and individuals—that lies at the nexus of economic, military and political institutions. Predicated on that conceptual framework, the dissertation takes a neoclassical realist approach to pinpoint grand strategy across four cases of Russian military interventions abroad: Moldova (1992), Georgia (2008), Crimea (2014) and Syria (2015). This dissertation builds on Hal Brands' conceptualization of grand strategy: “the theory, or logic, that guides leaders seeking security in a complex and insecure world.”

Utilizing qualitative data analysis (QDA) and informed by personal and professional experiences in Russia, each case study follows a neoclassical realist model of causation with the explanatory variable tied to international systemic stimuli, mediated by leadership perceptions and domestic institutions, that shape the dependent variable—military intervention. The devil is always in the details, especially in a decision-making process as opaque as Russia's. With a neoclassical realist lens, I therefore postulate that this causal chain operates via key intervening variables, one of which is the Russian MIC. Utilizing a proxy voice for the MIC, this dissertation provides a useful lens about the intervening process that gives rise to armed conflict from which we can

then infer a Russian grand strategy based on cross-case commonalities and progression. In other words, Russian grand strategy through perceptions from within the Russian MIC.

Overall, this study identifies the mainsprings of contemporary Russian grand strategy—military modernization and the formation of subjective narratives that empower the Kremlin to at times contradict international laws and norms, particularly in armed interventions, with the goal of securing long-term national sovereignty by orienting the international system towards multipolarity. Informed by Braudel’s “longue durée” understanding of historical change, I call Russia’s grand strategy the “long nudge.” In this context, Russian state leaders slowly nudge the nation by shaping national memory in order to ensure military modernization and cultivate enduring domestic support—a national will—for (inevitable) state actions that require the use of force. The Kremlin also pursues international outcomes that nudge other states into accepting changes to rules and norms within the international system, but this nudging is not intended to overturn the system itself. This suggests that strategic patience—not aggressive revanchism or blind opportunism—underpins contemporary Russian grand strategy.

Research findings indicate that each successful iteration of the use of force demonstrates Russian gains in relative power vis-à-vis the West, particularly the U.S., and thereby enhances Russian state prestige—the ability to make rules, shape norms and impose its will over others. Finally, observing that international structural conditions—the degree of systemic clarity and the permissive nature of the strategic environment—changed surrounding each case of military intervention, this dissertation also lends important context to Russia’s changing self-perception

of power, with direct strategic, operational and tactical implications to policy makers tasked with countering Russian aggressive behavior.

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Nomenclature: Translations of Foreign Language Sources

This paper is written in English but relies heavily on Russian language sources. Throughout this paper I have attempted to best represent this content and its meaning. To this end, official translations are used over those of my own whenever possible. In cases where I translate from Russian into English, I note this as “(author’s translation).” To avoid ambiguity in politically sensitive texts, I make clear who translated the source material. For example, I annotate “(Kremlin’s translation)” in the text or bibliography in cases where the Russian government provides its own English version of official documents. In some instances, I paraphrase cited sources because my own translation may not be suitable due to a clear possibility of multiple interpretations. When quoting Russian sources, I tend to provide only the English version in order to preserve space and get to the point. In some instances, however, I provide both versions, typically with the Russian text in a footnote. I do this to maintain transparency and facilitate native interpretation of sensitive, nuanced or openly debated content.

Regarding source titles in the bibliography, I avoid the American Library Association and Library of Congress (ALA-LC) transliteration standards to facilitate source language copy and paste for readers who desire to access or search my sources online.¹ Instead, I use Cyrillic titles of articles followed by a translation in brackets. Unless otherwise specified in the bibliography entry, these bracketed translations are my own. For those who want to convert names of cited Russian titles into ALA-LC format, a useful transliteration application is available online.²

¹ <https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsd/roman.html>

² For transliteration application, visit: <https://www.transliteration.com/transliteration/en/russian/ala-lc/>

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The views expressed in this dissertation are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the United States Air Force, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government. Moreover, this study was conducted in strict adherence with standards and rules set by Northwestern University.

Chapter 1 – Introduction: What Makes Grand Strategy?

—the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.

F. Scott Fitzgerald³

It takes not only arms to defeat an enemy.

Generalissimo Alexander Vasilyevich Suvorov

A historical refrain seems to be “what are those sneaky Russians up to now?” During the first Russian raid on Constantinople in 860, Photius lamented that the Russians “poured upon our frontiers all at once, in the twinkling of an eye, like a billow of the sea, and destroyed the inhabitants on the earth, as the wild boar (destroys) grass or reed or crop.”⁴ Ever since, Russia watchers of all kinds attempt to place how the land of tsars fits in the world relative to everyone else—friend, foe or otherwise. Seventeenth century thinker Alexis de Tocqueville opined that Russia, along with America, appeared “marked out by the will of Heaven to sway the destinies of half the globe.”⁵ In 1863, Otto von Bismarck quipped that the secret of politics was to “Make a good treaty with Russia.”⁶ Less certain about the Eurasian power’s true nature, Winston Churchill famously described Russia as “a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma.”⁷

During Russia’s “wild” socio-economic transition in the 1990s, the jury largely remained out on Russia’s medium to long-term fate within the international system’s post-Soviet reshuffle.

³ F Scott Fitzgerald, *The Crack-Up*, ed. Edmund Wilson (New York: J. Laughlin, 1945), 69.

⁴ A A Vasil'ev, *The Russian Attack on Constantinople in 860* (Cambridge, Mass.: Medieval Academy of America, 1946), 201. See also J Shepard, “Some Problems of Russo-Byzantine Relations c. 860-c. 1050,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 52, no. 126 (1974): 10–33.

⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Alexis de Tocqueville on Democracy, Revolution, and Society: Selected Writings*, Heritage of Sociology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

⁶ A J P Taylor, *Bismarck, the Man and the Statesman* (London: New English Library, 1974), 164.

⁷ Alan Cowell, “Churchill’s Definition of Russia Still Rings True,” *International Herald Tribune (European Ed.)*, Sep 5, 2019, 2.

In 1997, esteemed Stanford scholar and former U.S. Ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul, opined that the aftermath of the Soviet Union’s collapse can be understood as “Russia in revolution.”⁸ He argued that the radical change and societal upheaval typically associated with revolution will push Russia in one of two possible directions: inclusion within the core of the international system as a “new” member or emergence as “a menacing outsider.”⁹ Two decades later, McFaul now views the Putin regime as engaging in an international “hot peace” with the U.S. and, at home, acquiring an autocratic stranglehold over society.¹⁰ For McFaul and others, the defining moment when Russia ended any notion of a “reset” with the West came in 2014 when the Kremlin forcibly annexed Crimea.

After Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich unexpectedly absconded from Kiev on February 22, 2014, the armed forces of the Russian Federation mobilized troops in its Western and Central Military Districts in order to invade Crimea, home to Russia’s Black Sea Fleet and its roughly 12,000 personnel. Moscow also directly reinforced the fleet, based in Sevastopol under a long-standing contract with the Ukrainian government. Soon thereafter, covert operatives seized control of the Crimean Parliament on February 27 and hoisted up a Russian flag.¹¹ On March 3, Russia’s *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* headlined the claim from Crimean media outlets that

⁸ R. Craig Nation and Michael McFaul, *The United States and Russia into the 21st Century*, Strategy Conference Series (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1997), 47–48. Ambassador McFaul served as U.S. Ambassador to Russia 2012-2014.

⁹ Ibid., 47; McFaul argues that after 1991 only one political ideology—democracy and its market system—holds “any legitimacy within the great powers of the international system.”

¹⁰ Michael McFaul, *From Cold War to Hot Peace: An American Ambassador in Putin’s Russia* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018), 420–24, 448.

¹¹ M Kofman et al., “Lessons from Russia’s Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine” (RAND, Santa Monica, CA, 2017), 8.

“polite, armed men” safeguard Crimea’s “autonomy.”¹² Oleg Pashinsky, a sergeant in the 31st

Air Assault Brigade from Ulyanovsk, took part in the operation and later detailed how he arrived on the peninsula:

“We were among the first to end up in Crimea on February 24, [2014]. Two days earlier, we awoke to the alarm in our barracks. We formed tactical groups and took planes to Anapa. From Anapa, we rode trucks to Novorossiysk, and from there we took a big landing ship to Sevastopol.

No one aside from our commanders had any idea about the operation to return Crimea to Russia. They just put us in the part of the ship used for cargo. And in the morning we got out onto the shore and realized that we were somewhere in Sevastopol, at the naval station of the Black Sea Fleet.

As soon as we got out onto the shore, we were told to take any symbols and insignia off our uniforms, so that our presence on the peninsula wasn’t so apparent, to avoid panic. We were all given green balaclavas, dark sunglasses, and knee and elbow pads. I think we were some of the first to be called ‘polite people.’ We were allowed to wear insignia with the Russian flag again only after the referendum.”¹³

Within two weeks, Russian forces sans insignia—referred to in the media as either “polite people” or “little green men”—took control of the entire peninsula.¹⁴ On March 18, Vladimir Putin concluded perhaps the smoothest military invasion in modern times by declaring Crimea formally annexed. Once complete, Moscow’s *fait accompli* drew worldwide condemnation.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry declared, “You just don’t in the 21st century behave in

¹² “Крымские СМИ: Автономия Контролируют «вежливые Вооруженные Люди» [Crimean Media: Autonomy Controlled by ‘Polite Armed Men’],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, March 3, 2014, https://web.archive.org/web/20140925002414/http://www.ng.ru/cis/2014-03-03/100_obzor030314.html.

¹³ Dmitry Pashinsky, “Кто Они? Монологи Военных, Получивших Медали «За Возвращение Крыма» [Who Are They? Monologues from Those in the Military Who Received the Medal ‘For the Return of Crimea’],” *Meduza*, March 9, 2015, <https://meduza.io/feature/2015/03/09/kto-oni>; Dmitry Pashinsky, “‘I Serve the Russian Federation!’ Soldiers Deployed during the Annexation of Crimea Speak,” *Meduza*, March 16, 2015, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2015/03/16/i-serve-the-russian-federation>.

¹⁴ While Western media mostly used the phrase “little green men,” the Russian-language media often used the term “polite people” to describe the unidentified soldiers in Crimea; for more details on the phrase’s origin see: https://aif.ru/society/army/chto_oznachaet_vyrazhenie_vezhlivye_lyudi_i_kak_ono_poyavilos

19th century fashion by invading another country on completely trumped up pre-text.” He also quipped, “If Russia wants to be a G8 country, it needs to behave like a G8 country.”¹⁵ These sentiments echoed in London too, where Foreign Secretary William Hague warned Moscow “Be in no doubt, there will be consequences. The world cannot say it is OK to violate the sovereignty of other nations.”¹⁶ Indeed, 100 member nations in the U.N. General Assembly voted in favor of an official but non-binding resolution that rebuked Russia’s illegal actions, declared Crimea’s referendum invalid, and reaffirmed international recognition of Crimea as still part of Ukraine.¹⁷

A primary problem with the annexation of Crimea involves Russia’s flagrant violation of international law and well-established norms that protect the sovereignty of states. By ignoring the U.N.-enshrined norms of territorial integrity and non-interference, for example, the Kremlin’s actions threaten a return to bygone eras of conquest and imperialism that privileged the maxim “might makes right.” As such, most of the world saw it fit to strongly sanction the Russian government, both politically and economically. Sanctions intensified over several iterations as Russian involvement in Eastern Ukraine’s fighting persisted. To date, the U.S. has sanctioned 665 individuals and levied restrictions on conducting business with Russian entities in areas of finance, energy and defense.¹⁸ The European Union and others have followed suit with

¹⁵ Will Dunham, “Kerry Condemns Russia’s ‘incredible Act of Aggression’ in Ukraine,” *Reuters*, March 2, 2014.

¹⁶ Ian Traynor and Patrick Wintour, “Ukraine Crisis: Vladimir Putin Has Lost the Plot, Says German Chancellor,” *The Guardian*, March 3, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/03/ukraine-vladimir-putin-angela-merkel-russian>; Agnieszka Miarka, “Wpływ Konfliktu Nadbałtyckich Ukraińskiego Na Bezpieczeństwo Państw,” in *Implikacje Konflikty Ukraińskiego Dla Polityki Zagranicznej i Bezpieczeństwa Polski*, ed. Katarzyna Czornik, Miron Łakomy, and Mieczysław Stolarczyk (Katowice: Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych, 2015), 298–319.

¹⁷ China abstained from voting. The governments of Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Syria, Afghanistan, and North Korea all support, to varying degrees, the Russian position on Crimea: G.A. Res., “Territorial Integrity of Ukraine,” Pub. L. No. A/RES/68/262, U.N.GAOR (2014), <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/68/262>. Mary Zeldin, “United Nations: Resolution Declares Crimea Referendum Invalid,” *Library of Congress*, April 2, 2014, <https://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/united-nations-resolution-declares-crimea-referendum-invalid/>.

¹⁸ Dianne E. Rennack and Cory Welt, “U.S. Sanctions on Russia: An Overview” (Congressional Research Service, August 29, 2019), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10779>.; Cory Welt et al., “U.S. Sanctions on

similar sanction regimes.¹⁹ NATO ceased all ongoing partnerships with Russia. The Council of Europe suspended Russia's membership for five years.²⁰

Although calculating political and economic costs imposed on Russia through sanctions remains both difficult and disputed, the short to medium-term impact appears significant. In the long-term, however, these ill effects may eventually dissipate without much concession from the Kremlin. In 2015, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) reported that Russia's economy contracted due to sanctions and Moscow's inability to enact much-needed structural reforms in its domestic markets.²¹ In 2019, The World Bank Group projected opportunities for only modest growth in the Russian economy through 2021 contingent upon many variables such as the Kremlin's successful implementation of internal reforms and planned infrastructure investment, stable energy export prices and the absence of additional, stronger sanctions.²² Yet, in a long-term perspective and taking into consideration that Russia's financial reserves eclipsed \$400 billion²³ by June 2018, it appears Putin's government may very well weather the storm of international sanctions. Moreover, Russia still refuses to budge in terms of the sanctions' original intent: make Putin change course in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine.

Russia" (Congressional Research Service, January 11, 2019), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/details?prodcode=R45415>.

¹⁹ "Council Decision 2014/145/CFSP," March 17, 2014, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:02014D0145-20171121&from=en>; For a detailed discussion on Japanese sanctions see: Maria Shagina, "Japan's Dilemma with Sanctions Policy Towards Russia: A Delicate Balancing Act," Focus Asia (Institute for Security Development Policy, Nov 2018), <http://isdip.eu/content/uploads/2018/11/Japans-Delicate-Balancing-Act-FA-FINAL.pdf>.

²⁰ Gilbert Reilhac, "Council of Europe Readmits Russia, Five Years after Suspension over Crimea," *Reuters*, June 25, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-rights-council-russia/council-of-europe-readmits-russia-five-years-after-suspension-over-crimea-idUSKCN1TQ1VL>.

²¹ "IMF Country Report No. 15/211," Russian Federation (International Monetary Fund, August 2015), https://www.imf.org/~media/Websites/IMF/Imported/external/pubs/ft/scr/2015/_cr15211pdf.ashx.

²² "Russia Economic Report 41" (World Bank Group, June 2019), <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/russia/publication/rer>.

²³ CEIC Data, <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/russia/foreign-exchange-reserves>

Crimea: Just One Piece of a Larger Puzzle

Far less destructive than the sacking of Constantinople in 860, Russia's relatively "peaceful" annexation of Crimea nonetheless begs us to ask the larger, historical question: what exactly are those sneaky Russians up to and whose side are they on? Ambassador McFaul asserts that three mainstream arguments in the West attempt to explain Putin's aggressive, anti-West foreign policy: first, to counter NATO expansion; second, to take advantage of a weak U.S. president; or third, to retain legitimacy by shifting focus away from Putin's domestic troubles by blaming America.²⁴ The dramatic annexation of Crimea does seem to suggest that Russia has become a malign actor within the international system. At the same time, however, painting Russia as either friend or foe neglects the Kremlin's full track record within the international system, which includes a recent history of geopolitical restraint and international cooperation with the U.S. and the West.

In line with F. Scott Fitzgerald's understanding about duplicity, Russia faces the following paradox with regards to its relationship with the West: the Kremlin wants to increase its military power relative to NATO and the U.S., but economically Russia remains unable to do so without befriending the West. In essence, the West is both friend and enemy. NATO, for example, is a declared "danger" according to Russia's 2010 military doctrine, but the same nations that form the alliance control much of the access to international markets and technologies that Russia requires to modernize its military and economy.²⁵ Similarly, other strategy documents call on Russia to cooperate in and benefit from global institutions but at the

²⁴ Michael A McFaul, "Peace as Cold as Siberia," *Hoover Digest*, no. 4 (2016): 110.

²⁵ Decree of the President of the Russian Federation, "Военная Доктрина Российской Федерации [Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation]," February 5, 2010, <http://www.kremlin.ru/supplement/461>.

same time attack the status-quo and “transform the Western-dominated international system into a multilateral one, where Russia can play the role of a great power.”²⁶

The Kremlin oftentimes has been a very good partner to the West depending on the situation. For example, Moscow actively supported NATO military operations in Afghanistan. The Northern Distribution Network—a logistical web of trucks, rail and shipping lanes spanning across Russia from the Baltic Sea to Central Asia—delivered up to 40% of ISAF-bound supplies, including 85% of fuel supplies, to Afghanistan during peak years of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF).²⁷ Russia even opened up its airspace to American aviation, ensuring thousands of OEF cargo sorties and delivering over a hundred thousand U.S. troops to the region.²⁸ Figure 1 below depicts the sprawling transport system assembled to feed the fight in Afghanistan.²⁹ In another recent case of cooperation, Russia chose to abstain rather than veto U.N. Security Council Resolution 1973, thereby setting up a no-fly zone over Libya and paving the way for NATO’s Operation Odyssey Dawn.³⁰

In the case of Ukraine, Russia has demonstrated a capacity to simultaneously wage a military campaign against a state in which it conducts major economic relations peacefully. Roughly 40% of Russia’s gas exports to Europe pass through Ukraine, resulting in almost \$3B

²⁶ Elena Kropatcheva, “Russian Foreign Policy in the Realm of European Security through the Lens of Neoclassical Realism,” *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 3, no. 1 (2012): 32–33.

²⁷ “NATO’s Once Vital Supply Link to Afghanistan via Russia Closes,” *Stars and Stripes*, May 20, 2015, <https://www.stripes.com/news/nato-s-once-vital-supply-link-to-afghanistan-via-russia-closes-1.347249>.

²⁸ Marlène Laruelle, “Russia’s Strategies in Afghanistan and Their Consequences for NATO,” Research Paper No. 69 (Rome: NATO Defense College, November 2011).

²⁹ See “Supply routes from Russia to Afghanistan,” <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/supply-routes-russia-afghanistan>.

³⁰ “Security Council Approves ‘No-Fly Zone’ over Libya, Authorizing ‘All Necessary Measures’ to Protect Civilians, by Vote of 10 in Favour with 5 Abstentions,” *U.N. Security Council*, March 17, 2011, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2011/sc10200.doc.htm>.

revenue for Kiev from associated transit fees in 2018.³¹ Although the Kremlin continues to build pipelines to bypass Ukraine and thereby deprive Kiev of easy revenue, the two nations recently penned a new gas transit deal.³² All this despite Russia's annexation of Crimea and continued involvement in Donbass. Moreover, this arrangement looks increasingly stable and likely to continue given the stalled progress on Russia's Nord Stream 2 pipeline, a \$10B project under the Baltic Sea from St. Petersburg to Germany.



Figure 1 – Northern Distribution Network. Copyright STRATFOR 2011.

³¹ Eurasianet. “Why Russia And Ukraine Are Still Making Billion-Dollar Energy Deals,” Feb 13, 2020. <https://oilprice.com/contributors/Eurasianet>; NAFTOGAZ. “Annual Report 2018,” <http://www.naftogaz.com/files/Zvity/Annual-Report-2018-engl.pdf>

³² David Sheppard, Nastassia Astrasheuskaya, and Roman Olearchyk, “Ukraine and Russia Sign Deal to Continue Gas Supply to Europe,” *Financial Times*, December 20, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/ce517960-231f-11ea-92da-f0c92c957a96>.

Not too dissimilar from its relationship with Ukraine, Russia charts fruitful economic relations with Turkey despite military confrontations in Syria. According to the Congressional Research Service, Russia supplied Ankara with half of its gas imports in 2018.³³ In early 2020, presidents Putin and Erdogan officially inaugurated the new TurkStream pipeline. This move looks to further strengthen Moscow's position as the region's leading gas exporter. Yet, both Russia and Turkey sit on opposite sides of a veritable powder keg in Syria. In 2015, a Turkish F-16 downed a Russian Su-24 while engaging in disputed combat operations close to Turkey's southern border. Since then, Ankara has significantly increased its military presence inside Syria. These moves have placed Russian forces in the precarious position of buttressing Damascus and conducting "anti-terrorist" combat operations in close proximity to Turkish forces.

Indeed, Russia's history of non-cooperation with the West is juxtaposed by a concurrent history of cooperation in international diplomacy and trade. In this context, Crimea is only one piece of a much larger Russian relationship with the West. This mixed track record presents a puzzle about the logic(s) that underpin Russia's (non)cooperation. Some Russian experts refer to this paradoxical relationship of (non)cooperation as "dualism" or Russia's "desire to strengthen power capabilities vis-à-vis the West, but [also] seeking its help and recognition." It is this puzzle that underpins the significance of understanding Russia's geopolitical behavior.³⁴ In other words, given its checkered track record of (non)cooperation with the West, does the Kremlin act according to a coherent set of long-term objectives or decipherable grand strategy? If Russia

³³ Sarah E. Garding et al., "TurkStream: Russia's Newest Gas Pipeline to Europe" (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, February 5, 2020), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11177>.

³⁴ A.D. Voskresensky, *ВОСТОК/ЗАПАД: Региональные Подсистемы и Региональные Проблемы Международных Отношений [EAST-WEST: Regional Subsystems and Regional Problems of International Relations]* (Moscow: Moscow State Institute of International Relations (University), 2002).

does have a grand strategy, how can we best understand it?

In this paper I argue that the Russian state does indeed possess a grand strategy. I also contend that this contemporary grand strategy emerged after President Vladimir Putin first took office in 2000. In particular, the active use of the Russian military to forcibly achieve objectives outside its borders provide deep insight into Russian grand strategy. With each successive foreign military intervention—Georgia in 2008, Ukraine in 2014 and Syria in 2015—the Kremlin’s perception about its ability to successfully pursue Russian national interests has evolved. In particular, the Kremlin’s self-perception of power has increased with a ratchet effect since the annexation of Crimea. What’s more, the structural context of the international system has changed with each successive war. This is significant because, according to Robert Gilpin, a scholar of neoclassical realism, “the most prestigious members of the international system are those states that have most recently used military force or economic power successfully and have thereby imposed their will on others.”³⁵

Therefore, neoclassical realism offers a useful lens through which to analyze Russian grand strategy. According to neoclassical realism, “the scope and ambition of a country’s foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities.”³⁶ Within this frame, I argue that Russia’s grand strategy becomes visible at key inflection points of change in both Russia’s material and subjective relationship to other states, primarily vis-à-vis the West (e.g. U.S., NATO and/or EU) and

³⁵ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 32.

³⁶ Gideon Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (1998): 146.

Russia's neighboring states.³⁷ In this paper, I demarcate four periods of time that together comprise contemporary Russian grand strategy, each associated with a significant use of the Russian armed forces on foreign soil: Moldova (1992), South Caucasus (2008), Ukraine (2014), and Syria (2015).

Due to the Russian government's lack of transparency, its grand strategy remains mostly undocumented and officially ambiguous. In this light, I contend that analysis of the Russian military industrial complex (MIC) offers a rich source of data useful to understanding the logic by which Russia engages with the world. The *Military Industrial Courier* (in Russian "VPK"), for example, offers a proxy voice of Russia's MIC at the nexus of politics, economics, the military and Russia's post-Soviet efforts to modernize.³⁸ Qualitative data analysis (QDA) of VPK content complements process tracing of Russian grand strategy in the Putin-Medvedev era. In making my argument for a distinct Russian grand strategy, I complement this MIC analysis with a wide-range of additional sources underpinned with a concerted effort to maximize the use of Russian-language content.

Understanding Strategy

Before delving into the specifics of Russian grand strategy, one must first address the broad scope and muddled understanding about what it means to study strategy. Over the years, scholars have proposed many competing notions about strategy, of which grand strategy is just one element. In general, grand strategy rests at the apex of a state's pursuit of national objectives.

³⁷ For use of term "inflection points" in US grand strategy evolution, see: Hal Brands, *The Promise and Pitfalls of Grand Strategy* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2012), 2.

³⁸ In Russian: *Voyenno-promyshlennyi kurier* or *VPK*, available online at <https://vpk-news.ru/>; The journal's title uses the same acronym "VPK" as the Russian acronym for "MIC" or "military industrial complex." This double-entendre evokes the journal's proxy voice for the MIC community in Russia.

Subordinate to grand strategy, the military and other institutions of national power devise organic strategies tailored to their specific roles and responsibilities. For example, a state's military strategy falls beneath a larger grand strategy. The renowned strategy writer, Colin Gray, defines military strategy with a Clausewitzian lens as, "the direction and use made of force and the threat of force for the purpose of policy as decided by politics." A state may incorporate many such strategies across the functions of government and society. It also remains entirely possible that a state lacks a grand strategy or any coherent set of guiding principles.

Typically, businesses, service providers, academic institutions as well as most other public and private organizations employ strategies to secure a wide array of interests and objectives, yet there appears little consensus on what this means. Northwestern University's Graduate School recently unveiled "Vision 2025," a strategic plan intended to champion values within a context of realizing strategic goals and priorities.³⁹ The plan emphasizes organizational excellence with words typed in bold such as "advocate," "cultivate" and "connect." Management expert and business professor, Richard Rumelt, however, cautions about the large qualitative gaps between good and bad strategy. According to Rumelt, cobbling together "pop culture, motivational slogans, and business buzz speak" is common but typically not useful, especially if the concept of strategy equates to success.⁴⁰ Moreover, the prevalence of bad strategy stems not from miscalculation but rather "active avoidance of the hard work of crafting good strategy."⁴¹ The fact of the matter is, however, that the study of strategy lacks universal agreement about

³⁹ The Graduate School, "Vision 2025," 2019, <https://www.tgs.northwestern.edu/documents/about/year-of-structure-recap.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Richard Rumelt, *Good Strategy/Bad Strategy: The Difference and Why It Matters* (New York: Crown Business, 2011), 5.

⁴¹ Rumelt, 58.

what Rumelt and others might consider as the “hard work” aspects of strategy: purpose, process, structure, terms and concepts.

Our understanding of strategy has evolved over centuries and refined definitions continue to spawn.⁴² Texts on the subject of strategy first surfaced in ancient China, but according to the Strategic Thinking Institute’s Rich Horwath, the English word “strategy” stems from Classic and Byzantine Greek “strategos” meaning “general.”⁴³ Still others argue that “strategy” stems from the Classic Greek “stratiyeia.”⁴⁴ Thucydides’ seminal account of the Peloponnesian War, which immortalized the epic competition between Archidamus and Pericles, exemplifies the ancient Greek penchant for analyzing the tragedy of political violence. When “strategos” later entered Latin and Roman use it took on a geographical connotation tied to conquered territories under military control.⁴⁵

The transformation in lexicon—from Greek “strategos” as a military commander into English “strategy” as a logic of power—emerged slowly. Not until 1771 did “strategy” enter European discourse by way of French officer Paul Gédéon Joly de Maizeroy’s translation of Byzantine emperor Leo VI’s military treatise *Taktiká*.⁴⁶ Horwath argues that in 1799, via Count Guibert’s *La Stratégique*, the European concept of strategy took on a broader meaning not

⁴² For a detailed history into the origins of strategy see: Biddle, *Strategy and Grand Strategy: What Students and Practitioners Need to Know*, 93.

⁴³ Rich Horwath, “The Origin of Strategy,” 2006, https://www.strategyskills.com/Articles_Samples/origin_strategy.pdf.

⁴⁴ Charles-Edouard Bouée, *Light Footprint Management: Leadership in Times of Change* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 11; Art Dimopoulos, “Strategy is a Greek Word,” *The National Herald*, May 31, 2016, <https://www.thenationalherald.com/125715/strategy-is-a-greek-word-and-we-need-new-strategies-to-survive/>.

⁴⁵ According to Horwath, One of the most famous Latin works in the area of military strategy was *Strategemata* by Frontius, which literally means “tricks of war.” Per Bouée, the Romans introduced the term “strategia” to refer to territories under control of a strategus, a military commander. The word retained this narrow, geographic meaning until the late 18th century.

⁴⁶ Biddle, *Strategy and Grand Strategy: What Students and Practitioners Need to Know*, 93.

dissimilar to how many understand it today.⁴⁷ By the Napoleonic era, the famed military theorist from Prussia, Carl von Clausewitz, emphasized strategy by differentiating between it and tactics. According to Clausewitz, tactics teach the use of military forces in singular engagements; strategy, meanwhile, utilizes multiple engagements to win a war.⁴⁸

Throughout most of modern history, governments have privileged military matters over other state functions when conceptualizing strategy. In this context, strategy is often thought of as a plan or roadmap that lays out how a military will achieve a desired set of goals or political end state. Antoine-Henri Jomini's 19th century classic, *The Art of War*, defines strategy as "the art of properly directing masses upon the theater of war, either for defense or for invasion."⁴⁹ Alfred Thayer Mahan greatly influenced U.S. foreign policy with his 1890 classic, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History 1660-1783*, which advocated for a national strategy built upon massing power of a particular kind: the navy, well-placed ports and other maritime assets. Similarly, Giulio Douhet, an Italian officer and military theorist, argued in 1921 for a scientific application of power in strategy: the use of airplanes *en masse* to exploit the distinctive advantages inherent to the vertical dimension.⁵⁰ In 1926, J. F. C. Fuller concluded that in fact "war can be reduced to a science."⁵¹

⁴⁷ Horwath, "The Origin of Strategy."

⁴⁸ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton University Press Princeton, N.J, 1976), 128.

⁴⁹ Antoine-Henri Jomini, *The Art of War*, trans. G. H. Mendell and W. P. Craighill (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2015), 11.

⁵⁰ Giulio Douhet, *The Command of the Air*, ed. Joseph Patrick Harahan and Richard H. Kohn (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2009).

⁵¹ J F C Fuller, *The Foundations of the Science of War*, ed. Combat Studies Institute (Books Express Publishing, 2012), 324.

Indeed, some believe the process of devising a winning strategy to be rather straightforward, almost like baking a cake from ingredients listed in a recipe. U.S. Army Colonel Arthur Lykke Jr. advocated in 1989 that “S = E +W + M” which when spelled out arrives at, “*Strategy equals ends* (objectives toward which one strives) plus *ways* (courses of action) plus *means* (instruments by which some end can be achieved.”^{52,53} Put another way:

“Ends are the objectives or goals sought. Means are the resources available to pursue the objectives. And Ways or methods are how one organizes and applies the resources. Each of these components suggests a related question. What do we want to pursue (ends)? With what (means)? How (ways)?”⁵⁴

This simple-to-understand concept has become a staple item in subsequent U.S. military doctrine and professional military education.⁵⁵ Favoring Lykke’s step-by-step approach to strategy, many practitioners have adapted or modified it to their own planning concepts, such as the identification of military centers of gravity.⁵⁶

Other scholars, however, contest the ends-ways-means nature of Lykke’s model. These competing ideas about strategy can be best simplified by Eliot Cohen’s assertion that strategy is a “theory of victory.”⁵⁷ Jeffrey Meiser openly criticizes Lykke’s definition of strategy as functionally flawed. Like Cohen, Meiser instead advocates a shift towards a less-formulaic understanding of strategy: “to create advantage, generate new sources of power, and exploit

⁵² Arthur F. Lykke Jr, “Defining Military Strategy,” *Military Review* 69, no. 5 (May 1989).

⁵³ M.L. Cavanaugh, “It’s Time to End the Tyranny of Ends, Ways, and Means,” *Modern War Institute at West Point*, July 24, 2017, <https://mwi.usma.edu/time-end-tyranny-ends-ways-means/>.

⁵⁴ Robert H. Dorff, “A Primer in Strategy Development,” in *U.S. Army War College Guide to Strategy*, ed. Joseph R. Cerami and James F. Jr. Holcomb (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2001), 11.

⁵⁵ For a recent example, see: “Joint Doctrine Note 1-18 Strategy” (Department of Defense, April 25, 2018), https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/jdn_jg/jdn1_18.pdf?ver=2018-04-25-150439-540.

⁵⁶ Dale C. Eikmeier, “A Logical Method for CENTER-OF-GRAVITY ANALYSIS,” *Military Review* 87 (Sep-Oct 2007): 63–64.

⁵⁷ Eliot A Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: Free Press, 2002), 33.

weaknesses in the opponent.”⁵⁸ Conceptually, this perspective falls in line with Stephen Chiabotti’s broad notion that strategy is “the management of context for continuing advantage.”⁵⁹ Finally, Barry Posen’s position is useful to note in order to transition the focus of this discussion from strategy writ-large to a specific subset: grand strategy. According to Posen, “grand strategy is a political-military, means-ends chain” which is on the one hand similar to the Lykke model. On the other hand, however, Posen asserts grand strategy is also “a state’s theory about how it can best ‘cause’ security for itself. Ideally, it includes an explanation of why the theory is expected to work.”⁶⁰

Defining Grand Strategy

To be fair to Lykke, he cautioned against misapplying his ends-ways-means construct. He reminded us not to conflate military strategy with grand strategy, or what he calls “national strategy.”⁶¹ In order to define the latter, he dutifully pulled from the 1987 version of Joint Chief of Staff Publication 1 which explains grand strategy as “The art and science of developing and using political, economic and psychological powers of a nation, together with its armed forces, during peace and war, to secure national objectives.”⁶² But according to historian Lawrence Freedman, no single definition of grand strategy can fully describe the field of study but the term nonetheless remains the best word to describe how we “think about actions in advance.”⁶³ This is in part because, as Peter D. Feaver notes, the study of grand strategy blends multiple disciplines:

⁵⁸ Jeffrey W. Meiser, “Ends + Ways + Means = (Bad) Strategy,” *Parameters* 46, no. 4 (Winter 2017-16): 81.

⁵⁹ Richard J. Bailey, James Wood Forsyth, and Mark Owen Yeisley, eds., *Strategy: Context and Adaptation from Archidamus to Airpower*, 2016, 97.

⁶⁰ Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 13.

⁶¹ Lykke Jr, “Defining Military Strategy,” 3.

⁶² Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), *Publication 1, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1987), 232.

⁶³ Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), x.

history, political science, public policy and economics.⁶⁴ According to Lawrence Freedman, strategy is also “fluid and flexible,” and a process by which the starting point retains far more salience than the end point.⁶⁵ Similarly, Hal Brands warns us that “Grand strategy is a notoriously slippery concept.”⁶⁶

In other words, strategy writ large differs from grand strategy, but both concepts suffer from confusion surrounding multiple, conflicting definitions. While discussing his upcoming book on Russian grand strategy in the 21st century, Westpoint professor Robert Person highlights this point by presenting two competing definitions of grand strategy—one by Feaver and the other by Brands.⁶⁷ According to Feaver, Grand strategy is “the collection of plans and policies that comprise the states deliberate effort to harness political military, diplomatic, and economic tools together to advance that state’s national interest. Grand strategy is the art of reconciling ends and means.”⁶⁸ Less formulaic, Brands opines that “At its best...a grand strategy represents an integrated scheme of interests, threats, resources, and policies.”⁶⁹ Person, arguably in an attempt to find common ground with his military audience, privileges Feaver’s interpretation to advance his argument about Russia.

But here is the rub: thinking about grand strategy in the context of ends-ways-means diminishes the creative scope with which strategists ought to conceptualize relative power and the procurement of state advantage. Lykke’s model was designed to remind failed military

⁶⁴ Peter Feaver, “What Is Grand Strategy and Why Do We Need It?,” *Foreign Policy*, April 8, 2009, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/04/08/what-is-grand-strategy-and-why-do-we-need-it/>.

⁶⁵ Freedman, *Strategy: A History*, xi.

⁶⁶ Hal Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy?*, 1.

⁶⁷ Listen to Person’s presentation (3 May 2019) at NSI website: <https://nsiteam.com/russian-grand-strategy-in-the-21st-century/>

⁶⁸ Feaver, “What Is Grand Strategy and Why Do We Need It?”

⁶⁹ Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy?*, 13.

strategists of the Vietnam era to pragmatically link ends with means. And by doing so, these strategists might avoid overextending military operations beyond the realities of actual resources on hand. Lykke calls this type of overextension a “strategy-capabilities mismatch,” a situation that proved devastating for America in Vietnam.⁷⁰ Meiser, however, criticizes Lykke’s approach because it oversimplifies the conceptual framework required for strategic thinking:

“There are significant costs, however, to highlighting the means and the ends while sidelining the ways. Viewing strategy as a problem of ends-means congruence is a seductive simplification. This kind of thinking leads to infinitely repeating the question of how many boots should be on the ground. A casual observer of American strategic discourse over the past decade and a half could be excused for thinking strategy is simply a debate about how many troops should be deployed for combat operations. This approach misses the core function of strategy, which is to figure out what to do with those boots on the ground, or even better, what are the alternatives to boots on the ground.”⁷¹

A key problem with Lykke’s model is that it lacks a theoretical component that would otherwise challenge strategists to question assumptions and explain the causal chain that might enable desired outcomes. As such, grand strategy by ends-ways-means often results in little more than glorified planning.

I prefer conceptions of grand strategy that focus less on matching ends with means and more on the logic by which a state forecasts successful attainment of long-term interests and safeguards unknowable but desirable futures. Therefore, in order to avoid some of the abovementioned pitfalls of grand strategy in application, and to best capture the essence of Russian grand strategy, this paper utilizes Hal Brands’ 2014 rendering of strategy:

“the intellectual architecture that gives form and structure to foreign policy...a purposeful and coherent set of ideas about what a nation seeks to accomplish in the

⁷⁰ Lykke Jr, “Defining Military Strategy,” 4.

⁷¹ Meiser, “Ends + Ways + Means = (Bad) Strategy,” 83.

world, and how it should go about doing so...it is the conceptual framework that helps nations determine where they want to go and how they ought to get there; it is the *theory, or logic, that guides leaders seeking security in a complex and insecure world.*⁷²

In application, Brands elaborates on numerous key assumptions that underpin his definition—each is summarized below:⁷³

First, grand strategy is not the same things as foreign policy. Brands clarifies foreign policy as “the sum total of a government’s interactions with the outside world, and it is expressed through initiatives ranging from diplomacy to foreign aid to humanitarian relief to the use of military force.” As such, we can regard grand strategy as a force that shapes instruments of power into foreign policy.

Second, grand strategy occurs within the context of multiple time horizons, yet the underlying focus ought to remain on fixed national interests. Brands clarifies that “grand strategy provides the crucial link between short-term actions and medium- and long-term goals.” And therefore, “should originate not from mere reactions to day-to-day events, but from a judgement of those enduring interests and priorities that transcend any single crisis or controversy.”⁷⁴

Third, grand strategy requires trade-offs, “ruthless” prioritization, and should focus on reconciling long-term interests against limited resources from which a state derives its power. Brands asserts power is multidimensional and includes a variety of domestic factors to include

⁷² Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry Truman to George W. Bush*, 3.

⁷³ Brands, 3–7.

⁷⁴ Brands, 4.

“economic strength, internal cohesion, ideological appeal.” New national interests often bear additional risks including the threat of resource overstretch.

Fourth, grand strategy is a process. The international system is not static. In contrast, dynamism and change require grand strategists to be flexible and adaptive. Consequently, grand strategy evolves over time according to context. In this way, a single grand strategy, for example “containment,” may actually consist of multiple grand strategies linked together as observed by John Lewis Gaddis.⁷⁵

Fifth, grand strategy is “an inherently interactive endeavor.” States compete back and forth in the international system just as war sees a “collision of two living forces.”⁷⁶ As such, grand strategy becomes an exchange between states—the actions of one state shapes those of another state, which in turn influences the first through its own actions. Consequently, devising a grand strategy can be both messy and difficult.

Sixth, the process and application of grand strategy is constant. In other words, strategists must operate with equal conviction during both peace and war. Indeed, a peacetime grand strategy may directly lead to successes during times conflict.

Seventh, a grand strategy need not be “formally enunciated and defined to qualify as such.” Simply put, grand strategy “requires a purposeful approach to policy” but does not need to be publicly or privately formalized, codified or labeled. Essentially, all states that must make trade-offs perform grand strategy. The bottom-line question should be, how well do they do it?

⁷⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

⁷⁶ Clausewitz, *On War*, 77.

In other words, not all grand strategies will be successful. This seems self-evident when grand strategy is thought of as a theory or logic of success.

Eighth, grand strategy remains an essential component of statecraft. Attached to this idea is the notion that short-term foreign policy results, either positive or negative, do not inherently define a grand strategy. Similarly, a state may from time to time choose not to act in accordance with its grand strategy. This stems in part from Brands' final point on grand strategy: it is "immensely challenging to pull off."

The Russian View on Grand Strategy and "Geostrategy"

Naturally, if this paper is about Russia it should strongly consider what Russians think about the study of strategy before settling on the use of Brands' abovementioned definition. The field of global pluralism, for example, asserts that different cultures maintain unique traditions in the fields of politics and law. For some, state policy can generate improved outcomes in a dynamic world through the application of political and legal theory underpinned by a multicultural approach with dialogue across cultural traditions.⁷⁷ In the context of international law, Hakimi nevertheless takes the view that universal agreement is impossible among states. She argues that "The key insight of legal pluralism is that different communities inevitably disagree on how to order themselves. In other words, global governance disputes are often intractable and cannot simply be wished away."⁷⁸ Given the reality that not all ideas are universally accepted, it is reasonable to consider that contemporary Russian politicians might

⁷⁷ Jacqueline Marie Vieceli, *A Philosophy of Global Pluralism. A Multicultural Approach to Political Theory* (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2013).

⁷⁸ Monica Hakimi, "The Work of International Law," *Harvard International Law Journal* 58, no. 1 (2017): 13.

conceptualize strategy in such a way that using a Western lens to try and understand it would only confuse the issue.

As it turns out, just like their Western counterparts, Russian experts have thus far failed to agree on a universal understanding of either strategy or grand strategy. Moreover, the study of strategy in Russia strongly parallels that of the West. Just like in the U.S., the word “strategy” imbues a wide range of meanings in Russian, from business and marketing to the military and government to education and beyond. The various meanings of grand strategy in Russian stem from several different words and phrases that modify “strategy,” each containing slightly differentiated nuance, but closely comparable to usage and meaning in English.⁷⁹ Four trends in the study of Russian grand strategy mirror those in the West: wide breadth of study, historical trends deeply rooted in the European military enterprise, an emphasis on state-level resource planning, and a turn towards forward-looking mental frameworks as theories for success.

Russian dictionaries typically emphasize four aspects of strategy.⁸⁰ First, they recognize the Greek origin of “stratiyeia.” Second, strategy refers to the conduct of military engagements or war in general. Third, strategy becomes linked beyond the military more broadly to the art of leading public and private endeavors towards success. Search any Russian bookstore for materials about strategy and you will find literally hundreds of books—many translated from English—that aim to deliver the reader a plan for success in all conceivable applications—

⁷⁹ Russian language refers to “grand strategy” with numerous phrasal modifiers to the word “strategy” (стратегия): *великая* “great (grand),” *народная* “national,” *большая* “big,” *масштабная* (extensive) and even a straight cognate, *гранд-стратегия*. Such variation detracts from standardized usage and impedes a singular understanding of terms. In addition, competing concepts exist, such as the field of “geostrategy” (геостратегия) or “national security strategy” (стратегия национальной безопасности).

⁸⁰ See website “Gramota.ru” which was established in 2000 by the Russia government’s Council on Russian language.

business, health, sports management, economics, politics, academia, lifestyle wellness, gardening and so on. Finally, Russian strategy definitions typically imply a connection to sports or competitive games, especially chess, a game that remains an enduring part of Russian culture and language. In this way, the wide-ranging application of strategy in Russian society strongly mirrors that in the West.

Historically, Russian military commanders first embraced the application and study of strategy during the Napoleonic era. General Alexander Vasilyevich Suvorov⁸¹ (1729-1800) penned a seminal work on Russian strategy by way of a military manual entitled “The Science of Victory,” posthumously published in 1806.⁸² A popular folk hero in Russia, Suvorov developed intensive training methods, codified in the “Suzdal Regulations,” dating back to the 1760s.⁸³ At the age of 70, Suvorov famously found his army of 24,000 soldiers, including 5,000 Cossack cavalry, surrounded by the French high up in the Swiss Alps in 1799. Suvorov marched his troops for eleven days over three rugged mountain passes, thereby turning a certain defeat into an impossible escape.⁸⁴ By the time Suvorov and his troops completed perhaps the most unparalleled march in military history, suffering combat under the most extreme conditions, 8,000 bodies remained scattered across the rocky passes. J.T. Headley, an American historian and former Secretary of State of New York, framed the magnitude of Suvorov’s alpine exploits

⁸¹ The surname is subject to variation: From 18th cent. ‘Suwarrow’ and ‘Suworow’, 19th cent. ‘Suvorof’ to present ‘Suvorov.’

⁸² In Russian “Наука Побеждать.” In 18th century context of use, “science” can also be interpreted as “art.” As such, Suvorov’s work is often translated as “Art of Victory.”

⁸³ Bruce W. Menning, “Train Hard, Fight Easy: The Legacy of A.V. Suvorov and His ‘Art of Victory,’” *Air University Review* November-December (1986): 81.

⁸⁴ Marcia Lieberman, “Where Cossacks Crossed the Alps,” *The New York Times*, March 17, 1991.

in historical context: “The passage of the St. Bernard, by Bonaparte, was a comfortable march compared to it, and Hannibal’s world-renowned exploit mere child’s play, beside it.”⁸⁵

According to most experts, both Russian and non-Russian, Suvorov’s many successes were not the result of good fortune or circumstance—“He won far too frequently to be called lucky: he never lost.”⁸⁶ His impressive resume stems from a life-long, systematic commitment to perfecting the application of armed force. For perspective, Robert A. Mosher, a thirty-year veteran of the U.S. State and Defense Departments, introduces the Russian in this way:

“Aleksandr Vasiliyevich Suvorov, Prince of Italy, Count of Rimnikskiy, Count of the Holy Roman Empire, Generalissimo of Russia's Ground and Naval forces, Field Marshal of the Austrian and Sardinian Armies, Prince of Sardinia. Seriously wounded six times...”⁸⁷

This laundry list of gallantry glosses over Suvorov’s true genius per Eugene Miakinkov. He insists that Suvorov’s transformative military art, and subsequent Russian thinking, actually laid the foundation for how Western militaries later chose to organize and fight.⁸⁸

The Russian historian Vladimir A. Zolotarev explains the dialectical nature between historical competition and military innovation, particularly between Russia and other states:

“Naturally, Russia's military strategy cannot be considered in isolation from the evolution of military art in the rest of the world. The main principles, categories, guidelines and requirements in Russian military strategy closely relate to the achievements of military strategy in other states. Russian military strategists, exploiting all things useful to achieve goals, counteracted their enemy’s strategic efforts, plans and methods of action. In this dialectical interweaving, Russia's military

⁸⁵ J. T. Headley, *The Alps and the Rhine: A Series of Sketches* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1845), 56.

⁸⁶ Philip Longworth, *The Art of Victory. The Life and Achievements of Generalissimo Suvorov 1729-1800* (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1965), 11.

⁸⁷ R. Mosher, “Suvorov - Russia's Eagle Over the Alps,” https://www.napoleon-series.org/research/biographies/c_suvorov.html

⁸⁸ Eugene Miakinkov, “A Russian Way of War? Westernization of Russian Military Thought, 1757-1800” (Ontario, University of Waterloo, 2000).

strategy, has constantly enriched and inversely impacted the strategies of other states. (Author's translation)"⁸⁹

Although it is a highly provocative idea to suggest that Russian strategy or a “Russian military way of war” became a template for Western counterparts in the 18th and 19th centuries, Suvorov’s “Science of Victory” in many ways reads like a modern-day Sun-Tzu, filled with highly sensible prescriptions and prescient one-liners.

Indeed, Suvorov’s ideas in many ways remain relevant in today’s digital age of combat. For example, the understanding that “A driven back enemy—unsuccessful, isolated, surrounded, scattered—equals success,” underpins modern concepts like counter air, the suppression of enemy air defenses or the notion that a “soft kill” can be just as effective as kinetic, “hard” destruction.⁹⁰ Adam Lowther praises Suvorov’s strategic foresight as follows:

“...Suvorov’s treatise is among the few works written during the era of linear warfare which proves useful in the current era of asymmetry. His principles of discipline, skill, speed and mobility are similar to those of Vegetius. Secrecy, surprise and morale played a major role in victory, which are also of great importance in the writing of Sun-tzu and Vegetius. Among the three theorists, Suvorov alone applied his theory to actual warfare.”⁹¹

Suvorov issued officers under his command the “Suzdal Regulations,” a codified set of training standards with an emphasis on inculcating the lower ranks with battlefield initiative and awareness.⁹² A strict disciplinarian, Suvorov nonetheless preferred the company of his men,

⁸⁹ V.A. Zolotarev, ed., *История Военной Стратегии России [The History of Russian Military Strategy]* (Moscow: Kuchkovo Polye Publishing House, 2000), 6.

⁹⁰ Mosher, “Suvorov - Russia's Eagle Over the Alps,” https://www.napoleon-series.org/research/biographies/c_suvorov.html; Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 1, *Air Force Basic Doctrine*, 2003

⁹¹ Adam Lowther, *Asymmetric Warfare and Military Thought*, London Security Policy Study (No 3) (London: Glen Segell, 2006), 34.

⁹² Roman Pyushenko, “Глобальный Кризис Идеологий [Global Crisis of Ideologies],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, March 20, 2013, No11 (479) edition.

often socializing with his conscripts both for genuine camaraderie and boosting unit morale.⁹³

This behavior, viewed as oddly fraternizing at the time, reflects a modern U.S. military leader's premium on empowering and respecting enlisted members, often referred to as the "backbone of the military."⁹⁴ In admiration of Suvorov's balance between discipline in training and respect for the individual warfighter, Menning urges contemporary U.S. officers to follow suit such that they can "train hard, fight easy."⁹⁵

Like in the West, the idea of grand strategy in Russia eventually came to encapsulate military strategy as a subordinate concept to larger political processes. During the 19th century, grand strategy emerged as an implied concept within Russia's developing and wide-ranging science of geopolitics.⁹⁶ Russian geostrategy focused on the state as an actor within a larger international system. Security competition and uncertainty drove Russian leaders to consider grand strategy as an overarching plan with the objective of establishing Russia as a modern great power on par with key European states. One of the major schools of geopolitical thought at the time was called "Eurasianism," and based on the Slavophile tradition of historical thinking and the subsequent idea that Russia's "special mission on its historical path" included exerting political influence across the Eurasian continent (Author's translation).⁹⁷ Russian Eurasianism

⁹³ Longworth, *The Art of Victory. The Life and Achievements of Generalissimo Suvorov 1729-1800*.

⁹⁴ Curtis L. Brownhill et al., *The Noncommissioned Officer and Petty Officer: Backbone of the Armed Forces* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2013).

⁹⁵ Menning, "Train Hard, Fight Easy: The Legacy of A.V. Suvorov and His 'Art of Victory,'" 87.

⁹⁶ S.M. Solov'ev, *История России с Древнейших Времен [History of Russia since Ancient Times]*, vol. 18, 1868, http://az.lib.ru/s/solowxew_sergej_mihajlowich/; A.S. Khomyakov, *Записки Всемирной Истории [Memoir on World History]* (Moscow: Universitetskaya Tipografiya, 1900), <http://metaparadigma.ru/khomyakov-a-s-polnoe-sobranie-sochinenij/>; A.S. Khomyakov, *О Старом и Новом: Статьи и Очерки [About the Old and New: Articles and Essays]*, ed. G.M. Friedlander (Moscow: Biblioteka "Lubitel' am rossiiskoi slovesnosti," 1988), <http://books.e-heritage.ru/book/10085098>.

⁹⁷ Nikolai Yakovlevich Danilevsky, *Россия и Европа. Взгляд на культурные и политические отношения Славянского мира к Германно-Романскому [Russia and Europe. A Perspective on the Cultural and Political Relations of the Slavic World towards the Germano-Romance World]* (St Petersburg: Izd. N. Strakhova, 1895); A. V. Pokazy, "Теоретические Аспекты Происхождения и Применения в Современном Обществе Терминов

holds many assumptions also found in Mackinder's "heartland" theory as well as Saul Cohen's theory of geostrategic regions.⁹⁸ Spykman's "rimland" theory, in contrast, criticized the importance of the Eurasian heartland due to Russia's lack of industry and economic productivity in its interior.⁹⁹ Spykman's ideas later helped to shape America's cold war grand strategy of containment.

Eurasianism remained popular until the early 20th century, when Soviet scholars shifted focus towards the "geostrategies" of other nations.¹⁰⁰ By the 1970s, G.H. Shakhnazarov proposed that the Soviet Union's political science academy develop its own unique theory of geopolitics. Thus began a reinvigorated pursuit by Soviet comparative researchers in pursuit of measuring the various categories of state power within the international system.¹⁰¹ Contributions were made across a wide range of topics within geopolitics: economics, politics, international relations, military and the sciences. According to S.A. Malchenkov, these efforts ultimately merged with the field of geostrategy, which he describes as "an applied area of geopolitics, focused on the

«Геополитика», «Геоэкономика» и «Геостратегия» [Theoretical Aspects of the Origin and Application of the Terms 'Geopolitics', 'Geo-Economics' and 'Geo-Strategy' in Contemporary Society], *Army and Society* 1 (2012): 2.

⁹⁸ Saul B. Cohen, *Geography and Politics in a World Divided* (London: Methuen, 1964); H. J. (1904) Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," *The Geographical Journal* 170, no. 4 (December 2004): 298–321.

⁹⁹ Nicholas John Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics. The United States and the Balance of Power*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942); Nicholas John Spykman, *The Geography of Peace* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1944); Michael P Gerace, "Between Mackinder and Spykman: Geopolitics, Containment, and After," *Comparative Strategy* 10, no. 4 (1991): 347–364.

¹⁰⁰ P.N. Savitsky, "Евразийство [Eurasianism]," in *Евразийский Временник [Eurasian Periodical]*, vol. 4 (Berlin, 1925), 5–23; N.S. Trubisnky, "Мы и Другие [Others and Us]," in *Евразийский Временник (Eurasian Periodical)*, vol. 4 (Berlin, 1925), 66–81; G.V. Vernadsky, "Два Подвига Св. Александра Невского [The Two Deeds of St. Alexander Nevsky]," in *Евразийский Временник (Eurasian Periodical)*, vol. 4 (Berlin, 1925), 318–37.

¹⁰¹ Pokazy, "Теоретические Аспекты Происхождения и Применения в Современном Обществе Терминов «Геополитика», «Геоэкономика» и «Геостратегия» [Theoretical Aspects of the Origin and Application of the Terms 'Geopolitics', 'Geo-Economics' and 'Geo-Strategy' in Contemporary Society]," 2–3.

formation of practical national security recommendations in order to protect national interests” (Author’s translation).¹⁰²

Konstantin Sorokin similarly characterizes geostrategy as an “applied” science, with a focus on the state as a unit of analysis and privileges the study of how states should conduct themselves on the “world stage” (Author’s translation).¹⁰³ Pokazy asserts that geostrategy also “addresses all categories of society” and the “strategic potential of other states, dividing them into potential allies or opponents, or possible neutral states” (Author’s translation).¹⁰⁴

Commensurate with realist arguments in international relations theory, contemporary Russian scholars of geostrategy emphasize the importance of relative power among states. In this context, the science of geostrategy aims to analyze how states can increase their aggregate power and standing in the international system by harnessing state resources in order to best leverage national mechanisms of power. As such, geostrategy, like the Western concept of grand strategy, sets out to link ends, ways and means.

The Soviet-styled ends-ways-means planning of the Gorbachev era continued into post-Soviet Russia. Still, it remains questionable whether or not Russia followed any discernable grand strategy under Yeltsin. At the time, the Kremlin continued to shroud in secrecy and misinformation whatever strategic thinking it may have conducted. In its place, Russia published a series of strategy documents similar to those found in the West. These included the Foreign

¹⁰² S. A. Malchenkov, “Категория ‘геостратегический приоритет’ в современной политической науке [The category of “Geostrategic priority” in contemporary political science],” *Izvestia Saratov University Politologia*, no. 3 (2010): 94.

¹⁰³ K. E. Sorokin, *Геополитика Современности и Геостратегия России [Modern Geopolitics and Geostrategy of Russia]* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1996), 16.

¹⁰⁴ Pokazy, “Теоретические Аспекты Происхождения и Применения в Современном Обществе Терминов «Геополитика», «Геоэкономика» и «Геостратегия» [Theoretical Aspects of the Origin and Application of the Terms ‘Geopolitics’, ‘Geo-Economics’ and ‘Geo-Strategy’ in Contemporary Society],” 5.

Policy Concept, Military Doctrine, National Security Strategy, and the Security Concept of the Russian Federation. Instead of describing grand strategy in context of Hal Brands' definition, these documents provide lists of desired ends and in some cases their related means.

N. V. Staskov emphasizes the difference between an ends-ways-means focus and strategy as a theory of success, particularly in the context of the Russian government's security problems in the North Caucasus region. According to Staskov, ends-ways-means planning lacks flexibility and foresight required to deal with dynamic security scenarios that require the use of force: "...it is impossible to clearly define in advance not only the strategy of 'withdrawal' of law enforcement agencies from a conflict, but also the legitimate terms and forms of force, as well as the methods of use of force." (Author's translation).¹⁰⁵ In other words, some of the hardest domestic and geopolitical problems for post-Soviet Russia require solutions that stem from creativity and the vision to see entirely new means and ways. This resonates well with Meiser's assertion that strategy should seek advantage by generating new sources of power.

Meanwhile, Masha Gessen observed that the communist party in the Soviet Union placed a premium on mathematics and quantitative sciences, but purposefully stunted academic freedom in philosophy, history and social sciences. In this context, Staskov's plea for creative strategy may be hard to come by. Gessen's critique starts with Lenin's banishment of several hundred Soviet intellectuals in 1922 on the so-called "Philosopher's ship." Over time, this repression of the social sciences denied Soviet academics important tools and languages for societal introspection—a skill that was lost over a few generations. According to Gessen, "These

¹⁰⁵ N.V. Staskov, *Силовые Операции в Системе Урегулирования Этнополитических Конфликтов: Отечественный и Международный Аспекты*. [The Use of Force in Ethno-Political Conflicts: Domestic and International Aspects] (Moscow: RAGS, 2005), 84.

disciplines atrophied to the point where, as a leading Russian economist wrote in 2015, the top Soviet economists of the 1970s could not understand the work of those who had preceded them by half a century.”¹⁰⁶ As a result, Gessen argues that Russians are today intellectually hindered to understand themselves as a nation.

In search of more enduring, less formulaic strategies for the 21st century, Russian politicians and academics are now beginning to reconceptualize grand strategy within a historical-social framework built upon the reality of American unilateral power. Grand strategy formation in Russia is also underpinned by a widely accepted belief that globalization increasingly threatens Russia’s sovereignty:

“The forcible introduction of democratic institutions into undeveloped societies leads to the destruction of the limited democracy that existed in them and, as a consequence, to the deterioration of the quality of governance and of society itself. The forceful spread of democracy, liberalism and their common standards by developed countries is an egoistic action aimed at imposing competitive conditions on the rest of the world and, ultimately, increasing [developed countries’] competitiveness at the expense of and degradation to other [undeveloped] nations” (Author’s translation).¹⁰⁷

The formation of contemporary grand strategy in Russia now shows signs of some genuinely unique development. This advancement has mostly followed one of two main currents.

On one hand, historical narratives have helped to revive new twists on Eurasianism with an approach to cognitively rationalize and justify Russian strategic interests that defy Western

¹⁰⁶ Masha Gessen, *The Future Is History : How Totalitarianism Reclaimed Russia* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2017), 18.

¹⁰⁷ Staskov, *Силовые Операции в Системе Урегулирования Этнополитических Конфликтов: Отечественный и Международный Аспекты. (The Use of Force in Ethno-Political Conflicts: Domestic and International Aspects)*, 40; See also: Olga N. Туныанова, “Национальный Суверенитет и Государственные Границы в Эпоху Глобализации (National Sovereignty and State Borders in the Globalization Era),” *Vek Globalizatsii*, no. 1 (2010): 89–105.

norms and values.¹⁰⁸ According to a recent examination of modern Russian geopolitics by

Harvard's John P. LeDonne:

“...the Eurasian dream remains very much alive, and pipelines have replaced rivers to carry Russian influence to the old peripheries. The contest will eventually be settled, as it was in the past, by the outcome of the rivalry between the maritime economies and a new Russia, in which assets are becoming once again concentrated in the hands of a ruling elite disdainful of its dependent population and craving for the restoration of the country's past greatness. Powers, great and small, cannot overcome their geography; great powers cannot resist practising geopolitics.”¹⁰⁹

On the other hand, new Russian thinkers also conceive of grand strategy as a long-term process not dissimilar to Hal Brands' strategy framework as a “*theory, or logic, that guides leaders seeking security in a complex and insecure world.*” Within this new vein of thinking, historical experiences and cultural perceptions, akin to the French school of *longue durée*, underpin a resurgent emphasis on “strategic culture.”¹¹⁰ Another recent grand strategy concept of interest articulates the strength of Russia's “deep people” as a strategic resource that can be harnessed in pursuit of enduring Russian sovereignty: the “long state.”¹¹¹

Another group of literature has emerged in Russia that has significantly advanced domestic scholarship on grand strategy. Andrey Kokoshin, Boris Yeltsin's first Deputy Defense Minister and former Secretary of the Russian Security Council, is a leading contributor, both in English and Russian. His works' content spans across the Soviet era military thinking all the

¹⁰⁸ Dmitri Trenin, “Russia's Evolving Grand Eurasia Strategy: Will It Work?,” *Carnegie Moscow Center*, July 20, 2017, <https://carnegie.ru/2017/07/20/russia-s-evolving-grand-eurasia-strategy-will-it-work-pub-71588>; Graham Smith, “The Masks of Proteus: Russia, Geopolitical Shift and the New Eurasianism,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 24, no. 4 (1999): 481–494.

¹⁰⁹ John P. LeDonne, “Geopolitics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Russian History*, ed. Simon Dixon, Online (www.oxfordhandbooks.com: Oxford University Press, 2018), 17.

¹¹⁰ Ben Lombardi, “Strategic Assessment—Russia Strategic Culture and Foreign Policy” (Defence R&D Canada Centre for Operational Research & Analysis, April 2009), <http://cradpdf.drdc-rddc.gc.ca/PDFS/unc87/p531868.pdf>.

¹¹¹ Vladislav Surkov, “Долгое Государство Путина [Putin's Long State],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, February 11, 2019, http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2019-02-11/5_7503_surkov.html.

way into contemporary Russian grand strategy.¹¹² As a strong complement, Alexander Svechin's 1927 *Strategy* was published in English in 1992 and offers a strong Clausewitzian contribution that became widely cited in the Soviet Union during late 1980s.¹¹³ At the end of the day, modern conceptions about what strategy does are now very similar in both Russia and the West. As such, I argue that it is both reasonable and useful for this paper to utilize Hal Brands' multi-faceted definition cited above from here on for consistency and the useful generation of knowledge.

A final word on grand strategy in contemporary Russia concerns the abovementioned challenges regarding the feasibility of actually uncovering what a grand strategy is. Simply put, if Putin's Russian grand strategy exists at all it is neither readily accessible to the outsider nor is it likely written down in a clear, formal statement even for those with access. Indeed, there are many factors that obscure Russian grand strategy. First, Russia has a long tradition of deceptive statecraft, steeped in the various methods of "maskirovka" and subterfuge that span across the whole of government. Second, the Kremlin may not even have a grand strategy, instead reacting to a series of short-term crises without any singular focus or purpose beyond securing immediate, short-term objectives. Third, defining the national interests that a grand strategy supports are not

¹¹² Andrei A Kokoshin, *Армия И Политика. Советская Военно-Политическая И Военно-Стратегическая Мысль, 1918- 1991 Годы [Army and Politics. Soviet Military-Political and Military-Strategic Thought, 1918-1991.]* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1995); Andrei A Kokoshin, *Реальный Суверенитет в Современной Мировополитической Системе [Real Sovereignty in Today's World Political System]* (Moscow: Европа, 2006); Andrei A Kokoshin, *О Стратегическом Планировании В Политике [On Strategic Planning in Politics]* (Moscow: URSS, 2007); Andrei A Kokoshin, *Политико-Военные И Военно-Стратегические Проблемы Национальной Безопасности России И Международной Безопасности [Political-Military and Military-Strategic Problems of Russia's National Security and International Security]* (Moscow: Higher School of Economics, 2013); Andrei A Kokoshin, "Национальные Интересы, Реальный Суверенитет и Национальная Безопасность [National Interests, Real Sovereignty and National Security]," *Voprosi Filisofii* 10 (2015): 5–19; Andrei Afanas'evich Kokoshin, *Soviet Strategic Thought, 1917-91*, CSIA Studies in International Security (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1998); Andrei A Kokoshin, "Notes on the Creation of an 'Innovative Russian Army,'" *Russian Politics & Law* 48, no. 3 (2010): 35–43, <https://doi.org/10.2753/RUP1061-1940480303>; Andrei A Kokoshin, "Providing Russia with Real Sovereignty in the Contemporary World," *Herald of the Russian Academy of Sciences* 84, no. 6 (2014): 449–55, <https://doi.org/10.1134/S1019331614060112>.

¹¹³ Aleksandr A Svechin, *Strategy*, ed. Kent D. Lee (Minneapolis: East View, 1992).

universally agreed upon. Fourth, because grand strategy is a process, uncovering it takes time and therefore requires research with more historical depth than even complex but singular events, such as the annexation of Crimea, afford. Finally, there are no agreed upon research methods to go find a state's grand strategy.

Road Map Ahead

The many difficulties concerning the study of grand strategy are arguably what makes this paper interesting and useful. To that end, the next two chapters discuss how I solve these challenges and the degree of scope in my research. Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical underpinnings of my research. Here, neoclassical realism supports my research agenda as a bridge between realism and constructivism. Chapter 3 then explains my qualitative, case-study methodology. I show how I link variables that account for both structural change within the international system as well as domestic modernization unique to Russia. As a key feature of methodology, I place these variables into a change-effect context of Russia's post-Soviet military interventions from Moldova to Syria in order to observe how the Russian state adapts with each iteration of war. This comparison is guided by an analysis of two key elements of the systemic stimuli that drive states towards international outcomes: systemic clarity (high or low) and the nature of the strategic environment (permissive or restrictive). Chapters 4-7 highlight four Russian military interventions: Moldova (1992), Georgia (2008), Crimea (2014) and Syria (2015).

Most uniquely, my paper channels a Russian perspective via case studies informed by software-assisted QDA of the Russian-language weekly publication, *VPK*, which specializes in

military-industrial reporting within both domestic and geopolitical contexts. As such, this paper at a minimum generates new descriptive knowledge about perspectives held by the Russian military industrial complex (MIC) spanning 2003-2019, especially in terms of state threats, opportunities and perceptions about relative power. From an analysis of chapters 4-7, I then extrapolate or infer Russian grand strategy from the MIC viewpoint. I also place Russian grand strategy in context to Braudel's social-historical concept of the *longue durée* and Carl Schmitt's notion of a sovereign's right to decipher and act upon a political state of exception or *Ausnahmezustand*. Braudel's work helps us understand strategic patience and a slow nudging by the Russian state to change some aspects of the international system but also retain other aspects. Schmitt's lens helps explain why some territorial borders remain blurry within a Russian view of sovereignty. A final chapter delves into conclusions about why, when and how the Kremlin use armed force to confront security threats in Russia's near abroad or resolve disputes in the broader international system. I offer suggestions for countering the anticipated arc of continuity in Russian grand strategy. Here, the concepts of military modernization, national will and Antulio Echevarria's notion of "gray zones" remain instructive. Finally, "hybrid" warfare should thus not be seen as a tactical phenomenon as it is often incorrectly placed, but rather in of a macro concept that harnesses the logic of success inherent in Russian grand strategy—military modernization drives security capabilities, a national will allows for them to be used, and when combined, the Kremlin can ensure the longevity of its state sovereignty on its own terms.

Chapter 2 – A Theory for Grand Strategy

...the deeper we go in search of causes, the more of them we find, and each cause taken singly or whole series of causes present themselves to us as equally correct in themselves, and equally false in their incapacity...to produce the event that took place.

Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy, *War and Peace*¹¹⁴

Don't regret lost soldiers, women will have more children.

Field Marshal Georgy Konstantinovich Zhukov¹¹⁵

As Tolstoy's observation above implies, a primary difficulty with the study of causation involves identifying a useful theory and meaningful scope of research. This applies to grand strategy too. Yet despite the numerous challenges that muddle the study of grand strategy, the international relations field of study offers many approaches and solutions. Writ large, realism offers a useful perspective for studying Russian state behavior. According to Robert Gilpin, however, realism might best be viewed more as a persuasion than a well-defined theoretical position.¹¹⁶ Ripsman et al similarly opine that, "classical realism refers a centuries-old philosophical approach to international politics, rather than a research program."¹¹⁷ Over time, the broad brush of realism has evolved into numerous branches, each with its own unique perspectives that add explanatory power to different kinds of cases and research questions.

¹¹⁴ Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larisa Volokhonsky (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 604.

¹¹⁵ In Russian, "Солдат не жалеть, бабы еще нарожают." The phrase is widely attributed to Zhukov, but in 2015 the director of the Russia's national archive, Sergei Mironenko, disputed the phrase's attribution, see: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2712788>

¹¹⁶ Robert Gilpin, *The Political Economy of International Relations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), 304; Jonathan Joseph, "Realism and Neorealism in International Relations Theory," in *The Encyclopedia of Political Thought*, ed. Michael T. Gibbons, First Edition (Wiley Online Library: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2015).

¹¹⁷ Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 169.

Contemporary realist theories typically find their roots in one of two camps: classical realists and structural realists.¹¹⁸ Classical realists view the history of the world as driven by human nature. In this tradition of realist thought—influenced by the likes of Machiavelli, Thucydides and Hobbes—Hans Morgenthau famously cautioned for a pessimistic view towards an enduring and highly consequential human nature which spawns a “tragic presence of evil in all political action.”¹¹⁹ A classical realist might posit that Field Marshal Zhukov exemplified the enduring principles of human nature with his pithy maxim about mothers compensating for his Red Army’s staggering losses.

Meanwhile, structural realists—sometimes labeled neorealists—contend that state behavior is driven by the structure of the international system. Kenneth Waltz’s seminal book *Theory of International Politics* outlines a foundation for neorealism underpinned by the concept of anarchy in the international system and the ensuing security uncertainty that all states face.¹²⁰ Waltz’s neorealism is often regarded as defensive realism, owing to the theory that states aim to strike a balance of power. In contrast, offensive realists, such as John Mearsheimer, argue that states, particularly great powers, continually seek increasing advantage over adversaries.¹²¹ Power maximizing strategies, however, often lead to unintended consequences. For example, Mearsheimer argued that Russia’s invasion of Crimea was actually caused by NATO and its post-Soviet expansion into Central and Eastern Europe.¹²² Jonathan Joseph thus characterizes

¹¹⁸ Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy”; Richard K Ashley, *The Poverty of Neorealism*, vol. 38, 2 (Cambridge University Press, 1984).

¹¹⁹ Hans J. (Hans Joachim) Morgenthau, *Politics in the Twentieth Century*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 7.

¹²⁰ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Addison-We (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

¹²¹ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 2014th ed. (New York: Norton, 2001).

¹²² John J. Mearsheimer, “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault,” *Foreign Affairs*, no. February (2014): 1–21.

neorealist state behavior as either “defined offensively as maximizing one’s power, or defensively as maximizing one’s security.”¹²³

Neoclassical realism, a term first coined by Gideon Rose in 1998, blends classical realism and structural realism.¹²⁴ Key neoclassical realists include William Wohlforth, Thomas Christensen, Randall Schweller, Fareed Zakaria, Alastair Murray, Steven Lobell, Colin Dueck, Robert Jervis, Nicholas Kitchen and Jeffrey Taliaferro.¹²⁵ Writ large, neoclassical realism attempts to “improve upon the external determinist core of neorealism” through the inclusion of “domestic political and perceptual intervening processes that can more fully and accurately account for state choices.”¹²⁶ In this way, neoclassical realism also offers a methodologically plural compromise between various competing schools of thought such as constructivism and liberalism. As a key feature, this compromise balances explanations about state behavior from the points of view of both domestic and external factors. In addition, neoclassical realism maintains a robust body of literature from which clear research variables can be formulated in the context of grand strategy and state behavior.¹²⁷

The tenants of neoclassical realism remain useful because they tend to align with stated Kremlin views about the international system and the role of nations within it. In many ways

¹²³ Joseph, “Realism and Neorealism in International Relations Theory.”

¹²⁴ Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy”; Joseph, “Realism and Neorealism in International Relations Theory.”

¹²⁵ Mearsheimer, “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault.”

¹²⁶ Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 31.

¹²⁷ Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*; Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, eds., *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Norrin M. Ripsman et al., “Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics.(Report),” *Uluslararası İlişkiler / International Relations* 14, no. 55 (2017): 119; J.W. Taliaferro, S.E. Lobell, and N.M. Ripsman, “Is Peaceful Change in World Politics Always Desirable? A Neoclassical Realist Perspective,” *International Studies Review* 20, no. 2 (2018): 283–291.

these views are realist in nature, particularly in context of state power, sovereignty and security.¹²⁸ For example, in his 2007 speech in Munich, President Putin stated, “I think it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernisation of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended?”¹²⁹ Andrei Tsygankov argues that Russia has a history of autocracy and embracing a strong central state. He explains a nativist perspective widely held in Russia which asserts, “a strong state is not an anomaly that should be gotten rid of.”¹³⁰ Indeed, Russian society historically has embraced centralized authority. Kotkin observes that “For Russia, the highest value is the state; for the United States, it is individual liberty, private property, and human rights, usually set out in opposition to the state.”¹³¹

At the same time, the Russian government also acknowledges the agency of its citizens and a profound risk posed by domestic threats that are often shaped by competing ideas and values. Again, Putin’s words are instructive: “As I said in the past, the state’s role and positions in the modern world are not determined only or predominantly by natural resources or production capacities; the decisive role is played by the people, as well as conditions for every individual’s development, self-assertion and creativity.”¹³² From the Kremlin’s perspective, the

¹²⁸ S. Burchill, “Realism and Neo-Realism,” in *Theories of International Relations*, ed. S. Burchill and A. Linklater, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 70–102. J. Grieco, “Realist International Theory and the Study of World Politics,” in *New Thinking in International Relations Theory*, ed. M. W. Doyle and G. J. Ikenberry (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997), 163–77.

¹²⁹ Vladimir Putin, “Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy (Kremlin Translation),” February 10, 2007, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>.

¹³⁰ Andrei P. Tsygankov, *The Strong State in Russia: Development and Crisis* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6.

¹³¹ Stephen Kotkin, “Russia’s Perpetual Geopolitics,” *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 3 (May-June 2016): 8.

¹³² Vladimir Putin, “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly (Kremlin Translation),” March 1, 2018, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56957>.

“color revolutions” offer a clear example of how ideas can materialize into tangible domestic threats to a strong national will. Alas, Russian leaders want to integrate into the world economy but at the same time stave off emerging domestic threats, both material and abstract, especially those that arise from globalization.

Because Russian state behavior is complex with many moving parts, neoclassical realism offers a theoretical construct that can incorporate both internal and external variables when analyzing grand strategy. According to Taliaferro et al:

“...leaders almost always face a two-level game in devising and implementing grand strategy: on the one hand, they must respond to the external environment, but, on the other, they must extract and mobilize resources from domestic society, work through existing domestic institutions, and maintain the support of stakeholders.”¹³³

Indeed, the synthesis of domestic and foreign concerns is readily apparent throughout the Russian Federation’s Doctrine of Information Security and National Security Strategy.¹³⁴

Some Key Suppositions of Neoclassical Realism

Because neoclassical realism corresponds well with my research, I use the following paragraphs to outline the major tenants of neoclassical realism as they relate to the study of grand strategy.

The International System: States Are Primary Actors (But Not Alone)

¹³³ Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Steven E Lobell, and Norrin M. Ripsman, “Introduction: Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy,” in *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, ed. Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 7.

¹³⁴ Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 646, “ДОКТРИНА Информационной Безопасности Российской Федерации [Doctrine of Information Security of the Russian Federation],” December 5, 2016, <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/41460>; Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 683, “Указ О Стратегии Национальной Безопасности Российской Федерации [National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation],” December 31, 2015, <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/acts/files/0001201512310038.pdf>.

Structural realists like Waltz maintain that the international system adheres to two key ordering principles: anarchy and hierarchy. Anarchy emphasizes the sameness of like units—states—that remain the key actors in a system that lacks a centralized authority structure above the state level. Because of this anarchy, states must fend for themselves through self-help. The hierarchical ordering principle contends that states arrange themselves “in relations of super- and subordination” based on “formally differentiated” degrees of authority and differentiation.¹³⁵ Walt’s conception of the international system preferences parsimony over complexity. Although, neoclassical realism asserts that Waltz’s conception of the international structure is too narrow, the school still borrows from two key insights from structuralists: first, the “system itself cannot dictate the behavior of individual units,” and, second, the “system’s anarchic ordering principle generates pervasive uncertainty among the units.”¹³⁶

Robert Jervis advances the neoclassical realist understanding of international structure beyond Waltz: “We are dealing with a system when (a) a set of units or elements is so interconnected that changes in some elements or their relations produce changes in other parts of the system, and (b) the entire system exhibits properties and behaviors that are different from those of the parts.”¹³⁷ In other words, just as the system’s structure affects how states behave, state behavior also affects the system. Jervis also observes the formation of non-linear relationships within the international system that often result in unintended consequences.

¹³⁵ William Clapton, *Risk and Hierarchy in International Society: Liberal Interventionism in the Post-Cold War Era*, Palgrave Studies in International Relations (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 13–14; Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 81.

¹³⁶ Ripsman et al., “Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics.(Report),” 36–37.

¹³⁷ Robert Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 6.

Indeed, fear about uncertainty and imperfect information preclude purely rationalistic outcomes even when states pursue their interests following strict cost-benefit analyses.

Neoclassical realists agree that nation states comprise the key actors in the international system, particularly great powers. This is because powerful states remain the most consequential actors within the international system.¹³⁸ At the same time, however, neoclassical realism recognizes other important variables at the unit level and within the structure or system.¹³⁹ Snyder calls these variables “structural modifiers,” which include military technology, geography, rates of technological diffusion, the balance between offense-defense weaponry.¹⁴⁰

Some experts, like Buzan, also recognize the structural import of institutions and norms.¹⁴¹ Naturally, these structural modifiers do not present opportunities and threats equally throughout the system. Great powers, for example, may have more or less equal access to military technology but smaller states do not. Think Russia and the U.S. as opposed to Yemen or Laos. By way of historical norms, some states possess large nuclear arsenals while a normative taboo against nuclear proliferation prevents others from acquiring them.¹⁴² Likewise, geography presents states with different threats and opportunities based on uneven resource distribution.

Relative Power: Perceptions Matter

¹³⁸ Ripsman et al., “Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics.(Report),” 35.

¹³⁹ Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life*, 109–10.

¹⁴⁰ Glenn H Snyder, “Process Variables in Neorealist Theory,” *Security Studies* 5, no. 3 (1996): 169–70; Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 7–10; Barry Buzan, Charles Jones, and Richard Little, eds., *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 69; Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 40–42.

¹⁴¹ Barry Buzan, “Beyond Neorealism: Interaction Capacity,” in *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism*, ed. Barry Buzan, Charles Jones, and Richard Little (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 72; Snyder, “Process Variables in Neorealist Theory,” 169.

¹⁴² Nina Tannenwald, “Stigmatizing the Bomb: Origins of the Nuclear Taboo,” *International Security* 29, no. 4 (2005): 9.

According to Rose, the heart of neoclassical realism posits that “the scope and ambition of a international system is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities.”¹⁴³ The term “power” lacks a universal definition and remains hotly contested even within the abovementioned understanding of the “international system.”¹⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the school of neoclassical realism recognizes key aspects about state power within the international system, sufficient enough to pursue robust research agendas. For example, power can be expressed in terms of the absolute and relative. Relative power is a relational concept and remains central to zero-sum thinking about state security. A problem with relative power is that states retain imperfect information and therefore both adversarial assessments and self-perceptions of power may or may not be accurate.

Neoclassical realists differentiate between actual power distributions and what state leaders assess their nation’s power to be relative to others.¹⁴⁵ Sometimes this is referred to as real vs perceived power. Simply put, real power refers to what a state is actually capable of whereas perceived power is what leaders think it to be. Real and perceived power can differ greatly, hence the possibility for miscalculation and error in state actions including warfare. Napoleon’s disastrous drive towards Moscow illustrates the point. Perceptions often differ from state to state due to inaccurate data or imperfect information. Likewise, states can arrive at different perceptions of power depending on what criteria they use to define or measure power. In addition, cultural and historical biases shape how world leaders often arrive at different

¹⁴³ Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” 146.

¹⁴⁴ Brian C. Schmidt and Thomas Juneau, “Neoclassical Realism and Power,” in *Neoclassical Realism in European Politics: Bringing Power Back In*, ed. Else Toje and Barbara Kunz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 61–62.

¹⁴⁵ Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 65.

assessments even when assessing a single event. Saddam Hussein, for example, grossly miscalculated his ability to hold on to occupied Kuwait. At the end of the day, perceptions about relative power drive many aspects of state behavior. Depending on which side of the power differential a state finds itself, leaders may seek to maintain balance, increase security or acquire further gains over other states.

Disaggregation of Power: Timescales Matter

Assessing aggregate state power, however, remains difficult because we have many options on how to cage our perceptions of power across a wide range of state characteristics and functions. Sometimes power can be expressed as simply hard or soft. Slightly more nuanced, the U.S. government often acknowledges the DIME concept of power: diplomatic, military, economic and political. Still other concepts of power abound: informational, cultural, cyber, coercive, legitimate, etc. In order to make sense of power, state leaders typically disaggregate power into categories and metrics, some of which can be measured. Some neoclassical realists focus on a state's material capabilities: gross domestic product, volume of defense spending, size and composition of armed forces, population demographics, research and development, financial reserves and foreign debt, geographic resources etc.¹⁴⁶ Other researchers focus on the abstract. For example, Hans Morgenthau contends that power also consists of concepts such as national will, morale and leadership quality.¹⁴⁷ In the end, any concept that tries to measure state power faces both limitations and criticism.

¹⁴⁶ J. Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (London ; New York: Allen Lane, 2006), 7–33; Randall L Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler's Strategy of World Conquest* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 26–31.

¹⁴⁷ Hans J. (Hans Joachim) Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations; the Struggle for Power and Peace.*, [1st ed.]. (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1948), 109–49.

Mearsheimer argues in favor of military-focused disaggregation of power. He asserts that states—particularly great powers—possess latent power, military power and effective power. Latent power consists of “the socio-economic ingredients that go into building military power,” which are determined by a state’s size and wealth—it’s “raw potential” to compete with rivals.¹⁴⁸ Closely related, “a state’s effective power is ultimately a function of its military forces and how they compare with the military of rival states.”¹⁴⁹ In this context, latent and military power more or less measure absolute power, whereas effective power remains relative to a specific adversary.

Mearsheimer’s conception of state power is useful but overly simplistic. Estimating effective power can help establish which state might win a contest of total war. With nuclear weapons at the disposal of most great powers, however, effective power remains useful only within a context limited to conventional weapons.¹⁵⁰ Yet, it is hard to imagine a full up war between nuclear-armed powers not escalating beyond conventional weapons at which point the weaker side begins to lose. Indeed, the nuclear parity struck between the U.S. and Russia under START and New START arms control regimes (1550 warheads and 700 delivery systems each) eliminates any real belief that either state can fight and win a nuclear war without unleashing cataclysmic disaster.¹⁵¹ Current Russian nuclear doctrine therefore assumes a conventionally superior adversary must “de-escalate” in face of a Russian limited, first use of nuclear weapons.¹⁵² Despite its nuclear policy of minimal deterrence, China should also be included in a

¹⁴⁸ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 55.

¹⁴⁹ Mearsheimer, 55.

¹⁵⁰ Despite the recent reintroduction of low-yield nuclear weapons into the U.S. arsenal, this researcher finds no credible concept of fighting limited nuclear war at this time.

¹⁵¹ New START expires in Feb 2021. Treaty details available at US State Dept and Arms Control Association: <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/NewSTART> and <https://www.state.gov/new-start/>

¹⁵² 2019 remarks by DIA add useful context to Russian and Chinese nuclear postures: <https://www.dia.mil/News/Speeches-and-Testimonies/Article-View/Article/1859890/russian-and-chinese-nuclear-modernization-trends/>

list of adversaries that cannot be defeated in large-scale conventional war without seriously risking unacceptable nuclear escalation.¹⁵³

I prefer to follow neoclassical realists who disaggregate power more holistically across state capabilities with a focus on a state's self-perception of relative power. This allows for the identification of specific threats and aspects of power that can be used in limited warfare and remain below a threshold that triggers a nuclear exchange. As such, this paper draws on Wohlforth's four components of power: "elements of power" (what power is), "distribution of power" (who has power in relative terms), "mechanics of power" (how power balances) and "prestige" (a state's relative position of influence in the international system). Wohlforth demonstrates the utility of his approach by illustrating that different states can choose to perceive power in different ways and therefore might make different assessment about relative power based on the same information available. For example, Wohlforth argues that during the Cold War Soviet leaders privileged military power while their American counterparts preferred more of an economic focus. According to Evans, Rueschemeyer and Skocpol, economic considerations are the most important: "A state's means of raising and deploying financial resources tells us more than could any other single factor about its existing (and immediate potential) capacities to create or strengthen state organizations, to employ personnel, to coopt political support, to subsidize economic enterprises, and to fund social programs."¹⁵⁴

The different approaches for the disaggregation of power suggest that state leaders perceive relative power on differing timescales. In the short-term, military power may arguably

¹⁵³ For details on China's nuclear and WMD history: <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/chinaprofile#nw>

¹⁵⁴ Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 16–17.

be more decisive to the calculus of relative power, while economic power might retain more salience in the long run. Freedman asserts that “actual or imminent instability, a changing context that induces a sense of conflict.”¹⁵⁵ Owing to a “fine-grained structure of power,” Van Evera argues that state leaders disaggregate military power into subcategories—e.g. first-mover advantage, fluctuations in military capabilities, etc.—based on perceptions about the immediacy and impact of adversarial threats.¹⁵⁶ State leaders then pursue “targeted-balancing” strategies based on maximizing limited resources and time.¹⁵⁷ Regardless of the timescale or circumstances, all states generate power through the extraction of available resources. Therefore, strategies of disaggregation support best practice in the prioritization of state resource extraction.

National Power vs State Power: Mobilization Matters

The total material assets within a society—economic, technological, military, geographic, human talent, etc.—is often very different from what the state can actually bring to bear through mobilization. This is because state leaders often do not have easy access to material resources. Some neoclassical realists describe this capacity difference in terms of national power and state power. National power refers to the total resources available for possible extraction, while state power refers to what is actually tapped into by a government. Governments are relevant because they are the primary decision maker for state-level decisions. Zakaria’s explanation is instructive:

"Foreign policy is made not by the nation as a whole but by its government; consequently, what matters is state power, not national power. State power is that

¹⁵⁵ Freedman, *Strategy: A History*, 611.

¹⁵⁶ Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict*, 7–11.

¹⁵⁷ Steven E Lobell, “A Granular Theory of Balancing,” *International Studies Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (2018): 593–95.

portion of national power the government can extract for its purposes and reflects the ease with which central decisionmakers can achieve their ends"¹⁵⁸

In this context, strong states can extract a larger chunk of national power than can weaker states. As such, the neoclassical realist understanding of national power therefore is broader than what structural realists tend to recognize, especially those who focus solely on military power.

Similar to Zakaria, Christensen argues that “gross assessments” of power remain insufficient to explain Waltzian balancing behavior.¹⁵⁹ This is because states tend to struggle with resource extraction and national mobilization operations, especially when such activities require major changes to national policy. Christensen therefore introduces the concept of “national political power” which he defines as “the ability of state leaders to mobilize their nation’s human and material resources behind security policy initiatives.”¹⁶⁰ According to Rose, “the notion that international power analysis must take into account the ability of governments to extract and direct the resources of their societies seems almost obvious, and in fact it simply involves incorporating into international relations theory variables that are routine in other subfields of political science.”¹⁶¹

Following Rose’s observations about research design, I draw on Christensen’s use of national political power as an intervening variable that mediates between international security threats and state mobilization. According to Christensen:

“A causal link is drawn between shifts in the international balance of power, leader’ creation of long-term grand strategies to address those shifts, the domestic political

¹⁵⁸ Fared Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America’s World Role* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), 9.

¹⁵⁹ Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” 161.

¹⁶⁰ Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 11.

¹⁶¹ Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” 161.

difficulties in mobilizing the public behind those strategies, and the manipulation of ideological crusades and short-term conflicts in order to gain popular support for long-term grand strategies.”¹⁶²

The idea that short-term gains require the use and “manipulation” of narratives between the state and its public resonates well with contemporary Russia. Lawrence Freedman highlights the use of scripts, narratives and “the growing importance of stories as a means of thinking about and communicating strategies.”¹⁶³ State-driven propaganda, an ever-present dynamic in Russian society, therefore fits well in a key neoclassical realist category of intervening variables broadly caged as “state-society relations,” which I discuss later in more detail below.¹⁶⁴ These variables help explain how states extract resources and garner sufficient popular support to mobilize.

Actionable Power: Kinetic Use Despite the Outlawry of War

Figure 2 below illustrates the two broad conceptions of state power discussed above. First, Measheirmer’s *military power* nests inside the larger body of *latent power*. Second, the resource-extraction concepts of Zakaria and Christensen also form a stacking model: the similar concepts of *national political power* and *state power* nest inside *national power*. Both models are useful but I utilize the latter with one modification. I add an extra layer of power that I call “actionable power.” Actionable power is the portion of state power that can actually be used in context of international norms and law that outlaw extra-territorial warfare. I loosely define actionable power as the use of politically-sustainable kinetic force outside the territory of a state. I argue that just as Christensen’s *national political power* emphasizes the difficulty of domestic resource mobilization, *actionable power* highlights the difficulty of translating domestic support

¹⁶² Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958*, 7.

¹⁶³ Freedman, *Strategy: A History*, xv.

¹⁶⁴ Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 70–71.

into politically sustainable kinetic operations conducted or directed outside the state. Kinetic operations attempt to directly damage, punish or coerce an adversary. These operations can

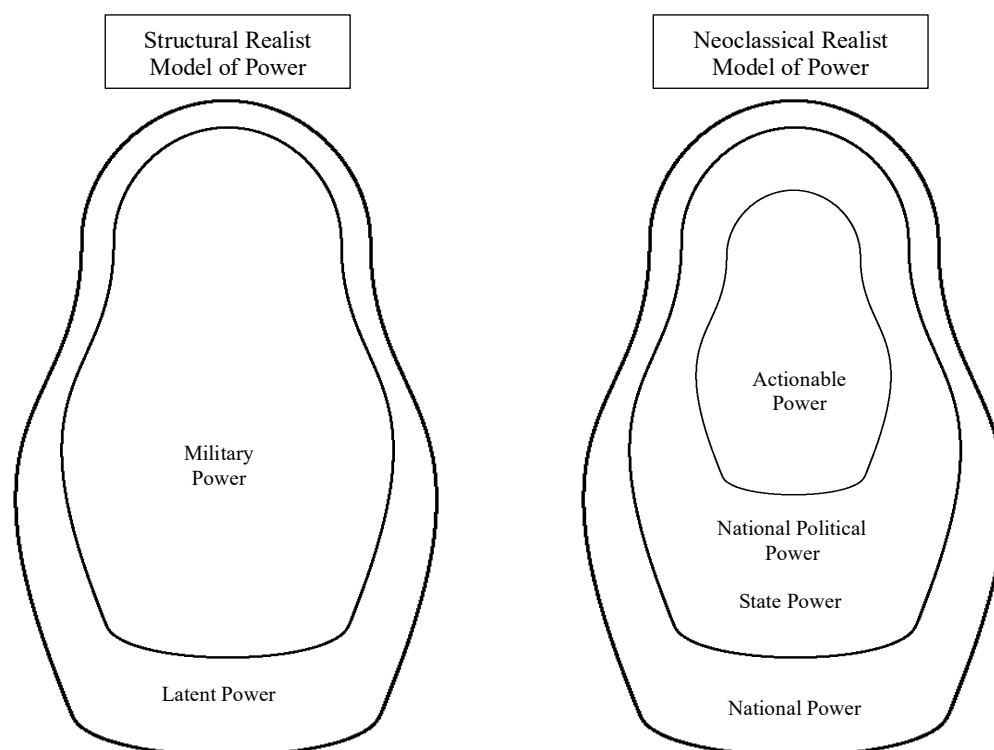


Figure 2 – Nesting Doll Models of State Power

include both military force or non-military action such as economic sanctions or embargo. Non-military actions, however, are always supported by military force. In this way, the concept of actionable power recognizes that a population will support and mobilize for armed conflict against another state in some conditions but not in others.

Even if its population supports it, a state will suffer significant political and economic consequences if it takes action against another state in contradiction to international law and the territorial integrity norm. Importantly, *actionable power* recognizes that coercive behaviors beget

different responses within the international system based on a vague calculus that determines thresholds of political tolerance. For example, not all military action triggers an in-kind military response, as witnessed in Crimea. A knee-jerk reaction from many analysts was to brand military actions that use deception as somehow novel by labeling them with buzzwords like “hybrid warfare” or “gray zone” conflicts. According to Echevarria, hybrid war is nothing new given humanity’s long history of conflict, but “What makes gray zone conflicts ‘interesting’ for a contemporary strategist is that they occur below the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO) Article 5 threshold and below the level of violence necessary to prompt a United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution.”¹⁶⁵

I argue that we see widespread use of deception in “gray zone” conflicts because state perceptions and state-society relations play a vital role in determining whether or not a military intervention is deemed above or below a UN response threshold. Through the effective use of deception, a state may be able to shape favorable perceptions about its actions and therefore reduce the undesirable response options that other states might consider. In cases when a state’s coercive behavior is deemed to warrant a response, the punitive action can materialize as reciprocal and in-kind (e.g. military action provokes a military response) or asymmetric (e.g. military action provokes a non-military reaction such as economic sanctions or political isolation). As is the case with actionable power, responses are heavily influenced by perceptions.

Since the conclusion of World War II, societal perceptions about the horrors of war have helped establish norms against the use of armed conflict. Of chief importance, the norm of

¹⁶⁵ Antulio Joseph Echevarria, *Operating in the Gray Zone: An Alternative Paradigm for U.S. Military Strategy*, Advancing Strategic Thought Series (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, 2016), xii.

territorial integrity, recognizes the permanence of state borders and boundaries within the modern international order. Mark Zacher describes the territorial integrity norm as “the growing respect for the proscription that force should not be used to alter interstate boundaries.”¹⁶⁶ Tanisha Fazal calls it the “norm against conquest.”¹⁶⁷ Like Fazal, Hensel and Frederick suggest a historical strengthening of the norm during the latter half of the 20th century, especially in the presence of “general territorial integrity obligations” or treaties.¹⁶⁸ According to Fazal, the norm against conquest prevents rivals from acquiring buffer state territory, but she also maintains that this norm works due to a unique combination of geography, the military power of the U.S. and its liberal values.

Fazal warns that norms are not fixed, however, and the trend against conquest could yet reverse course, particularly given a questionable U.S. intervention in Iraq. America’s strong-handed formation of a new nation state, the Republic of Kosovo, also arguably detracts from the international legitimacy of American liberal values. Most definitely, the Kremlin agrees that the same American power that helped shape stability in the modern international system now acts against it, including the norm of territorial integrity.¹⁶⁹ In the aftermath of Russia’s annexation of Crimea, Putin explained that Kosovo established a legal and moral precedent: “Key international institutions are not getting any stronger; on the contrary, in many cases, they are sadly degrading.

¹⁶⁶ Mark W Zacher, “The Territorial Integrity Norm : International Boundaries and the Use of Force,” *International Organization* 55, no. 2 (2001): 215.

¹⁶⁷ Tanisha M. Fazal, *State Death: The Politics and Geography of Conquest, Occupation and Annexation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

¹⁶⁸ Paul R Hensel and Bryan Frederick, “The Territorial Integrity Norm and Interstate Territorial Claims” (2017), 13.

¹⁶⁹ Vasile Rotaru and Miruna Troncotă, “Continuity and Change in Instrumentalizing ‘The Precedent’. How Russia Uses Kosovo to Legitimize the Annexation of Crimea,” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 17, no. 3 (2017): 325–45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2017.1348044>.

Our western partners, led by the United States of America, prefer not to be guided by international law in their practical policies, but by the rule of the gun.”¹⁷⁰

Despite Russia’s annexation of Crimea, Hathaway and Shapiro argue that the prohibition on armed conflict to change international borders, or what they call the “outlawry” of war, still remains strong and relevant.¹⁷¹ They see the outlawry of war as the fundamental cause for the post-WW2 reduction in interstate war. Specifically, they argue the Peace Pact of 1928 set the post-WW2 order into motion. In this context, the outlawry of war effectively locks in place all international borders. Acknowledging Russia’s annexation of Crimea, the authors highlight the rarity of such events. Time scales are important to Hathaway and Shapiro, suggesting that through proper political isolation, Russia will become an “outcast” in the international system and very well may be forced to eventually return Crimea to Ukraine.

What Hathaway and Shapiro fail to grasp is that with conquest writ large, and the case of Crimea in particular, territorial integrity is neither a black and white issue nor a binary condition of either violation or adherence. Instead, the perceptions held by states and other actors bring rise to contradictions and complexity that in some cases prevent other states from taking reciprocal measures even to outright conquest. It is in this context that my term *actionable power* proves useful in this paper. It helps us contextualize why Russia buys and develops particular weapon systems, for example, and how they intend to use them. Actionable power also helps describe the parameters in which the Kremlin seeks war. Again, in line with Gilpin, “the most prestigious

¹⁷⁰ Vladimir Putin, “Address by President of the Russian Federation (Kremlin Translation)” (Kremlin, March 18, 2014), <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

¹⁷¹ Oona Anne Hathaway and Scott J. Shapiro, *The Internationalists: How a Radical Plan to Outlaw War Remade the World* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2017).

members of the international system are those states that have most recently used military force or economic power successfully and have thereby imposed their will on others.”¹⁷²

The International System’s Structure Can Change

States alone do not determine the international structure via foreign policy or grand strategy. Nevertheless, the structure of the international system changes, albeit often slowly, in concert with a wide mix of state behaviors spanning economic, political and military policy pursuits.¹⁷³ Variations in state behavior reflect different perceptions about anarchy, hierarchy, security and power. These perceptions are often driven by domestic culture and historically significant narratives. For example, Kitchen argues that “prevailing ideas” in a society help drive state behavior—an intervening variable between the system’s structure and international outcomes:

“processes within states are influenced not only by exogenous systemic factors and considerations of power and security, but also by cultural and ideological bias, domestic political considerations and prevailing ideas.”¹⁷⁴

Similarly, Dueck asserts that state behavior often reflects outcomes that are culturally acceptable to various unit-level actors with domestic influence on government. For example, Dueck argues contemporary U.S. foreign policy is in part shaped by a domestic sense of limited liability—a “culturally shaped preference for avoiding costs and commitments in grand strategy.”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 32.

¹⁷³ Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 87–90.

¹⁷⁴ Nicholas Kitchen, “Systemic Pressures and Domestic Ideas: A Neoclassical Realist Model of Grand Strategy Formation,” *Review of International Studies* 36, no. 1 (2010): 133.

¹⁷⁵ Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 26.

Figure 3 below, sourced from Ripsman et al., illustrates how *systemic stimuli* cause state behavior, expressed in terms of *international outcomes*, by way of intervening variables within

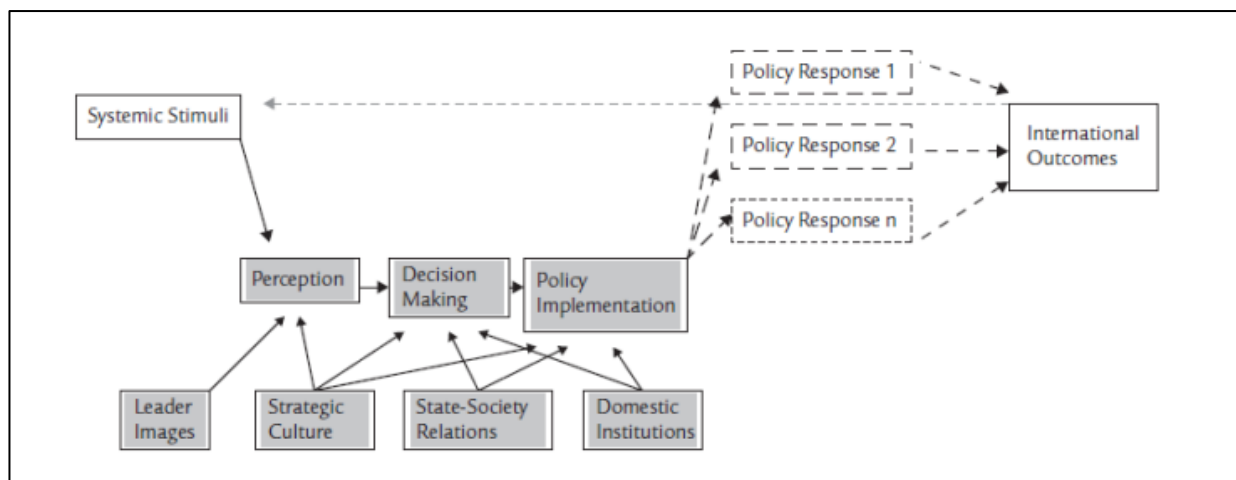


Figure 3 – Neoclassical Realist Model

the state.¹⁷⁶ Variation in state behavior is in part explained by the gray boxes that represent groups of intervening variables often associated with neoclassical realism (*leader images, strategic culture, domestic institutions, etc.*). Much like the formation of grand strategy, the process in Figure 3 is iterative. In this way, change occurs when international outcomes, such as the use of armed conflict to settle an interstate dispute, recalibrate systemic stimuli. In the figure, this feedback loop is expressed by a dashed arrow pointing from the box “international outcomes” back to the beginning of the process, “systemic stimuli.”

Two Key Systemic Variables: The Strategic Environment & It's Clarity

¹⁷⁶ Source: Figure 2.1 in Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 34.

Neoclassical realists often describe structural change in the international system in terms of clarity.¹⁷⁷ As a key systemic variable, clarity consists of three elements as viewed by states: “(1) the degree to which threats and opportunities are readily discernable; (2) whether the system provides information on the time horizons of threats and opportunities; and (3) whether optimal policy options stand out.”¹⁷⁸ As critics will surely point out, these three sets of information remain difficult to measure precisely. Yet, together they provide useful information about the processes that lead to international outcomes. Qualitative analysis of clarity (or uncertainty) can also identify key changes in the international system, especially important fluctuations, both real and perceived, in relative power. The next chapter outlines in more detail how to qualitatively assess clarity.

In tandem with clarity, the nature of the strategic environment forms another key systemic variable used to contextualize either state behavior or change in the international system. The nature of the strategic environment can be expressed as lying somewhere on a slide scale between two opposite characteristics—permissive or restrictive. The environment is said to be either permissive or restrictive based on the “magnitude” and “imminence” of threats and opportunities.¹⁷⁹ These terms are not simply a reiteration of clarity’s notion of time horizons. The difference is that clarity deals with a state’s ability to identify short- and long-term threats or opportunities, whereas imminence refers to a clear and present danger or a fleeting opportunity for advantage. Magnitude qualifies to what extent an imminent threat is dangerous or to what

¹⁷⁷ Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E Lobell, “Conclusion: The State of Neoclassical Realism,” in *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, ed. Steven E Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 282–87.

¹⁷⁸ Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 46.

¹⁷⁹ Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, 52.

extent an opportunity looks favorable. Generally speaking, the greater in magnitude and imminence a threat or opportunity is, the more restrictive the environment. This is because a state will focus on an imminent threat or opportunity over lesser threats, thereby restricting the room for policy options. Likewise, when the strategic environment is permissive, threats and opportunities remain vague and therefore the state can pursue a wider range of policy options.

A two-by-two box diagram that contrasts clarity with the nature of the strategic environment is a useful way to contextualize contemporary Russian state behavior. For example, Table 1 below illustrates that with each military intervention in the post-Soviet space, Russia maneuvered within different structural conditions in the international system. In other words, the international structure changed over time in terms of clarity and permissiveness. In the first instance in 1992, Moldova presented an imminent security challenge that required quick stabilization. In this case, the nature of external threats to the Russian state remained vague in the newly formed post-Cold War era. Yet, the precedent of intervention within the former Soviet space laid the ground for other intervention narratives took take shape in subsequent years.

Table 1 – Using Systemic Stimuli to Characterize Post-Soviet Russian Military Interventions

| | | Nature of Strategic Environment (Permissive to Restrictive) | |
|---|--------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| | | Permissive Strategic Environment | Restrictive Strategic Environment |
| Degree of Systemic Clarity (High to Low) | High Clarity | Syria (2015) | Crimea (2014) |
| | Low Clarity | Georgia (2008) | Moldova (1992) |

By 2008, the environment allowed for Russia to take its time (several years) before initiating military operations against Georgia.¹⁸⁰ This patience reflects less urgency and therefore a much wider range of policy options available to Russian leaders prior to the decision for armed escalation. Although Russia by 2008 had clearly articulated displeasure with American hegemony and NATO expansion as a threat to its security, the Kremlin nevertheless partnered with the West in a wide range of political, economic and military activities in the post-911 setting of an international war against terror. Such a conflicted relationship, characterized by cooperation and noncooperation alike, prevented Russia from settling into a clear “us versus them” war footing. Indeed, the harsh lessons of the war with Georgia illuminated key areas where Russia’s military required significant improvement. Indeed, it would take several years of military modernization before the Kremlin would possess demonstrated capabilities needed to engage the West more aggressively.

By the time Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, the nature of the strategic environment became increasingly restrictive. This new clarity about threats and opportunities stemmed primarily from President Yanukovich’s sudden ouster. Maidan quickly turned violent as many Ukrainians protested Yanukovich’s alignment with Russia, favoring instead a shift towards Europe. This volatile situation created a clear and present danger to civil order in Ukraine, but it also presented a new security imbalance for Russia. What would happen to Russia’s Black Sea Fleet, for example, if Kiev integrated more formally with the EU? For Russia, questions like this intensified perceptions about the threat posed by NATO expansion in particular and American hegemony in general. In other words, an increase in systemic clarity forced the Kremlin to take

¹⁸⁰ Eli Lake, “Russia Waged Covert War on Georgia Starting in ’04,” *The Washington Times*, December 2, 2010, online edition.

action. What's more, Russia's military had greatly improved capabilities since its last armed intervention in Georgia. Those war lessons, many of which were highly embarrassing, proved instructive. In this light, perhaps we do not see Crimea without first experiencing Georgia; or as Mark Galeotti puts it, "In hindsight, one wonders, would Crimea and the Donbass wars have happened if the West had been more robust in its response to Georgia?"¹⁸¹

Zakaria argues that leadership perceptions, "by whatever cognitive processes, whether right or wrong," of increases in capabilities are what shape a state's interests, not the other way around.¹⁸² If this is true, then Russia's newly demonstrated military expertise opened up the Kremlin's aperture for assessing new opportunities to gain international influence and power. Enter Syria, 2015: President Assad's regime is virtually on the eve of collapse, encircled by a very capable myriad of insurgency fighting with direct support from Western nations. In 2013, the thought of a direct Russia intervention in Syria seemed implausible. President Obama implicitly threatened regime change in Damascus if a so-called red line was crossed. Yet, at the same time the strategic environment became more permissive for Russian leaders. Riding on newfound military power, Russia saw an opportunity to expand the pursuit of its national interests. Consequently, the Assad Regime is now firmly in power backed by Russian forces. Unavoidably, the American-led coalition agreed to and thereby normalized Russian air power operations in Syria under joint rules of force deconfliction. Just as Georgia was a stepping stone to Crimea, Russia would not have intervened in Syria without first successfully annexing

¹⁸¹ Sarah Pruitt, "How a Five-Day War With Georgia Allowed Russia to Reassert Its Military Might," History.Com, September 4, 2018, <https://www.history.com/news/russia-georgia-war-military-nato>.

¹⁸² Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role*, 24.

Crimea.¹⁸³ Each additional military conquest, like a ratchet effect, further strengthens perceptions about relative power. With this invigorated international prestige, the Kremlin can then reassess threats and widen Russian apertures towards new opportunities both at home and abroad.

The End of Russia's Post-Soviet Transition?

The four cases of Russian military intervention highlight that the Russian state has operated under evolving conditions when resorting to armed interstate conflict. In this way, Figure 1 lends itself to starting a new conversation about how we assess Russia as a nation in transition. For years there have been studies about transitional economies and post-communist states integrating more fully in international institutions. Many states, including Poland and the Baltics, have fared well in post-communism systems. In terms of developing democracy, Russia, though, is regarded in the West as a missed opportunity that failed to materialize.

At the same time however, perhaps Syria signals an end to “transition” in Russia. Contemporary Russia, despite its deeply autocratic nature of governance, has emerged as a stable state: the Kremlin maintains a clear understanding of world security relationships combined with an increasingly expanding set of policy options with which to navigate. In essence, Russian self-perceptions about state capabilities and relative power in the international system are finally starting to align with a historically driven self-image of great hierarchical importance in the world system. Put another way, Russia's experience in Syria reflects a world in which Russia has been trying to find itself: high systemic clarity in a highly permissive environment. Russian can

¹⁸³ Busra Nur Bilgic Cakmak and Firdevs Bulut, “If Russia Were Stopped in Crimea, It Wouldn't Be in Syria,” Anadolu Agency, March 11, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/if-russia-were-stopped-in-crimea-it-wouldnt-be-in-syria/1762426#>.

now increasingly pursue national interests buoyed by recent gains in relative power as demonstrated on the battlefield.

For all the above mentioned reasons, neoclassical realism offers a practical framework with which to contextualize grand strategy in contemporary Russia. In terms of scope, neoclassical realism supports a balanced approach that focuses on causal processes from which we can describe patterns and trends. Finally, it is from these process patterns that this paper infers Russian grand strategy. Before detailing my methods in chapter 3, the rest of this section considers criticism and limitations of neoclassical realism's theoretical currents.

Criticism and Limitations of Neoclassical Realism

There are many strengths to neoclassical realism, especially in terms of improving upon the weaknesses of classical and structural realism. Yet, neoclassical realism itself generates legitimate critique within political science circles. For some, the theory's inclusion of both structural (international) and domestic variables lacks the parsimony and consistency required to offer genuine explanatory power and broad applicability across cases. Steven Walt, for example, argues that "Neoclassical realism tends to incorporate domestic variables in an ad hoc manner, and its proponents have yet to identify when these variables have greater or lesser influence."¹⁸⁴ In context of security competition, Legro and Moravscik opine that neoclassical realism fails to offer more explanatory power than competing theories:

"Who is correct—liberals who attribute conflict to deadlocked preferences, epistemic theorists who point to conflicting embedded beliefs, realists who invoke security externalities, or institutionalists who highlight coordination (bargaining) failure?"

¹⁸⁴ Stephen M Walt, "The Enduring Relevance of Realist Tradition," in *Political Science: The State of the Discipline*, ed. Ira Katznelson and Helen V. Milner (New York : Washington D.C.: Norton : American Political Science Association, 2002), 211.

Current realist theory, which combines all four into ‘relative-gains seeking,’ evades this question.”¹⁸⁵

The same authors insist that neoclassical realism’s “theoretical indeterminacy and a reliance on exogenous variation in state preferences,” renders the theory incapable of serious empirical study.¹⁸⁶

Another challenge for those who study grand strategy within the confines of neoclassical realism involves establishing useful research variables of inquiry. For example, is grand strategy a causal variable, the object of explanation or something else? Is grand strategy tangible or measurable, and if so, how can we know? If grand strategy, as Colin Gray argues, only exists in a future context, how can we come to know when it has been realized or not?¹⁸⁷ Despite such criticism and given Brands’ definition of grand strategy, neoclassical realism offers a viable theoretical construct within which grand strategy can be studied through the use of intervening variables (IVV) that mediate between explanatory variables (IV) and dependent variables (DV).

Research conducted through a neoclassical realist lens is perhaps strongest when it adheres to key theoretical limitations. First, as addressed by critics above, the theory remains focused on the particular.¹⁸⁸ As such, neoclassical realism explains specific cases without an attempt to generalize causal findings to other cases. Effectively this means that as neoclassical realists are “bringing the state back in,” specialization begins to supersede structural generalization.¹⁸⁹ Second, the theory depends on the loose understanding of an “international

¹⁸⁵ Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, “Is Anybody Still a Realist?,” *International Security* 24, no. 2 (1999): 48.

¹⁸⁶ Legro and Moravcsik, 28.

¹⁸⁷ Colin S Gray, “Why Strategy Is Different,” *Infinity Journal* 6, no. 4 (Summer 2019): 4–8.

¹⁸⁸ Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 95–96.

¹⁸⁹ Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, *Bringing the State Back In*.

system” as the Western advent of modern states, each characterized by its distinct territorial boundaries, and the system of interaction that began developed in the 16th century. Third, neoclassical realism explains state behavior and policy choice in context of balancing between both international security pressures and domestic politics. In order to be useful, the theory therefore requires international threats to actively be present and feature within a state’s calculus for policy and action. Fourth, the predictive power of neoclassical realism remains rather weak. With so many combinations of intervening variables and different time frames to observe them, the theory writ-large lacks a general ability to forecast international outcomes. Fifth, time horizons matter a lot in terms of what kind of causal processes can be captured. For example, neoclassical realists often frame state behavior in terms of relative power. But because relative changes in power seldom change quickly, cases that document structural change or swings in power differentials must account for years or decades.

In a positive light, neoclassical realism’s appreciation for temporal significance aligns well with Fernand Braudel’s social-historical concept of the *longue durée*.¹⁹⁰ Dale Tomich, professor and researcher at Binghamton University’s Fernand Braudel Center, asserts that “the *longue durée* is simply the most stable temporal relation of the longest duration in the problem under consideration. It forms the stabilizing ground against which cyclical variations of other temporal structures are established, and it allows the ordering of historical inquiry.” In a nutshell, the *longue durée* concept pairs well with inquiry into contemporary Russian state behavior. As outlined in the next chapter, my research on current perceptions within Russian institutions leads

¹⁹⁰ For analysis of Braudel’s work, see: Dale Tomich, “The Order of Historical Time: The *Longue Durée* and Micro-History,” *Almanack. (Guarulhos)*, no. 2 (semestre de 2011): 52–65.

me to believe the Kremlin desires policy pathways that stem from a grand strategy steeped with a protracted patience—in essence a form of *longue durée* that I call the “long nudge.”

The long nudge encapsulates Russia’s long-term perspective about state survival and national endurance, which privilege serial history over temporary shifts and sudden change. In this context, Russian grand strategy aims to right the post-Cold War ship so to speak—to steady both the Russian state and the international system after the dramatic shock caused by the Soviet Union’s collapse. Vladislav Surkov, the Kremlin insider who introduced Russians to the concepts of “sovereign democracy” and “Putin’s long state,” asserts that it may take a century of isolation before Russia eventually reclaims its rightful place atop the world system’s pecking order as one the few great powers.¹⁹¹ Put another way, the Russians’ historical arc sees American hegemony as an erratic blip on the radar scope of history—an anomaly that will pass with time given the proper nudging. Neoclassical realism affords a lens that best captures this perspective and the next chapter outlines the methods used to arrive at this understanding of Russian grand strategy.

¹⁹¹ Vladislav Surkov, “Одиночество Полукровки [The Solitude of the Half-Breed],” *Russia in Global Affairs* March/April, no. 2 (2018), <https://www.globalaffairs.ru/articles/odinochestvo-polukrovki-14-2/>. According to Bochkova, “sovereign democracy” is a new alternative to Russia’s managed democracy—Sovereign democracy emphasizes the close interrelation between the nation and the state, and the centralization of power in a unified Russian nation to ensure its independence. It is a way of consolidating Russia in order to overcome both threats emanating from external factors and specific negative traditions in the state’s political development. See: Maria S. Bochkova, “Суверенитет и Демократия в России в Условиях Трансформации Мировой Политической Системы [Sovereignty and Democracy in Russia in the Context of the Transformation of the World Political System],” *Национальный Психологический Журнал [National Psychology Journal]* 4, no. 2 (2010): 36.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

"We are constantly accused of carrying out some kind of military activity. Where? On our territory. But the fact that our borders are evolving is normal."

President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, 2016¹⁹²

This paper seeks out a better understanding of contemporary Russian grand strategy—not a simple task. There would be little value in such an endeavor if the strategy was easily accessible or discernable. Moreover, I have no direct or informal access to the Kremlin, but even if I could interview President Putin or his senior leaders about grand strategy, they most definitely would either decline to comment or answer in a deceptive way. Russian historian Nikolai Starikov makes this point when analyzing Moscow’s current orientation towards Ukraine: “There should be a Russian strategy towards Ukraine, and certainly there is. Only our president can answer what it actually is, but he is unlikely to do so for quite understandable reasons.”¹⁹³ The next question then is to decide how to best approximate what Putin and those crazy Russians are up to—do they even have a grand strategy and if so, what methods can I employ to find out what it is?

Introduction

This paper uses qualitative research to arrive at conclusions about Russian grand strategy. The term “qualitative research” covers a broad range of research types that “help us understand

¹⁹² In Russian: "Нас постоянно обвиняют в том, что мы осуществляем какую-то военную активность. Где? На своей территории, а то, что у наших границ развивается - это нормально." as quoted in: “Putin accused NATO of pushing Russia towards a ‘militaristic frenzy’ (Author’s translation),” *Interfax*, June 30, 2016, <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/516230>.

¹⁹³ Quote in Russian: “Стратегия России в отношении Украины должна быть и, несомненно, есть. Какая на самом деле, ответить может только наш президент, но он вряд ли скажет по вполне понятным причинам.” See: Nikolai Starikov, “Голодомир для элиты [Death by starvation for the elites],” *Voenno-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, January 14, 2004, No1 (18) edition, 4.

and explain the meaning of social phenomena.”¹⁹⁴ Aspers and Corte define qualitative research as a process consisting of two tasks: “(i) how to do things—namely, generating and analyzing empirical material, in an iterative process in which one gets closer by making distinctions, and (ii) the outcome—improved understanding novel to the scholarly community.”¹⁹⁵ In support of these objectives, this paper employs a case study format aided by software-assisted qualitative data analysis (QDA).

The qualitative case study technique is “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit.”¹⁹⁶ In execution, case studies are exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive.¹⁹⁷ The case studies in this paper are also particularistic: they “focus on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon.”¹⁹⁸ Here, the cases are events—military interventions—that together take shape as a historical phenomenon.

According to Miles and Huberman, case studies have many strengths. Because they focus on specific and local contexts, case studies specialize in “understanding latent, underlying, or nonobvious issues.”¹⁹⁹ With an “interpretive” focus on meaning, cases uncover how people connect to their surrounding communities through “perceptions, assumptions, prejudgments, and presuppositions.”²⁰⁰ In addition, case studies remain strong tools for developing and testing

¹⁹⁴ Sharan B Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, 2nd ed.. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 5.

¹⁹⁵ Patrik Aspers and Ugo Corte, “What Is Qualitative in Qualitative Research,” *Qualitative Sociology* 42, no. 2 (2019): 155.

¹⁹⁶ Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, 21.

¹⁹⁷ B. L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 4th ed. (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 2001), 230.

¹⁹⁸ Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, 29.

¹⁹⁹ Matthew B Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*, 2nd ed.. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1994), 10.

²⁰⁰ Max Van Manen, “Linking Ways of Knowing with Ways of Being Practical,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 6, no. 3 (1977): 214.

hypotheses as well as complementing quantitative research methods. Qualitative work can greatly benefit quantitative research in terms of data validation and analysis.²⁰¹ But just as case studies have strengths, they also suffer from limitations.

The general consensus among qualitative researchers is that the benefits of the case study approach outweigh the limitations. Researchers should nevertheless remain cognizant of weaknesses to the approach in order to mitigate possible shortcomings. As with other types of research, case studies inherently suffer from the personal biases of those conducting them. Put simply, humans are always prone to discrepancy when describing what they think they saw or heard—as such eye-witness accounts usually contribute some of the weakest evidence in courtroom trials. Despite the many benefits of rich description and contextual nuance that case studies provide, Guba and Lincoln argue that cases are still prone to oversimplify and as such, “they tend to masquerade as a whole when in fact they are but a part—a slice of life.”²⁰²

Furthermore, case studies often require more time or financial resources than what is available, thus requiring compromises to data collection, breadth of scope and the level of detail in thick description. Most texts on the subject also point to a lack of generalizability with case studies. Nevertheless, even single cases can be exceptionally vital to the natural and social sciences. Flyvbjerg, for example, points to the work of Galileo, Newton, Einstein, Bohr, Darwin and others as examples of single-case greatness.²⁰³ This paper utilizes four cases in order to derive the benefits of cross-case comparison. In addition, this paper attempts to soften the

²⁰¹ Miles and Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*, 10.

²⁰² Egon G Guba and Yvonna S Lincoln, *Effective Evaluation*, 1st ed.. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1981), 377.

²⁰³ Bent Flyvbjerg, “Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no. 2 (April 1, 2006): 226.

limitations of qualitative work by using computer software that facilitates improved QDA. More on these techniques below.

In consideration of these limitations associated with particularistic case studies, my own background should be transparent so the reader may consider my personal biases and limitations. First, I am not a native speaker of Russian. I first starting learning Russian at the University of Florida in 1994 and later graduated with a degree in Russian studies. Since 2003, I have been qualified as a foreign area officer (FAO) in the U.S. Air Force. As part of my annual competency requirements, I take the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) to demonstrate that I maintain proficiency in Russian, scoring 3-3 or better on the listening and reading modalities. Over the course of my career, I have executed Russian related tasks in my FAO duties in a wide range of contexts, including a two-year stint serving at the U.S. embassy in Moscow, Russia. Since 1994, I've spent roughly five years in Russia and the former Soviet Union (more than half the former Republics), and thirteen years on the European continent.

Given my robust professional exposure to Central and East Europe, augmented with stints in the Caucasus and Central Asia, I acknowledge that I have biases but also bring to the table considerable strengths in personal experience and perspective. This background helped me in my case selection, analysis and the process of emergent development throughout. With strict deadlines to complete my overall studies, taking on this project proved a practical choice because I already possessed the regional knowledge and language skills required to push directly into conducting research. Naturally, I seek out regular feedback from other regional experts and my political science advisors and cohort in order to provide a counter to my inherent biases.

Case Selection & Description

This paper draws on four cases for comparison. Each case encompasses the events of a Russian military intervention outside the borders of the Russian Federation: Moldova (1992), Georgia (2008), Crimea (2014), and Syria (2015). Effectively, I have selected on the DV (highlighted in Figure 4 below). This is generally seen as a design flaw even in qualitative research. In this study, however, the choosing “international outcomes” as cases actually

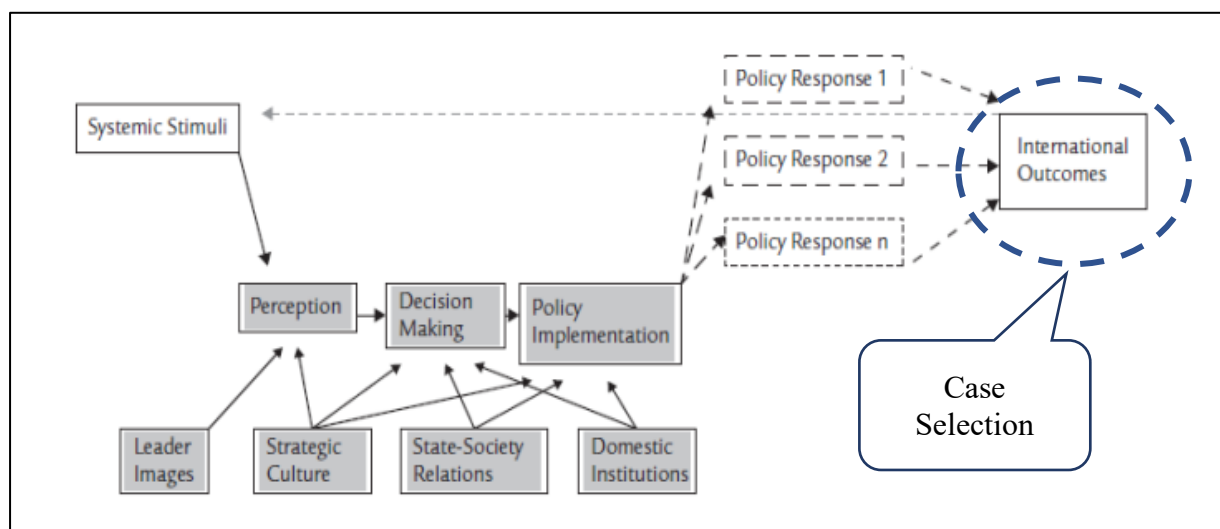


Figure 4 – Case Selection Using Neoclassical Realist Model

supports my goal of description and explanation from a Russian point of view. As such, this paper does not attempt to prove causation. Rather, I utilize the broad theoretical model already baked into neoclassical realism to guide my efforts towards description and explanation of context. Although these four cases are similar in terms of what defines them as like events, they also have key differences. Most importantly, each case occurred during a different time period and with different durations.

In broad application, the cases begin as soon as sizeable military operations confront adversarial forces within the territory of a foreign state. Likewise, cases end with the cessation of military hostilities as outlined in ceasefire or other post-confrontational agreements. I do not

define exactly what constitutes “sizeable military operations” in order to not arbitrarily cut out key contextual data that occurs prior to and after military operations. Pre-intervention perceptions and events obviously condition the Russian rationale for intervention in each case. Likewise, subsequent post-intervention events and the inherent time delay involved with the formulation of state perceptions should be considered as contextually relevant. For example, it may take some time for the military to provide state leaders with after action reports and other key performance-related findings that could signal a meaningful shift in relative power.

As such, I align the start and stop demarcations of each case to timelines widely accepted by Russian and international sources. But I also take into account events that occur before and after the cases in order to better glean insight into what happened in the cases, why and how they change the “structural stimuli” within the international system (see left side of Figure 4). Instead of looking at a specific window of time either side of the case, I relied source data to help inform me when to start or stop linking data. As a rule of thumb, I focused initially within a time band of one year on either side of the case. I then expanded the time bands until I in my best estimation relevant data was no longer present. This process remained emergent throughout my research. Regarding the final three cases, I relied on software-assisted content analysis to assist with establishing relevant time bands.

In the case of Moldova, Russian armed intervention began on June 20, 1992 and ended with a formally negotiated ceasefire on August 1, 1992. Other armed hostilities took place in the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic and newly independent Moldova prior to the case’s onset. As expected, these events help explain the case but do not involve the Russian intervention directly, therefore they technically occur outside the case.

Although much shorter, establishing a start date for the Georgian case remains contested. By most accounts, Russian military forces crossed their border on August 7, 2008 and moved into the autonomous Republic of South Ossetia, recognized within the international system as a part of Georgian territory. Armed hostilities between Russian and Georgian forces, however, didn't begin until the next day on August 8, just past midnight Moscow time. As the case study will explain, both sides still dispute the actual timeline. For the purposes of this study, I use the start date of August 8 because explaining the Russian rationale for it remains instructive to understanding the Kremlin's grand strategy. The case lasts just five days with an EU-brokered ceasefire agreement materializing on August 12. Similar to the first case of Moldova, hostilities that occurred in the region before the case impacted the Russian decision to use armed force against Georgia.

Bounding the third case, Russia's fait accompli in Crimea, also benefits from a decidedly Russian point of view. Here it is instructive to take the dates listed on the medals awarded by the Russian Ministry of Defense to participating soldiers (see Figure 5). Accordingly, the case began



Figure 5 – Medal “for the return of Crimea” issued by the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation

on February 20, 2014 and ended the next month on March 18 with a “treaty of accession.” Defining the timeline of the third case, however, remains contentious. First, the official start per the Russian medal predates military action that for many marks the onset of armed intervention. For example, Treisman provides an account that suggests intervention operations began only on February 23.²⁰⁴ Second, Kiev and

²⁰⁴ Daniel Treisman, “Why Putin Took Crimea,” *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 3 (June 2016): 52.

many onlookers refuse to recognize Russia's annexation of Crimea. From this perspective, Russia still remains actively engaged in a military intervention turned long-term occupation.²⁰⁵

Unlike with Crimea, the final case in Syria clearly remains in progress. With a case start date of September 30, 2015, the Russian intervention continues amidst ongoing operations. The fact that this case is not yet over limits some aspects for cross-case comparison. Post-hostilities changes in leader perceptions about relative power largely hinge upon the degree to which the Russians are successful. Likewise, changes to the balance of power vis-à-vis the U.S. will likely occur too if the Kremlin were to somehow score a major geopolitical victory. One can envision how a strong Assad regime with control over all its territory at some point down the road would greatly bolster the Kremlin's international prestige. Nevertheless, the onset of intervention and the Russian experience in Syria thus far provide a great deal of insight into Russian strategic culture, grand strategy and how the Kremlin crafts the story about Russia's historical inertia.

Other instances of Russian military activity—Tajikistan, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Eastern Ukraine, and Chechnya—might be considered as overseas military interventions, but I do not include them in this study. Time constraints simply do not allow for more cases. In addition, their inclusion may not add more meaningful insight than already accounted for with the four selected cases. The case of Russian peacekeepers in Tajikistan, for example, covers the same timeframe and political considerations as the Moldova case, but with much less content available regarding the intervention. Additionally, most Russian operations in Tajikistan were multinational in nature and lacked a real geopolitical desire by the Kremlin to be

²⁰⁵ Wikipedia for example maintains a webpage as of 5 March 2020 entitled, "Russian military intervention in Ukraine (2014–present)." See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_military_intervention_in_Ukraine_\(2014–present\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_military_intervention_in_Ukraine_(2014–present))

there. Russian operations in South Ossetia and Abkhazia also retained more of a peacekeeping characteristic and therefore do not stand alone in my research, but their highly relevant circumstances will be considered in the case of Georgia.

Nagorno-Karabakh shares with Tajikistan a similar geopolitical context—namely, a reluctant Russia as peacekeeper that works within multinational confines. There are also reasons to discount this case as an actual armed intervention by the Russian military: a multinational dynamic, support from most Western nations and relatively little use of Russian military assets and personnel. Russia’s military provocations in the Donbass region of eastern Ukraine certainly look like hostile interventionist actions against Ukraine. Nevertheless, much of this case’s context relevant to Russian grand strategy will be present in the Crimea case. Therefore, cutting one case from Ukraine but keeping the other maintains the same scope of research but with a more manageable workload given my tight deadline.

The main reason for Chechnya’s exclusion as a case from this study rests on territorial borders—it’s technically part of the Russian Federation. The right for the Russian military to conduct operations on its own soil, in what can be caged as a localized civil war, remains hard to dispute. Several states and human rights organizations criticized Russia for violating rules that govern the conduct of war during the two post-Soviet Chechen wars. These criticisms, however, gained little traction formally or informally. Conflict against terrorists and other armed groups in the North Caucasus nevertheless remains brightly ingrained in the national memory of contemporary Russians. As Prime Minister in 1999, Putin delivered a memorable quote about dealing with terrorists that remains an enduring part of popular culture: “...if we catch them in

the latrine, then we kill them there. That's it, the matter is closed (Author's translation)."²⁰⁶

Indeed, the historical and emotional impact that the wars in Chechnya placed on the Russian nation and government help explain other instances of Russian military intervention. Despite their exclusion from this study, the cases of Russian military operations in Tajikistan, Nagorno-Karabakh, Chechnya and Donbass remain tied to Russian national interests and merit future consideration should time and resources permit.

Data Collection & Analysis

Sources

As a consequence of my military status and previous work at the embassy in Moscow, the researcher is not allowed to conduct academic research in Russia or formally collaborate with Russian academic institutions. In addition, I do not want to cause unintended consequences for citizens inside Russia who might assist my research. As such, the majority of my research will be conducted at distance. My primary sources include archived newspapers and websites, recorded and transcribed interviews, official Russian documents and communications, as well as photos and video. Secondary sources include books, magazines, websites, blogs and newspapers after the fact.

This paper relies a great deal on information taken from the *Military Industrial Courier* (VPK), the Russian weekly newspaper that specializes in reporting on the defense industry within both domestic and international contexts.²⁰⁷ The Russian acronym for military industrial complex

²⁰⁶ Quote in Russian: “Российские самолеты наносят удары исключительно по базам террористов. Мы будем преследовать террористов везде. В аэропорту – в аэропорту. Значит, вы уж меня извините, в туалете поймает – мы и в сортире их замочим, в конце концов. Все, вопрос закрыт окончательно.”
<https://namednibook.ru/operaciya-preemnik-putin-mochit-v-s.html>

²⁰⁷ The VPK publishers also maintain a robust website with additional material and news at: <https://www.vpk-news.ru/>

(MIC) is also VPK in Russian. There is no doubt the publishers intentionally chose the word “courier” in order to create the double acronym—VPK (military industrial complex/courier). Thankfully there is more to *VPK* than just smart marketing. Since its first issue on August 19, 2003, *VPK* has become a reliable standard-bearer in the Russian mass media market.²⁰⁸ *VPK* is one of the leading Russian publications—if not the leader—with a voice that represents interests and perspectives widely held in the Russian MIC.²⁰⁹

Head author for ideas at *VPK* since 2004 and member of the Russian Academy of Military Sciences, Igor Raufovich Ashurbeyli, brings a world-class resume to the publication.²¹⁰ It is true that he also doubles as the leader of Asgardia, the first space nation.²¹¹ But within the Russian defense industry, Ashurbeyli’s leadership and technical acumen have been very consequential. For example, from 2000 to 2011, he was the General Director of the anti-aircraft defense systems company NPO Almaz, where he oversaw the implementation of key upgrades to the S-300 Favorite, the creation of the S-400 Triumph, and the design of the S-500 and Vityaz surface to air missile systems (SAM).²¹² Ashurbeyli also authored the concept designs for Russia’s 5th generation integrated air defense architecture. The SAM systems from NPO Almaz underpin the much-discussed military concept known in the West as anti-access area denial

²⁰⁸ “Директору Общероссийской Еженедельной Газеты «Военно-Промышленный Курьер» Зарине Гуриевой [Zarina Gurieva, Director of the All-Russian Weekly Newspaper Military-Industrial Courier],” Socium Holding, June 19, 2018, <https://www.socium-a.ru/news/article/18-iyunya-den-rozhdeniya-otmetila-zarina-gurieva-17332>.

²⁰⁹ “Книга «Социум». Зарина Гуриева: Формируем Повестку Дня [The Book ‘The Socium’. Zarina Gurieva: We Are Forming the Agenda],” July 10, 2018, <https://www.socium-a.ru/news/article/kniga-socium-formiruem-povestku-dnya-17384>.

²¹⁰ For biography/CV, see: <https://www.ashurbeyli.ru/p/status>

²¹¹ For more on Asgardia, see: <https://asgardia.space/en/>

²¹² NPO Almaz in Russian: ГСКБ Концерна ПВО “Алмаз-Антей,” <http://raspletin.com/>

(A2/AD).²¹³ Whether these systems strictly represent air defense capabilities or instead embody a larger Russian military strategy by design, Ashurbeyli's experience in this field and others lends a distinctive credibility to the *VPK* voice.²¹⁴

In 2015, *VPK* initiated an award, the "Shield and Sword of the Fatherland," presented to artists who best capture the spirit and imagination of the Russian MIC, its people and its outlays. Aleksandr Prokhanov, the award's first laureate, lamented the "abyss" into which Russia fell during the 1990s, but celebrates the dedicated workers that humanize the MIC's resilience and eventual resurgence:

"They retained the main (MIC) sanctuaries and values. They were engineers, designers, directors, heads of special departments that kept secrets, technology, and did not let the teams collapse. They created thousands of inventions, but they did not leave (in the 1990s), they preserved the country's defense and industrial complex."²¹⁵

In Prokhanov's view, the Russian MIC survives despite the repression of Stalin, communism and the many enemies arrived on Russia's doorstep, such as "Stefan Batory, the Livonian Order, Napoleon, Hitler or the current Western armada." In the spirit of *VPK*'s award, Prokhanov proclaimed Russia's "divine dreams about eternal justice and beauty." He also noted how other states in the world surrender to the blows of injustice, but he opined that "thank God" Russia has a special mission in the world: "We will still stand with one foot on the Pacific Ocean and with the other foot on the Arctic Ocean," destined to take on the battles for humanity.

²¹³ Tomasz Smura, "Russian Anti-Access Area Denial (A2AD) Capabilities - Implications for NATO," Casimir Pulaski Foundation, November 27, 2016, <https://pulaski.pl/en/russian-anti-access-area-denial-a2ad-capabilities-implications-for-nato/>.

²¹⁴ Michael Kofman, "It's Time To Talk About A2/AD: Rethinking The Russian Military Challenge," War on the Rocks, September 5, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/09/its-time-to-talk-about-a2-ad-rethinking-the-russian-military-challenge/>.

²¹⁵ Aleksandr Prokhanov, "Гвардия Развития [Development's Guardian]," *Voenno-Promyshlennyi Kur'er (VPK)*, December 23, 2015, No. 49 (615) edition, <https://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/28597>.

In a nutshell, *VPK* lies at the nexus of society, politics, economics, and the military, speaking with an authoritative voice decidedly in support of the MIC and armed forces of Russia. The publication protects the rights of defense enterprises, unites their efforts and helps promote military products in the domestic and foreign markets. Leading domestic experts within the MIC professional community actively cooperate with the newspaper, which regularly features in the Russia mass media. The weekly *VPK* provides content in several categories: military modernization, geopolitics, the MIC economy, defense industry problems and achievements, and law enforcement. *VPK* targets both domestic and international audiences: Russia's Presidential administration, the government of the Russian Federation, Federation Council, State Duma, Security Council of the Russian Federation, Audit Chamber of the Russian Federation, Military Industrial Commission under the Government of the Russian Federation, Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, as well as other government organizations, ministries and departments, enterprises of the MIC of Russia and CIS countries, and foreign diplomatic missions. For all these reasons, I rely on *VPK* as a proxy for the Russian MIC.

The following Russian language sources have also proven extremely useful: The Sulakshin Center for Political Science Ideas and Ideology, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs archives dating back to 2004 including the *Diplomaticheskii vestnik* publication; the Russian Duma's catalogue of official documents; the Kremlin and President of Russia websites and online archives; Russian interagency statistics website, fedstat.ru; the federal state statistical service, gks.ru; Russian Prosecutor General, genproc.gov.ru; the scientific-research center for national security problems, nic-pnb.ru; United Nations multimedia archives, unmultimedia.org; and numerous open-source publications from Russian academic institutions.

Additionally, numerous Russian newspapers (*Kommersant*, *Izvestia*, *Rossiskaya Gazeta*, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* etc.) offer online searchable archives. Russian historical texts, documents and books can also be accessed online in official Russian government archives pertaining to military and political affairs since WW2, such as rgavfm.ru and archive.mil.ru. Finally, research data and analyses can be readily accessed from think tanks and academic research centers on both sides of the Atlantic such as the following: Russian Center for Strategic Research, Carnegie Moscow Center, Institute of Modern Russia, The Russian International Affairs Council, The Jamestown Center, RAND, Brookings Institute, U.S. military war colleges, the Foreign Policy Research Institute and others.

Process

My research framework follows an emergent process with emphasis on adapting to and making adjustments as new discoveries occur. A tailored process for data collection includes the use of ATLAS.ti software specifically designed for QDA. ATLAS.ti affords the researcher a digital workspace that centralizes everything in a project such as documents, code book, coded data segments, memos, hyperlinks and space for group collaboration. This toolset allows for the linkage of semantic ideas and a quotational system that was designed to support inductive, interpretive phases of research. The software also incorporates a visual network tool to assist in conceptual level analysis.

My research process included following the Five Level QDA Method developed by Woolf and Silver.²¹⁶ As the name indicates, this method guides the researcher in five process

²¹⁶ Nicholas H. Woolf, *Qualitative Analysis Using ATLAS.Ti: The Five-Level QDA Method* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018).

phases: developing objectives, creating the overall analytic plan, translating analytic tasks into software tasks, software tool selection, and custom use of software operations. This QDA method supports an emergent process with an iterative process in which data can be refined as analytic assumptions change with the discovery of new information. I augmented this approach with the QDA guidelines and techniques outlined by Friese.²¹⁷ This text was extremely beneficial to learning how to use ATLAS.ti software and conduct my first cut of data analysis.

It was during this first cut that I experimented with codes, narrowed the focus of my research and settled on the *VPK* as a primary focus. Within the neoclassical realist model, domestic institutions play a significant role in the intervening process between systemic stimuli and international outcomes. Figure 6 below highlights the IIV group of domestic institutions, with a dashed circle around it, which pinpoints where the MIC sits within neoclassical realist model. It is from this vantage point that *VPK* by proxy views and interacts with the system that produced the military intervention outcomes of interest. In this way, my research looks across

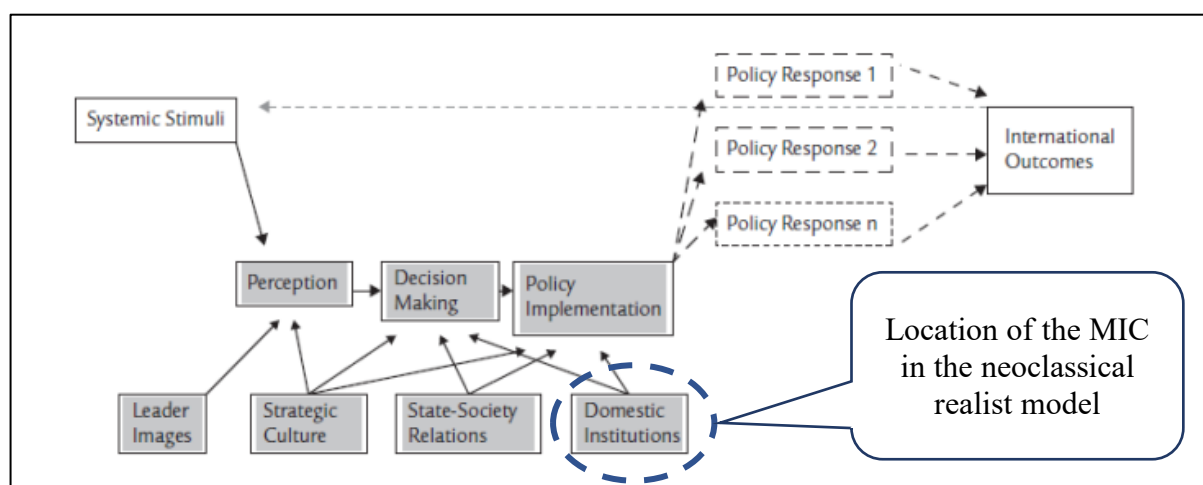


Figure 6 – *VPK* as proxy for MIC domestic institutions within the neoclassical realist model

²¹⁷ Susanne Friese, *Qualitative Data Analysis with ATLAS.Ti*, Second edition.. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2014).

four cases that are more or less in series. Essentially, these cases represent four phases of contemporary Russian grand strategy as viewed by the Russian MIC.

QDA of *VPK* content was not used for the first case (Moldova) because publication began only in 2003. But *VPK* lent robust content for the final three cases and as a result provides a unique feature to this paper. In my first cut of data analysis, I utilized free downloadable content provided on the publisher's website.²¹⁸ Essentially, each file contains a PDF file with one weekly issue beginning with the first issue from 2004. These files load into ATLAS.ti but lose a great deal of function due to the many narrow columns and subsequent line breaks that split words in ways the software neither understands nor can repair. After a successful first cut look at these files, the Northwestern University library procured access to the entire *VPK* content ranging from 2003-2019 through a copyright agreement with Eastview.²¹⁹

The new *VPK* data arrived in 21,762 files in Extensible Markup Language (XML) format. Each file contains a single article. I renamed the files to make them chronologically sortable. Unfortunately, ATLAS.ti does not support the XML format. As such, I batch converted these files into TXT file format and loaded them into ATLAS.ti. Organizing these files in ATLAS.ti was made simple through a naming convention that contained the date of the article at the beginning of each file name. This also made searching and sorting files much easier, especially when it came using the library search function in ATLAS.ti. Alongside the robust documentation tools in ATLAS.ti, I also kept a journal to keep track of the emergent discoveries

²¹⁸ For *VPK* archive 2004-present, see: <https://www.vpk-news.ru/issues>

²¹⁹ *VPK* is a part of Eastview's UDB-MIL collection. For database descriptions and services, see: <https://www.eastview.com/>

and associated insights, reflections, contradictions. In an iterative way, these items prompted new task lists to accomplish in order to adjust accordingly to emerging lines of inquiry.

Scope

Robert Gilpin's insights about change in the international system informed my thinking about how to best establish scope parameters of research. According to Gilpin, "the most prestigious members of the international system are those states that have most recently used military force or economic power successfully and have thereby imposed their will on others."²²⁰ Bearing this in mind, I focus my cases on the first element of prestige—use of military force. Although Gilpin also asserts the importance of "economic power," this paper is not focused on economics. For sure, economics play a significant role in facilitating military power. As such, I include some discussions about economic issues in this paper, but I do so only to support my aims of explaining military interventions and grand strategy.

Because this paper focuses on grand strategy, I intentionally ignore a great deal of tactical and operational content as it relates to military interventions. Although tactical discussions can be useful for the warfighter, such as parsing through the tactics of "hybrid" warfare, this paper focuses on the state as a primary actor within a larger anarchical system of states. This paper instead examines data on the level of grand strategy, the logic that drives a state to make larger muscle movements in pursuit of national and security interests.

Analysis

²²⁰ Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 32.

This project follows both inductive and deductive lines of research. It is deductive in terms of theory formulation—I use an already established model of international relations provided by neoclassical realists. This model was chosen after my first cut of data collection and analysis, when it became clear that neoclassical realism pairs well with the 19th century “Concert of Nations” view of the world that I discovered in the pages of *VPK* and other Russian sources. Instead of developing a new theory of Russia state behavior, my research looks at cases of military intervention with the aim of inductively arriving at Russian grand strategy as viewed by the MIC. The way in which I channel Russian grand strategy, is by inferring it from the results of cross-case comparison. In other words, Russia’s grand strategy is what the Russian MIC says it is.

Two key elements of structure in the neoclassical realist model underpin where I triangulate cross-case trends and salient comparisons—systemic clarity and the nature of the strategic environment. As discussed in the previous chapter, these key independent variables drive state behavior. The state behavior is an intervening process that ultimately leads to the the dependent variable—international outcomes. As such, I’m looking at two key IVs through the lens of an important IIV (the Russian MIC) to describe and explain why certain DVs (armed intervention) occur.

VPK's data placed an emphasis on the importance of leadership perceptions about the IVs and how they change in reaction to each additional iteration of the DV. In other words, the MIC is concerned a great deal with structural changes to the system and perceptions about changes in relative power. *VPK* data bore out a additional focus on state-society relations in terms of cultivating national will to support the state's use of military force abroad. Figure 7 highlights these focus areas from the perspective of the Russian MIC.

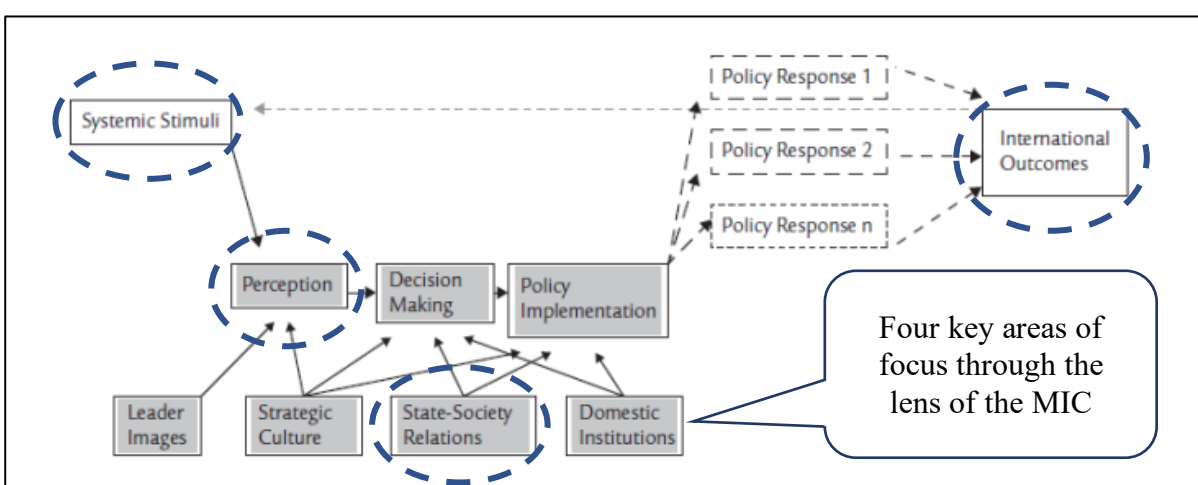


Figure 7 – Four areas of research focus driven by the MIC, a domestic institutional IIV

Having already overviewed systemic clarity and the nature of the strategic environment in the previous chapter, this section expands on the analysis of these two DVs. In terms of systemic clarity, I qualitatively assess *VPK* articles using three elements of clarity: discernibility of threats and opportunities, time horizon of threats and opportunities, and clarity of policy options.²²¹ Drawing on the works of Walt, Gaddis and Kennan, Ripsman et al. arrive at several questions that assess the element of discernibility. As such, these questions define the characteristics of discernibility: intent, capability and scope of imminence. My research, asks to what extent does the data show the following:

²²¹ Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*.

Discernibility of threats (posed by another state)—²²²

- “revisionism or expressed hostility to harm the state’s territorial integrity or core interests”
- “economic and military capability to inflict harm on the state”
- “a sense of imminence...to inflict harm in short order”

Discernibility of opportunities (to gain in relative power vis-à-vis another state)—²²³

- “evidence that relative capabilities favor the state in question”
- “evidence that other consequential parties lack the political resolve to resist the state’s moves in the theater in question”
- “evidence that a favorable balance of capabilities and resolve will not persist indefinitely, making it important to act as soon as possible”

Time horizon of threats and opportunities (estimated or perceived by state leaders)—²²⁴

- “adversary behavior signals either imminent attack or indefinite withdrawal”

Presence of clear policy options (a relatively rare phenomenon)—²²⁵

- “optimal policy options” exist to respond to threats
- “optimal policy options” exist to pursue opportunities

In aggregate, these questions assess systemic clarity, the lack of which is uncertainty. In QDA, specific measures of clarity remain elusive. After all, it is extremely difficult to perfectly assess conditions that always include imperfect informational and actors that may not behave rationally. As such, measuring systemic clarity typically takes on an estimate along a slide scale between two opposites—high and low. Regarding the specific terminology of threats, Oleg Nechiporenko distinguishes between three useful terms in Russian: “security, danger and threat (author’s translation).”²²⁶ Each term carries its own nuance and unfortunately they are not

²²² Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, 46–47; Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 22–28; Stephen M. Walt, *Revolution and War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 21–26; Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy*, 60.

²²³ Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 47; Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict*, 74–75.

²²⁴ Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 48.

²²⁵ Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, 48–49.

²²⁶ Oleg Nechiporenko, “Заблудились В Трех Терминах Как В Соснах [Lost In Three Terms Like Lost In A Forest],” *Voенно-promыshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, December 4, 2013, No47 (515) edition.

applied evenly throughout Russian scholarship on security studies and international relations. Nonetheless, I follow Nechiporenko’s lead on using this terminology as a guide for assessing systemic clarity and the strategic environment in each case study.

The nature of the strategic environment can also be assessed in these broad assessments of high and low. As a reminder, clarity pertains to “the scope of information the system provides,” while the strategic environment “pertains to the content of that information.”²²⁷ The nature of the strategic environment is said to be either permissive or restrictive. This permissiveness consists of two elements: imminence and magnitude. Imminence qualifies the actual danger posed by a threat. In this sense, the time horizon element of systemic clarity does not mean the same thing as imminence because a clear threat might have little ability to act in a foreseeable timeframe. Magnitude refers to the severity of a threat. The elements of imminence and magnitude can also be applied to a state’s opportunities to create relative power advantages.

Just as with clarity, my research asks questions to assess the nature of the strategic environment for each of my case studies—to what extent does the data show the following:

Imminence of threats (posed by another state)—²²⁸

- “a clear and present danger or opportunity”

Imminence of opportunities (to gain in relative power vis-à-vis another state)—²²⁹

- “a clear and present” opportunity

Magnitude of threats (estimated or perceived by state leaders)—²³⁰

²²⁷ Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 52.

²²⁸ Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, 52.

²²⁹ Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, 52.

²³⁰ Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, 52–53.

- Evidence that a threat is severe

Magnitude of opportunities (estimated or perceived by state leaders)—²³¹

- Evidence that an opportunity is attractive

All of the questions presented above helped establish a coding process. During my first cut of research using ATLAS.ti, I created a codebook shown in Table 2 below. This coding process required identifying important content in the *VPK* articles and then encoding it accordingly. After sufficient coding, the emergence of patterns, trends and themes begin to take shape. Ideally, I would read and encode every article in my *VPK* database. Unfortunately, I have neither the time nor the resources required to fund a sufficiently large research team to encode the entire dataset. I considered taking random samples of the data as an objective way to trim down the content to a more manageable volume. The way the data is organized—one file is one article—means that all samples are not equal. Some articles are editorials by key figures in the government, while other articles are very short and merely provide a few facts about a recent MIC deal between India and Israel. In the end, I chose a pragmatic strategy of using target words and phrases to elicit meaningful content. Here, the process remained emergent thought out all phases of collection and analysis.

Table 2 illustrates how my codebook was applied to each case. The left-hand side of the table works its way towards the middle by breaking down systemic stimuli (clarity and nature of strategic environment) into their elements and subsequent attributes. The coding in blue were assigned to *VPK* articles. During the analysis phase, these codes were used to assess each element attribute in terms of High (H), Medium (M) or Low (L). Although these conclusions

²³¹ Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, 52–53.

Table 2 – Codebook and its application in assessing systemic clarity and the nature of the strategic environment

| Systemic Stimuli | Stimuli Elements | Element Attributes | Code Book | Case 1 | Case 2 | Case 3 | Case 4 |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|---------|--------|--------|
| | | | | Moldova | Georgia | Crimea | Syria |
| Clarity | Discernability | Threat Intent | CDT.intent.H | H | L | M | H |
| | | | CDT.intent.L | | | | |
| | | Threat Capability | CDT.cape.H | L | L | H | H |
| | | | CDT.cape.L | | | | |
| | | Threat Imminence (Scope) | CDT.imminent.H | L | L | H | H |
| | | | CDT.imminent.L | | | | |
| | Advantage Opportunity | CDO.advantage.H | H | H | H | H | |
| | | CDO.advantage.L | | | | | |
| | Adversarial Resolve | CDO.resolve.H | L | L | L | H | |
| | | CDO.resolve.L | | | | | |
| | Opportunity Imminence (Scope) | CDO.urgent.H | H | M | H | H | |
| | | CDO.urgent.L | | | | | |
| Time Horizon | Threat Signals | CTT.quickchange.H | M | M | M | H | |
| | | CTT.quickchange.L | | | | | |
| Opportunity for Advantage | CTO.quickchange.H | L | L | M | H | | |
| | CTO.quickchange.L | | | | | | |
| Optimal Options | Threat Policy Options | COT.optimalpolicy.H | L | L | L | L | |
| | | COT.optimalpolicy.L | | | | | |
| Opportunity Policy Options | COO.optimalpolicy.H | L | L | L | L | | |
| | COO.optimalpolicy.L | | | | | | |
| Nature of Strategic Environment | Imminence (Content) | Threat Danger | SEIT.danger.H | H | L | H | L |
| | | | SEIT.danger.L | | | | |
| | Opportunity Attractiveness | SEIO.attractive.H | L | L | H | L | |
| | | SEIO.attractive.L | | | | | |
| | Magnitude | Threat Impact | SEMT.impact.H | H | M | H | M |
| | | | SEMT.impact.L | | | | |
| Opportunity Impact | SEMO.impact.H | H | M | H | L | | |
| | SEMO.impact.L | | | | | | |
| | | | | H = High, M = Medium, L = Low | | | |
| Case-Specific Codes | | Case 1 | Mol1 | | | | |
| | | Case 2 | Geo2 | | | | |
| | | Case 3 | Krm3 | | | | |
| | | Case 4 | Syr4 | | | | |

represent only broad notions of clarity and the strategic environment, the differences between them across cases impart a great deal of knowledge. Additional coding was devised throughout the process. For example, it was useful to also code by case in order to better utilize the analytic tools in the ATLAS.ti software. These assessments were further reduced to create Table 1, introduced in the previous chapter. The next chapters will further explain these and other insights.

Chapter 4 – Moldova 1992: Low Clarity in a Restrictive Environment

“10 years in Poland, 10 months in Hungary, 10 weeks in East Germany and 10 days in Czechoslovakia—and when the time does come, it will take 10 hours or 10 minutes in Romania.”

The Word on the Street in Eastern Europe, 1989²³²

“We are constantly accused of carrying out some kind of military activity. Where? On our territory. But the fact that our borders are evolving is normal.”

President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, 2016²³³

“...I saw Mr. Putin answer questions about military spending at a conference he was conducting. He answered without joking, saying that if you do not take care of your army, you will start feeding someone else's.”

Prime Minister of Moldova Pavel Filip, 2018²³⁴

This chapter establishes a baseline with which to frame Russia’s transition as a newly formed state in the post-Soviet world community before it becomes the more capable geopolitical competitor of today. Table 3 below shows Russia’s transition over time amidst changing conditions in the international system and across this paper’s four cases of military intervention. The context within which Russia engaged in military interventions is constructed using broad assessments of systematic clarity and the nature of the strategic environment. When combined, these systemic stimuli construct a larger picture of a Russian state using armed force under four different combinations of structural conditions. This chapter focuses on the first of these four cases: Russia’s 40-day armed intervention in Moldova during the summer of 1992.

²³² “The Curtain Rises: Eastern Europe, 1989,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 17, 1989, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1989-12-17-ss-1794-story.html>.

²³³ “Putin accused NATO of pushing Russia towards a ‘militaristic frenzy’ (Author’s translation).”

²³⁴ Author’s translation from: Pavel Muntyan, “«Если Не Позаботишься о Своей Армии, Начнешь Кормить Чужую»: Как Повздорили Президент Молдовы и Премьер-Министр Из-За Цитаты Путина [“If You Don’t Take Care of Your Army, You’ll Start Feeding Someone Else’s”]: How the President and Prime Minister of Moldova Argued Over A Quote by Putin],” *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, March 2, 2018, <https://www.kp.md/daily/26801/3836617/#print>.

Moldova sits in the bottom right quadrant of Table 3. Accordingly, Moldova is a case in which Russia faced **low systemic clarity** in a very **restrictive strategic environment**. Moldova posed a clearly discernible threat to Russian sovereignty and national interests, but the imminence and capability of this threat remained low or vague. In short, there was little clarity beyond Kishinev's expressed desires to unite Moldova with Romania. In terms of the strategic environment, no matter how weak the Moldovan government was vis-à-vis Russia, the magnitude of the threat to Russians living in Pridnestrovia was unacceptably high (see on map in Figure 8).²³⁵ Importantly, the Kremlin was constrained by a tight timeline, narrow set of policy prescriptions and no general consensus on how to best engage in its "near abroad." A success in Moldova, however, posed a great opportunity for the Kremlin to establish expectations for dealing with similar threats erupting in other parts of the former Soviet republics, home to some 25 million Russians.

Table 3 – Post-Soviet Russian Interventions: Systemic Clarity and the Nature of the Strategic Environment

| | | Nature of Strategic Environment (Permissive to Restrictive) | |
|---|--------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| | | Permissive Strategic Environment | Restrictive Strategic Environment |
| Degree of Systemic Clarity (High to Low) | High Clarity | Syria (2015) | Crimea (2014) |
| | Low Clarity | Georgia (2008) | Moldova (1992) |

Introduction

²³⁵ Map source file accessed from Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2001621369/>



Figure 8 – Map of Moldova. Pridnestrovie in red.

In 2016, President Putin intimated that fluctuating national borders are a normal phenomenon within the international system, coyly implying that Russian forces only operate within its own borders. This juxtaposition between negotiable borders on the one hand and the sanctity of territorial integrity on the other, captures perfectly contemporary Russia's tiered view towards other states—near abroad vs far abroad. Russia's near abroad consists of the 14 former Soviet Republics. This conception is political, not geographically driven. Some states in the near abroad border Russia, some do not. Some states that border Russia (e.g. Poland, China, etc.) are

not considered in Russia's near abroad. Within the near abroad, Russia maintains a wide variance of relations from outright hostile to cordial and collaborative.

According to Moldova's Prime Minister, Putin also had previously joked about the dark realities awaiting weak nations unable to defend themselves. Just as Thucydides wrote over two thousand years ago, one can imagine Putin conjuring up the same words, "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must."²³⁶ Should it even come as a surprise that Russia's first military foray after the collapse of the Soviet Union still features in tensions between Moscow and the West? As the case below will illustrate, Russia's actions in Moldova during 1992 served in many ways to create a precedent for future Russian policy towards its near abroad as well as to establish a foundation for a distinctively 19th century understanding of state sovereignty.

This chapter explains just how Russia became militarily involved in Moldova and why the events of 1992 remain so consequential today. Russian area specialists and scholars, especially those in the West, often assert that Putin's turn towards an autocratic style of democracy somehow subverted the country's natural course of social and political evolution—the embracement of liberal values and subsequent integration into the international community as a "normal" nation.²³⁷ The sudden collapse of the "evil empire" may have shocked the international order, but its relatively peaceful demise ushered in a new era of optimism for peace among great powers. This enthusiasm became contagious as droves of Western technocrats

²³⁶ Thucydides, *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, Free Press trade pbk. ed.. (New York: Free Press, 2008), 352.

²³⁷ Elena Shestopal, ed., *New Trends in Russian Political Mentality: Putin 3.0* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016); Lilia Shevtsova, "Post-communist Russia: A Historic Opportunity Missed," *International Affairs* 83, no. 5 (2007): 891–912, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2007.00661.x>.

hurried to Russia to build up its democratic institutions. It is understandable how some early circumstances misled many of us about the autocratic direction of Russia's inevitable rise.

As a fledgling democracy, Yeltsin's Russia was supposed to stay clear of military intervention, especially in sub-regional conflicts in the former Soviet republics. It was clear at the time that the Soviet Union was too large and too inefficient to pursue armed adventurism. The economic burden alone was enough a reason for Russia to adopt policies to cut loose the other republics. Indeed, seemingly every step along the way President Yeltsin supported the international community's preference to promote democratic stability and Western liberal values. Russia embraced the West while letting the other states chart their own course. According to Dmitri Trenin:

“1991 marked a watershed in Russia's perceptions of her own identity and interests. Empire-building and Communist ideology both became discredited. In its desire to ‘dump’ the other Soviet republics, the Russian political elite consciously precipitated the collapse of the USSR. It regarded the republics as a drain on Russian resources. Its actions were guided by a set of interests which could be summarized as *‘back to the family of civilized nations.’*”²³⁸

But despite Yeltsin's best efforts to keep Russia out of trouble, it did not take long for Russia to get involved in military interventionism.

The problem at heart is one that post-colonial Africa knows all too well: *uti possidetis juris* (as you possess under the law).²³⁹ This is the Westphalian principle that preferences stability within the international state system over the self-determinist rights of minority groups

²³⁸ Dmitri Trenin, “Russia's Security Interests and Policies in the Caucasus Region,” in *Contested Borders in the Caucasus*, ed. Bruno Coppieters, online open library (Brussels: VUB Press, 1996), <http://poli.vub.ac.be/publi/ContBorders/eng/ch0301.htm>.

²³⁹ For detailed cases of international borders impacting conflict in Africa, see: William Reno, *Warfare in Independent Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

within recognized territorial borders. Simply put, *uti possidetis* is an internationally recognized norm that guarantees the territorial integrity of states. As such newly created states retain recognized borders from their predecessor states. *Uti possidetis* becomes especially important in cases of state dissolution and decolonization because states are denied the opportunity to redraw borders. This became problematic in parts of post-Colonial Africa where some borders were either arbitrary manifestations of imperialism or purposefully drawn to cause ethnic division for imperial benefit. Scholars therefore credit *uti possidetis* for helping reduce the incidence of interstate war, but they also recognize at the same time the norm has unintentionally encouraged a significant uptick in civil war since decolonization took place last century.²⁴⁰

As was the case in post-colonial Africa, the borders inherited by new states after the breakup of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union did not satisfy all internal ethnic groups. The case of Moldova is no different. Andrei Tsygankov asserts that in 1991 Yeltsin pursued a path of isolationism in order to wean other republics off of a centralized Russia. For example, the following year in 1992, Russia doled out \$17 billion worth of subsidies outside Russia.²⁴¹ As is often the case, a large military is expensive. As such, four goals underpinned Yeltsin's isolation efforts: "the fastest possible withdrawal of Russian troops from outside Russia; Tacit support of the control introduced by governments in the 'near abroad' on former Soviet troops; Improving relations with the central governments while ignoring separatists within CIS states; Inviting foreign participation in settling conflicts in the 'near abroad.'"²⁴²

²⁴⁰ Hendrik Spruyt, "Civil Wars as Challenges to the Modern International System," *Daedalus* 146, no. 4 (2017): 112–125, https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00463.

²⁴¹ Alexander A Pikayev, "The Russian Domestic Debate on Policy towards the 'Near Abroad,'" in *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, ed. Lena Jonson and Clive Archer (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996).

²⁴² Pikayev, 52–53.

Yeltsin's four-point plan towards integration with the West, however, proved too difficult to follow. In short, Russia's historical arc pulled Moscow back into orbit. More specifically, revanchist hardliners back home forced Yeltsin's hand, and Russia's 14th Army stationed in Moldova was the card he had to play to keep a firm grip on power in the Kremlin. In Russian politics, the Kremlin must be strong. Kotkin observes how the Russian state's self-image contrasts with the West: "For Russia, the highest value is the state; for the United States, it is individual liberty, private property, and human rights, usually set out in opposition to the state."²⁴³ In this context, the case of Russian intervention in Moldova piggybacks on events that took place during the buildup to the Soviet Union's collapse—a time of sifting out a balance between the competing values of state stability and self-determination.

The euphoric quote atop this chapter captures the great buzz taking place on the streets all across central and eastern Europe during 1989. This was largescale social upheaval fueled by the unexpected capitulation of communism and all the great expectations for newfound freedom that accompanied it. Moldovans watched these world events unfold and many began to hope for a better society, one without communism. Especially among the ethnic Moldovan majority, these hopes included pursuing a union with their culturally close neighbor, Romania; and it certainly did not hurt that Romania was next in line to break the shackles of communism. Unfortunately, there was a large group of society in the easternmost part of the Moldova that feared the cultural implications that closer ties with Romania might bring. This place is Transnistria, known by its residents as Pridnestrovie, which in 1989 was home to about one ninth of Moldova's 4.3 million

²⁴³ Stephen Kotkin, "Russia's Perpetual Geopolitics," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 3 (May-June 2016): 8.

people and occupies twelve percent of the country's territory.²⁴⁴ Pridnestrovie sits nestled between the Dniester River and Moldova's external border with Ukraine.²⁴⁵ One large city in Pridnestrovie, Bendery, is a geographic exception as it lies on the western bank of the Dniester River.

But more than geography sets Pridnestrovie apart from the rest of Moldova. A signature feature in the region is of prime importance: most people proudly retained a Soviet identity (and many still do today). In many ways, Tiraspol, the capital of Pridnestrovie, remains a Soviet time capsule frozen in place. In 1989, only about a quarter of the population in Pridnestrovie consisted of ethnic Russians and Ukrainians, but nevertheless the Russian language was nearly universal in application. The Russian language remained prevalent due to its proud and enduring Soviet mindset that had been deeply ingrained into the community. In a nutshell, there are two halves of Moldova and they collided in the last days of the USSR: Bessarabia (Romanian identity) and Pridnestrovie (Soviet identity).²⁴⁶ The economy of the latter was inexorably tied to the Soviet system—heavy industry, power stations and the presence of the 14th Army provided money and urban jobs. In Soviet times, Pridnestrovie supplied 90% of its electricity, 33% of its total industrial output, and ultimately generated 40% of the republic's GNP.²⁴⁷ Ethnic Moldovans in

²⁴⁴ "Population by Sex, Rate of Population Increase, Surface Area and Density," 1991 Demographic Yearbook Annuaire Démographique (New York: United Nations, 1992), 110, <https://unstats.un.org/home/>.

²⁴⁵ For this paper, I follow the Russian language and use *Pridnestrovie* instead of *Transnistria* or *Transdnestria*. Although in English *Transnistria* is most commonly used in academia and politics, the linguistic and historical connotations brought on by the use of *Pridnestrovie* complements my case study approach. *Transnistria* carries with it the sensibility of *uti possidetis*, while *Pridnestrovie* is steeped with the right to self-determination. This point is made clearer by using the less common term. Note: sometimes *Pridnestrovie* is transliterated as *Pridnestrov'e*. This paper uses the former Russian variant for stylistic purposes.

²⁴⁶ This of course is an oversimplification for simplicity; the Gagauz people of Turkish descent also claimed an autonomous republic in the southern portions of Moldova. However, the Russia army's intervention politically concerned Pridnestrovie.

²⁴⁷ Kamil Całus et al., *Naddniestrze Historia – Polityka – Gospodarka [Transdnestria History, Politics, Economy]* (Poznań: EastWest Analytics, 2014), 16; Stefan Troebst, "The 'Transdnestrian Moldovan Republic': From Conflict-

Pridnestrovia settled mainly in small villages and on farms, and consequently had far less impact on the region's economic livelihood.²⁴⁸ These ethnic Moldovans also had far less to gain from the nationalist movements on the other side of the Dniester.

Pridnestrovia's pocket of Russian speakers took shape from Moldova's mixed bag of history, a land passed back and forth in various sizes between expanding and retracting empires—Bessarabia, part of the historic territory of Moldavia positioned between the Prut and Dniester rivers, makes a good example. Beginning with Peter I, Tsarist Russia occupied Moldavia five times between 1711 and 1812.²⁴⁹ A monument dedicated to Count Alexander Suvorov in 1979 still proudly stands in modern-day Tiraspol.²⁵⁰ After the 1806-1812 war with the Turks, Russia was ceded Bessarabia. Later in 1940, other parts of Moldova were annexed by the Soviets. As a consequence, the areas of Moldova most often on the Russian side of the line naturally share more in common with Russia than they do with Romania.

In the Bessarabia half, the Moldovan language is essentially the same language as Romanian, and throughout the Soviet era the Kremlin suspiciously viewed ethnic Moldovans and Romanians as sharing a common language and cultural identity.²⁵¹ The only functional

Driven State-Building to State-Driven Nation-Building," *European Yearbook of Minority Issues Online* 2, no. 1 (2002): 6–7.

²⁴⁸ Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2000), 336–38.

²⁴⁹ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Moldova/History>

²⁵⁰ "34 Года Назад в Тирасполе Был Открыт Памятник Александру Васильевичу Суворову [A Monument to Alexander Vasilyevich Suvorov Was Unveiled 34 Years Ago in Tiraspol]," *Novosti Pridnestrovyia*, November 23, 2013, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/13-11-23/34-goda-nazad-v-tiraspole-by-l-otkryt-pamyatnik-aleksandru>; King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, 331.

²⁵¹ N. Mumji et al., "Summary of the Meeting and Negotiations held by L. I. Brezhnev with N. Ceausescu in Crimea, on 5 August 1977" (August 17, 1977), Document No. 1 in Gheorghe Negru, "Disputa dintre URSS si RSR privind tratarea istoriei relatiilor ruso- si soviet-române" [The Dispute Between the USSR and the RSR Regarding the Historical Treatment of Russo- and Soviet-Romanian Relations], *Destin românesc [Romanian Destiny]*, no. 3-4 (2010), pp. 182-187; Arhiva Organizatiilor Social-Politic din Moldova [AOSPRM], fond 51, inv. 44, dosar 13, filele

difference between Moldovan and Romanian is the letter set: Latin letters for Romanian, Cyrillic for Moldovan. Cyrillization of Romanian first took place in areas occupied by Tsarist Russia. Later the Soviets pushed for Cyrillization in the late 1930s. Ultimately, most Moldovans spoke Russian by the time the Soviet Union collapsed. The debate, however, was to what extent this legacy should continue.

“Suitcase, train station, Russia”

Union (with Romania) movements were underway in the Moldova S.S.R. well before the Soviet Union officially collapsed. Most controversially, the union movement saw roughly 800 published articles between 1988-1989 that advocated for a return of the Romanian language in society.²⁵² This “Romanianization” became a reality on August 31, 1989. New language laws codified the transliteration of Moldovan into Latin letters and established it as the official language. This trend rested on the premise that Russian must be eradicated from Moldova because it was a language of occupation that held back Moldova’s true Romanian identity. As a result, schools would officially begin to teach Romanian in the 1990-91 academic year. To accomplish this, 2,500 language courses were introduced to the beginning of a phased approach to transforming the nation.²⁵³ Meanwhile, in Pridnestrovia these new laws stirred fear, anger, mistrust and resentment. Russian speakers feared that their language preferences would be phased out and parents would lose the right to choose Russian as a language of instruction for their children. Beyond education, Russian speakers feared becoming second class citizens. In

126-135. Translated for CWIHP by Larry L. Watts., History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114142>.

²⁵² Aleš Buzu, “Recuperarea Identității Naționale În Besarabia Prin Intermediul Limbii Române. [Recovering the National Identity in Besarabia through the Romanian Language]” (Prague, Charles University, 2012), 84, <https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/detail/89371/>.

²⁵³ Vladimír Baar and Daniel Jakubek, “Divided National Identity in Moldova,” *Journal of Nationalism, Memory & Language Politics* 11, no. 1 (2017): 79.

response to the language laws, citizens took to the streets in mass protests both in Pridnestrovie and the capital Kishinev. Workers also protested with regular strikes.²⁵⁴ The most extreme elements of the language laws were eventually dropped, but tensions remained.

National soul searching became common throughout the Soviet republics in the late 1980s, as *glasnost* and *perestroika* gave rise to a “cultural renaissance.” But this surge witnessed new national “self-identification” often caged in local terms of us-versus-them.²⁵⁵ Ethnic minorities throughout the post-Soviet space soon bore monikers like enemy, alien and invader. Anti-Russian agitation phrases became common. The residents of Pridnestrovie were right to be fearful. One popular phrase twisted Soviet verbiage to call for “Romanians to Unite.” Similarly, “Moldova for Moldovans.” More frightening, however, were calls for “Russians beyond the Dniester, Jews in the Dniester.” Blunt and to the point, one slogan told Russians just how to leave: “Suitcase, train station, Russia.”²⁵⁶

The reaction in Pridnestrovie was predictable: citizens together with their local government established an autonomous region on September 2, 1990 and declared the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR) to be sovereign and independent from Kishinev. This transpired one week after the Gagauz ethnic minority living in the southern part of the Moldova S.S.R. declared their own independent republic. Tensions were rising. During October in the Pridnestrovian city of Dubasari, residents protested the presence of armed Moldovan police in

²⁵⁴ King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, 344.

²⁵⁵ Irina F Selivanova, “Trans-Dniestria,” in *U.S. and Russia Policymaking With Respect to the Use of Force*, ed. Jeremy R Azrael and Emil A Payin (Washington D.C.: RAND Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, 1995), 80.

²⁵⁶ In Russian: “Румыны, объединяйтесь,” “Молдавия—для молдаван,” “Русских—за Днестр, евреев—в Днестр,” “Чемодан-вокзал-Россия.” Tatyana Dolinskaya, “Молдовская Осень-2009: «Русских За Днестр, Евреев в Днестр» [Moldovan Autumn 2009: “Russians beyond the Dniester, Jews in the Dniester],” Svobodnaya Pressa [Free Press], October 5, 2009, <https://svpressa.ru/world/article/15059/>.

unmarked cars patrolling without the consent of local government officials. By December, protesters blocked the main bridge over the Dniester. Central authorities responded swiftly—a Special Purpose Militia Unit (OMON) from the Ministry of Internal Affairs engaged the protesters with force.²⁵⁷ Allegedly, three protesters were killed and were fifteen wounded, of which nine were shot. After the Moldovan militia disengaged, local residents permanently barricaded the bridges, thereby closing off Dubasari from the Bessarabia side of the Dniester.

In an attempt to quell the increasing tensions in the country, Gorbachev issued a decree “on the measure for normalization of the situation in the Moldova S.S.R.”²⁵⁸ The purpose of Gorbachev’s decree was two-fold: first, to declare null and void the Pridnestrovian and Gagauz independent republics; second, to request that Kishinev reconsider its own independence aspirations and the passage of the controversial language laws. In practice, the decree failed to create rapprochement between the parties. Tensions remained high. But Gorbachev faced rising tensions in all of the republics, and he needed to act. So, Gorbachev allowed the republics to hold their own free national elections. This was the green light that Moldovan union supporters had been waiting for.

In late February 1991, the Popular Front of Moldova routed the communists in national elections (candidates collectively ran as independents). The Popular Front was widely seen as a temporary coalition but one that decidedly supported improving ties with Romania. In response,

²⁵⁷ In Russian: Отряд милиции Особого Назначения (ОМОН). The first Moldova SSR OMON unit was formed on 1 Nov 1989, the last of the republics to institute this type of unit, which were put into place beginning in 1988 to combat rising crime throughout the USSR. On Nov 10, 1989 OMON troops repulsed an attack by protestors trying to take over the Ministry of Internal Affairs building.

²⁵⁸ Mikhail Gorbachev, “Указ N УП-1215 Президента Союза Советских Социалистических Республик О Мерах По Нормализации Обстановки в ССР Молдова [Decree No UP-1215 of the President of the U.S.S.R. on Measures to Normalize the Situation in the Moldova S.S.R.]” (Kremlin, December 22, 1990), <https://constitutions.ru/?p=3025>.

those living on the east bank of the Dniester began to consolidate local control over their territory. By summer 1991, the Bessarabia side of Moldova was completely cut off from the rest of the Soviet Union because the railway lines that linked Moldova with Ukraine all ran through hubs located in PMR territory.²⁵⁹

Just as in Moldova, national elections were soon held in other republics and within weeks Boris Yeltsin became the first president of the Russian S.S.R. In many ways, Yeltsin's election put him at odds with Gorbachev, especially because Yeltsin quickly began isolating Russia from the rest of the USSR. Gorbachev seemed weak to many inside the Soviet political apparatus, including the KGB. Their resentment led to action culminating in the failed "August Putsch." This moment in history is instructive for understanding conditions on the ground in Moldova. In Kishinev, President Mircea Snegur and the ruling elites supported Yeltsin standing on his tank. In Pridnestrovie, the opposite was true: people vehemently backed the coup plotters. After all, those living in the PMR were far more Soviet than those in the rest of Moldova.

Like other republics, Moldova prepared for political life on their own. For President Snegur, this included Moldova's declaration of independence from Moscow just a week after the failed putsch. In anticipation of joining a new Europe without communism, the leaders in Kishinev now began preparations to physically reassert control over Moldova's territory, including the PMR. Tensions continued to rise, including isolated shootings and murder, such that all Moldovans knew the worst was yet to come.²⁶⁰ Meanwhile, Yeltsin was contemplating

²⁵⁹ King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, 345–46.

²⁶⁰ Andrei Pavlenko, "1992. Кругом Была Война [1992. War Was All Around]," *Pridnestrovie Daily*, February 5, 2018, <http://pridnestrovie-daily.net/archives/25989>.

independence, but in his case, he wanted to free Russia from Soviet control. Arguably, Moldova was the furthest thing from his mind.

Wolves Chasing Buffalo

On December 8, 1991, Boris Yeltsin, Stanislav Shushkevich and Leonid Kravchuk—the newly minted leaders of the Russian, Belorussian, and Ukrainian republics—met in Belovezhskaya Pushcha, located in Belarus near the border with Poland. This is a remote area with a large forest preserve and home to Europe’s last wild buffalo. As such, Russian Historian Alexander Pikayev calls these leaders the “gang of three bison.”²⁶¹ Given their recent elections, few observers guessed that Yeltsin, Shushkevich and Kravchuk would engage in anything more than a good boondoggle with hunting and ample rations of vodka. Yet, in just two days, this “gang” decided the fate of the Soviet Union. Their meeting culminated in a declaration that, according to Shushkevich, began with the only line all three agreed on without debate: “The USSR, as a geopolitical reality, and as a subject of international law - has ceased to exist.”²⁶² To put it mildly, killing the Soviet Union fast tracked Yeltsin’s policy of dumping the burdensome republics in order to streamline Russia. A big part of this plan meant keeping Russian troops out of local troubles.

But back in Moscow, many senior officials were furious with Yelstin. In their minds, Yelstin had no authority to dissolve the USSR. These were men like Viktor Zhigulin (Supreme Council), Viktor Anpilov, Albert Makashov, and Gennady Zuganov (communists), Nikolai

²⁶¹ Pikayev, “The Russian Domestic Debate on Policy towards the ‘Near Abroad.’”

²⁶² Dina Newman, “How Three Men Signed the USSR’s Death Warrant,” BBC World Service, December 24, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-38416657>.

Pavlov (Russian Unity Party), and Sazhi Umalatova (Chechen opposition figure).²⁶³ They were like political wolves on a hunt—revanchist wolves chasing after the “three bison.” These “patriots” were set on killing the declaration from Belovezhskaya Pushcha, or at least coaxing the respective national legislatures to do so. As an alternative, they wanted to reconstitute the republics—at least Belarus, Russia and Ukraine—into an improved socialist entity, perhaps a federation. Some advocated to do so peacefully, but Vladimir Zhirinovskiy advocated for more forceful measures in Russia’s near abroad.²⁶⁴ Ultimately, however, Gorbachev resigned in December and the USSR was no more. Yeltsin was now in charge, but with a political opposition committed to his ouster.

The brewing conflict in Moldova only served as fodder for Yeltsin’s detractors—from the beginning of April “five to seven PMR defenders died each day” and Moldovan and Russian artillery routinely exchanged fire.²⁶⁵ The pro-intervention opposition in Moscow began to win the public debate before a concerned domestic audience that remained highly sympathetic to those in Pridnestrovie and other areas of the former Soviet Union, like in South Ossetia, where ethnic Russians were caught up in regional hostilities. Moreover, 25 million ethnic Russians were now residing in Russia’s near abroad and another 15 million sympathized with or identified as Russian.²⁶⁶ The Kremlin needed to quell fears about the lives and livelihood of these Russians.

²⁶³ Mikhail Shevelev, “Хотят Ли Русские Войны [Do the Russians Want Wars],” *Izvestia*, June 28, 1992, 5, https://yeltsin.ru/uploads/upload/newspaper/1992/mn06_28_92/index.html; Pikayev, “The Russian Domestic Debate on Policy towards the ‘Near Abroad.’”

²⁶⁴ Pikayev, “The Russian Domestic Debate on Policy towards the ‘Near Abroad.’”

²⁶⁵ Lev Sigal, “Армия в Приднестровье: Разделяй, Но Не Властвуй [Army in Transnistria: Divide but Do Not Rule],” *Kommerstant’ Vlast’*, June 4, 1992, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4061?query=молдова>; Selivanova, “Trans-Dniestria,” 63.

²⁶⁶ Pikayev, “The Russian Domestic Debate on Policy towards the ‘Near Abroad’”; Dmitri Trenin, *Should We Fear Russia?* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2016), 45.

Unfortunately for Yeltsin, the decisive moments to act on Moldova came while he was away on an official state visit to the U.S.

Dinner in Bucharest

Full-fledged armed conflict erupted in Moldova after several months of skirmishes and small clashes along the PMR. On June 19, 1992 a PMR counterintelligence operative and his driver were fired upon by Moldovan police in broad daylight near a publishing house in the eastern part of Bendery.²⁶⁷ Firefights between Moldovan police units and PMR militia quickly ensued throughout the center of town. The sound of machinegun fire echoed through the night as small-scale engagements continued until dawn—this day became known in the PMR as “black Friday.”²⁶⁸ Here geography is very important. Bendery is uniquely situated on the *west* bank of the Dniester, the opposite side of the river from the rest of the PMR.²⁶⁹ Consequently, Moldovan forces had direct land access to the city, while logistically the PMR had to cross a bridge before entering Bendery from the east bank. Predictably, this bridge became the most important feature in the city.

The next day, June 20th, proved highly consequential both for Moldova and Yeltsin’s Russia. In the morning, Moldovan forces successfully captured the bridge and set up a barricade with several armored vehicles. This effectively cut Bendery off from the PMR. Moldovan snipers provided cover from tall buildings to the west. The PMR’s under gunned efforts to clear

²⁶⁷ Grigory P Volovoi, *Кровавое Лето в Бендерах - Хроника Приднестровской* [*Bloody Summer in Bender - A Pridnestrovian Chronicle*] (Bender, Moldova: Poligrafist, 1993), 8–14.

²⁶⁸ Video footage in: Peter Bobrov, *До, Во Время и После Войны* [*Before, during and after the War*], 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-45aMvVqhrI>; “«Черная Пятница». Как Началась Бендерская Трагедия [“Black Friday” How the Bender Tragedy Began],” *Novosti Pridnestrovyya*, June 19, 2016, <https://novostipmr.com/ru/news/16-06-19/chernaya-pyatnica-kak-nachalas-benderskaya-tragediya>.

²⁶⁹ In this region the east bank is referred to as the “left bank” although it sits on the right side of the Dniester on a map.

the bridge were unsuccessful. As such, the PMR requested the 14th Russian Army to intervene—or at least lend out their equipment. For weeks the people in the PMR begged for assistance from Russian officers, still stationed in Tiraspol as a Soviet legacy yet untouched by Moscow. In the late 1980s, the 14th Army was a low-readiness reserve unit at one third normal strength.²⁷⁰ Nevertheless, it was well-equipped, maintained its own embedded intelligence units and kept a large number of local militiamen on its payroll as “security guards.”²⁷¹

Remarkably, the 14th Army leadership showed great restraint by remaining equally unhelpful to Moldova and the PMR alike—on the battlefield. Up until this point, although the 14th Army stayed out of the fighting, most of the PMR’s weapons and other military equipment were either stolen from 14th Army warehouses or purchased through illegal means. Perhaps this is how local PMR officials realized their social arms plan called “A machinegun for every family (author’s translation).”²⁷² The sale of military hardware was commonplace in the years following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Defense Secretary Pavel Grachev, for example, became widely known as “Pasha Mercedes” due to his reputation of corruption and graft.²⁷³ But in the case of Bendery, it was the Moldovans’ provocative barricade on the Bendery bridge that encouraged the 14th Army to finally stop turning a blind eye. It was now painfully obvious that

²⁷⁰ “Operational Group of Russian Forces in Moldova,” Global Security, n.d., <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/russia/ogrv-moldova.htm>, last accessed Jan 2020.

²⁷¹ Mykola Siruk, Valentyn Torba, and Ivan Kapsamun, “On How Conflicts Are Fueled,” *Den’ [The Day]*, January 20, 2015, <http://day.kyiv.ua/en/article/economy/how-conflicts-are-fueled>.

²⁷² Vyacheslav Samoshkin, “На Фронтах Пока Затишье [The Fronts For Now Are Quiet],” *Izvestia*, July 5, 1992, 4, https://yeltsin.ru/uploads/upload/newspaper/1992/mn07_05_92/index.html.

²⁷³ Mikhail Sokolov and Anastasia Kirilenko, “20 Years Ago, Russia Had Its Biggest Political Crisis Since the Bolshevik Revolution,” *The Atlantic*, October 4, 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/10/20-years-ago-russia-had-its-biggest-political-crisis-since-the-bolshevik-revolution/280237/>.

thousands of Bendery citizens were in harm's way. A large-scale exodus of refugees was already in progress.

Maintaining neutrality so-to-speak, the 14th Army provided more substantial hardware to the PMR. With the initial support of eight T-64 tanks on loan, two howitzers and dozens of laser-sighted antitank weapons, PMR forces retook the bridge before sundown.²⁷⁴ Dozens of armored vehicles, with "PMR" freshly painted in large white letters, then pushed into Bendery and engaged the Moldovan forces: 50 armored personnel carriers, 10 T-55 tanks and several 120 mm howitzers.²⁷⁵ The PMR secured most of Bendery by sundown the next day. News reports tallied 484 killed, 72 missing in action, and more than 1,000 wounded.²⁷⁶ *Izvestia* special correspondent, Leonid Kapelyushin, marveled at the ease with which these "beautiful warfighters" took action, but he also presciently opined that "In this war there will be no winner."²⁷⁷ Kishinev would counterattack within a week and the bloodshed would continue daily.

With Yeltsin out of Pocket, Vice President Rutskoi went on TV on 20 June to brief the nation about events ongoing in Bendery. His speech was militaristic in tone, calling the actions of Kishinev's forces "genocide" and asserting that Russia would "put a stop to the mass murder of a peaceful population (author's translation)." He also stated that Russian troops are allowed "to repel by all available means attacks on soldiers and their families". According to Rutskoi, "our troops have already taken the first steps for the necessary defense and will continue to react

²⁷⁴ Leonid Kapelyushny, "Как Это Было в Бендерах [How It Was in Bendery]," *Izvestiya*, July 23, 1992, 1.

²⁷⁵ Lev Sigal, "Война в Приднестровье: Руцкой Отразил Наступление [The War in Transnistria: Rutskoy Reflected on the Offensive]," *Kommerstant' Vlast'*, June 22, 1992, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5431>.

²⁷⁶ *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, June 2, 1992 cited in: Selivanova, "Trans-Dniestria," 66.

²⁷⁷ Kapelyushny, "Как Это Было в Бендерах [How It Was in Bendery]," 1.

adequately."²⁷⁸ In coordination with senior military leaders, Ruskoi then dispatched a senior army officer to Tiraspol to assess the situation on the ground. This officer assumed the fake name, “Colonel Gusev” and arrived in Tiraspol on 23 June.²⁷⁹ Col. Gusev readied his troops on its practice ranges and once the green light was given from Moscow, he revealed himself as General Aleksandr Lebed, new commander of the 14th Army. Lebed’s forces—complete with MiG-29 aircraft, tanks, anti-aircraft defense systems and long-range artillery—swarmed Bendery and the surrounding areas.

What happened in Bendery eventually became the rule in Moldova—the Russian army would intervene on the side of Pridnestrovia until the Moldovan government stood down—in Molovat, Cocieri, Koshnitsa, and Bulboak. Essentially, Kishinev’s forces had initially surrounded the PMR and were poised with enough firepower to wipe out any and all PMR resistance. According to a Moldovan commander, Kishinev’s troops “were ready to push all the way to Ukraine (author’s translation).”²⁸⁰ On July 4, 1992, Lebed’s 14th Army dominated the battlefield to such an extent he held a press conference in Tiraspol to address the leaders of Russia and Moldova.

With a grimace on his face, sometimes flashing his teeth in mid-sentence, Lebed described the situation on the ground candidly: genocide, refugees, pillaging, destruction. On just the PMR side: 650 dead and over 4,000 wounded, two-thirds of which were civilians. “Enough!

²⁷⁸ Sigal, “Война в Приднестровье: Руцкой Отразил Наступление [The War in Transnistria: Ruskoy Reflected on the Offensive].”

²⁷⁹ Aleksandr Lebed, *За Державу Обидно [An Insult to Power]* (Moscow: Publisher of "Moskovskaya Pravda" newspaper, 1995), 420; Nikolai Burbyga, “Драма 14-й Армии [14th Army Drama],” *Izvestiya*, July 20, 1992, 8.

²⁸⁰ Sergei Paskar, “Генерал Карасёв: «Конфликта в Приднестровье Было Не Избежать» [General Karasev: ‘Conflict in Transnistria Was Inevitable’],” *SP*, March 6, 2019, <https://esp.md/podrobnosti/2019/03/06/general-karasyov-konflikta-v-pridnestrovia-bylo-ne-izbezhat>.

Enough!”²⁸¹ Lebed made it clear that the Russian Army "will continue to remain neutral, but the quality of this neutrality will change. It will be different, a qualitatively different neutrality, an armed neutrality (author’s translation).”²⁸² After this press conference, the politicians began peace negotiations and the Moldovan military began its withdrawal. Gen. Lebed famously made one more remark after which the fighting ended: “Tomorrow I will have breakfast in Tiraspol, and if one more bullet falls in the PMR, I will have lunch in Kishinev, and dinner in Bucharest (author’s translation).”²⁸³

Of course, to tell the full story of the Russian intervention in Moldova would take many books. As such, to remain within the scope of this paper, Table 4 below provides a snapshot of the whole case. It is from these broad assessments that I located Moldova’s place in Table 3. The rest of the chapter discusses in more detail the key aspects of the low systemic clarity and restrictive strategic environment presented in this case.

Discerning Systemic Clarity: “Ours” to Yours

In the early 1990s, Russians obviously cared deeply about the fall of the Soviet Union and how best to forge ahead. Some looked to future with optimism. Others consulted the past and hoped for much of the same. Most likely, they all desired for Russians to live well and for the Russian state to provide peace, stability and prosperity. Sivkov argues that the “wild 90s were the darkest years in Russian history (author’s translation)” because in domestic politics, the

²⁸¹ *Пресс конференция генерала Лебеда 1992 [General Lebed’s Press Conference in 1992]* (Tiraspol, 1992), <https://yandex.ru/video/preview/?filmId=14268101549190302791&text=речь+лебеда+1992>.

²⁸² Sigal, “Война в Приднестровье: Руцкой Отразил Наступление [The War in Transnistria: Ruts koy Reflected on the Offensive]”; Samoshkin, “На Фронтах Пока Затишье [The Fronts For Now Are Quiet],” 4.

²⁸³ “Завтра я буду завтракать в Тирасполе, а если упадёт хоть одна пуля в Приднестровье, обедать я буду в Кишинёве, а ужинать в Бухаресте.” See Minute 07:50: Sergei Kholoshevsky, *Приднестровье: Русский Форпост [Transnistria: Russian Outpost]* (НТВ [NTV], 2013), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rq8FKnhDzio>; Siruk, Torba, and Kapsamun, “On How Conflicts Are Fueled.”

Russian authorities, under slogans of liberalization and democratization, introduced market relations and eliminated government monopolies without any organized plan or purpose other than to destroy the country.²⁸⁴ Indeed, economic hardships, deep ethnic tensions and violence spread throughout the republics during the 1990s and diminished hopes of a quick transition from communism.

Table 4 – Russian Intervention in Moldova: Low Clarity in a Restrictive Strategic

| Systemic Stimuli | Stimuli Elements | Element Attributes | Case 1 |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|---------|
| | | | Moldova |
| Clarity | Discernability | Threat Intent | H |
| | | Threat Capability | L |
| | | Threat Imminence (Scope) | L |
| | | Advantage Opportunity | M |
| | | Adversarial Resolve | L |
| | | Opportunity Imminence (Scope) | M |
| | Time Horizon | Threat Signals | M |
| | | Opportunity for Advantage | L |
| | Optimal Options | Threat Policy Options | L |
| | | Opportunity Policy Options | L |
| Nature of Strategic Environment | Imminence (Content) | Threat Danger | H |
| | | Opportunity Attractiveness | H |
| | Magnitude | Threat Impact | H |
| | | Opportunity Impact | L |

Moscow's ruling elites wanted to play their part making a peaceful transition to prosperity, they simply did not execute the task well. Part of the problem was that the authorities

²⁸⁴ Konstantin Sivkov, "В Поисках Своего Пути [In Search Of Its Own Way]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, June 19, 2013, No23 (491) edition.

were just as split as the nation was on making up their minds about what kind of country Russia ought to be and how Russia should identify and ensure its collective interests. The policies that the Kremlin ultimately pursued in Moldova, particularly its military intervention, stemmed from a clearly discernable threat: Kishinev's articulated vision for a Moldova reunited with Romania, a new norm that would necessarily restrict the self-determination of Russians living in Pridnestrovia. In short, Moldova presented a clear threat to Russia's evolving understanding about itself and the Kremlin's obligation to protect *all* Russians.

But not everything was so clearly discernable. The sudden breakup of the Soviet Union created an identity crisis not just for Russians, but also for other ethnic groups and nationalities who also struggled to come to terms with the reality of fifteen new countries. Vera Tolz asserts that an essential ingredient in modern Russian identity is "the comparison with the West."²⁸⁵ In line with Tolz, a common way many Russians tried to address or resolve this post-Soviet identity crisis was to frame it in the Cold War's bipolarity of the not so distant past: us versus them, the Soviets versus Americans. Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev summarized Russia's interests in a way that seemed to suppress such negative urges for comparison: "Our active foreign policy, our diplomacy, are necessary to guarantee entry into the world community... and thereby to help meet the internal needs of Russia... The developed countries of the West are Russia's natural allies."²⁸⁶

But simply swapping out Soviet for Russia or replacing "them" with "natural allies" was not a black and white proposition, nor was it always desirable. Some questions remained difficult

²⁸⁵ Vera Tolz, *Russia: Inventing the Nation* (London: Arnold, 2001), 69.

²⁸⁶ *Izvestia*, 2 January 1992 in Tolz, 125.

to answer: who are Russians, where is Russia now, and do Russians become something different overnight simply because “three bison” decided to change the borders? Not all of the answers were satisfying and for many Russians the armed conflict in Moldova exemplified the difficulty in identifying who exactly is “us” or who exactly is “them.” Without a universal, mutual understanding about national identities within the former Soviet space, the principles of territorial integrity, self-determination and noninterference became muddled in Moldova. Simply put, it was hard in many cases to tell exactly who was who or what to do in cases of civil unrest involving Russians now living somewhere else. Similarly, many found it highly unsatisfying to equate new lines on map to how they emotionally connected with long-standing ideas about their homeland (*rodina*) and who constitutes “us” (*nashi*).

During the conflict in Moldova, a political cartoon on the front page of *Kommersant*, the Soviet Union’s first independent newspaper, captured the ironies and difficulties facing the Russian peacekeepers trying to identify friend or foe as a third-party force in Moldova’s complex lay of the land. The cartoon, shown below in Figure 9, depicts an unmarked tank chugging along with a giant arm reaching out its top, wielding a paddling stick that conveys the following sentiment: this is what “ours” are doing to yours. In short, whichever side the tank represents (“ours”) is giving a whipping to the other side (“yours”). The tank could be Moldovan, but it’s probably Russian, but if Russian it is still unclear who is driving it—the 14th Army or the PMR. Like good political cartoons, Figure 9 also employs word play to impart irony. A common Russian phrase, similar to the one on the cartoon’s paddle, imparts the idea that trying to “serve



Рис. Г. ЖИВУЦКОГО.

Figure 9 – "Ours" to Yours. By G. Zhivutsky.
Kommersant' Vlast' newspaper. July 9, 1992.

both sides" (i.e. both "ours" and "yours") is ill advised.²⁸⁷ This phrase connects squarely to the idea that the "neutral" Russian 14th Army found itself in a precarious predicament between two sides of Moldova—both geopolitically and socially. According to Russia's official position, the 14-th Army remained neutral and was forced to act only because the Moldovan side initiated conflict, especially during the escalation in Bendery on 20 June.²⁸⁸ Finally, the cartoon's tank is visibly contorted in the turret with a bent barrel

that suggests unintended targets might be struck. For sure, the intervention saw both fratricide and many civilian casualties; but the conflict also witnessed an anguished difficulty on all sides when rationalizing the criteria that distinguished friend from foe.

The cartoon also resonates in part due to the great difficulty defining post-Soviet national identity in 1992. Moreover, the Kremlin's formulation of a "near abroad" was equally difficult to ascertain. This is because the near abroad concept preferences social, historical and political considerations over international delineations of territory. For sure, a citizen in Tiraspol in the summer of 1991 likely felt no less Soviet by the summer of 1992 despite the highly consequential changes that occurred on a map. Voting in Pridnestrovie suggests the majority of

²⁸⁷ In Russian: И нашим и вашим... и за копейку спляшем [both ours and yours...]

²⁸⁸ Andrei V Devyatkov, "Россия И Вооруженная Стадия При Днестровского Конфликта (1991–1992 Годы) [Russia and the Armed Phase of the Transnistrian Conflict (1991-92)]," *Vestnik Chelyabinsk Univ.* 191, no. 10 (2009): 108–12.

its residents, even ethnic Moldovans, did not identify with the government in Kishinev.

Pridnestrovia held multiple referendums on self-rule and independence between 1989 and 2006.

In 1990, 92% of adult residents voted overwhelming in favor of forming a self-governing

autonomous entity, the PMR, with over 95% were in favor.²⁸⁹ In 1991, the PMR elected Igor

Smirnov to the office of president and voted in favor of independence on a referendum.²⁹⁰ A

constitution was ratified in 1994. In 2006, the PMR once again successfully held a referendum

on independence and integrating with the Russian Federation, yet still receives no recognition as

a state in the international community.²⁹¹

Politicians in Pridnestrovia have since 1989 used the Soviet memory of WWII to drive a wedge between Tiraspol and Kishinev.²⁹² In the PMR, the Soviet legacy of victory and liberation juxtaposes against anti-Romanian propaganda that still paint Bucharest in a fascist context as willful allies to the German NAZIs—or more directly: Kishinev equals fascism. The use of history to create a new post-Soviet identity has been common. In Russia, this started with Yeltsin’s efforts to create a new Russian image:

“Divided views of the past are one of the main pillars of identity in contemporary political communities. And the community behind the modern Russian state is no exception in this sense: the construction of its identity certainly includes what could be called a policy of memory, that is, the production of social representations of this community's past. Various social agents are involved in this work: professional

²⁸⁹ “Russian-Speaking Moldavian City Votes Autonomy,” *Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS)*, January 30, 1990.

²⁹⁰ Oazu Nantoi, “О Молдаве и Не Только о Ней [Not Just about Moldova],” *Izvestia*, July 19, 1992, https://yeltsin.ru/uploads/upload/newspaper/1992/mn07_19_92/index.html.

²⁹¹ Yevgeny Nazarenko, “Референдум 2006 Года В Приднестровье: Предпосылки И Современность (Политико-Правовой Анализ) [2006 Referendum in Transnistria: Prerequisites and Modernity (Political-Legal Analysis)],” Eurasian Transnistria Media Center, July 11, 2016, <http://eurasian.su/article/referendum-2006-goda-v-pridnestrove>.

²⁹² John Alan Mason, “Internationalist Mobilization during the Collapse of the Soviet Union: The Moldovan Elections of 1990,” *Nationalities Papers* 37, no. 2 (2009): 165–66.

historians, certainly journalists, but also writers, filmmakers, and people of other professions. Politicians also contribute a lot to this process (author's translation)."²⁹³

Indeed, both Yeltsin and Smirnov in the PMR used images of the Soviet victory over fascism to unite their citizens under a shared identity.

According to Olga Malinova, the Yeltsin administration also focused on more recent episodes in history with which to rally Russians around a common identity:

“From the point of view of building a narrative about a new Russia, which is different from the old Russia, it was very important to institutionalize for public use some milestones in recent history. And we can clearly see that in the Yeltsin period such efforts were made. It's true that they weren't quite consistent (author's translation).”²⁹⁴

Whether by intentional design in the Kremlin or not, the armed intervention by the 14th Army became a moment of extreme pride in Russia. It was a rare “victory” amid growing societal and political upheaval. On the international scene, for example, Russians lamented their inability to defend the injustices taking place in ethnically-torn Yugoslavia.²⁹⁵ As such, Gen Lebed's charismatic leadership captured the Russian people's admiration in a great time of emotional strife both in Russia and Pridnestrovia, where he became considered the PMR's “number one man.”²⁹⁶

In a nutshell, for Russians the only clearly discernible element going into the Moldova intervention was that Kishinev posed some a general threat to people in the PMR. But the 14th Army's intervention shed new clarity and context about Russia's and Russians' place in the

²⁹³ Olga Malinova, “Политика Памяти в Постсоветской России [Political Memory in Post-Soviet Russia],” PostNauka, February 11, 2015, <https://postnauka.ru/video/41333>.

²⁹⁴ Malinova.

²⁹⁵ Dzhuro Bilbiya, “Югославская Драма: Поиски Виновных [Yugoslav Drama: The Search for the Guilty],” *Izvestia*, June 30, 1992, https://yeltsin.ru/uploads/upload/newspaper/1992/izv06_30_92/index.html.

²⁹⁶ In Russian: человек номер один in: Burbyga, “Драма 14-й Армии [14th Army Drama],” 8.

world. Much of this clarity stemmed directly from Gen Lebed's press conference when he used words like genocide, fratricide, and multiethnic people. He also celebrated the honor of Russian officers, the great moral legacy of the Soviet Union's victory in WWII, and explicitly labeled the politicians in Kishinev and Bucharest as contemporary fascists. The division between "us" and "them" was now much clearer.

As such, Gen Lebed's success in Moldova and popularity among Russians helped solidify four subsequent trends in the Kremlin's foreign policy. First, Yeltsin's plan to trim the fat and steer clear of the former republics' regional problems was over—Russia would use its army in the near abroad if needed, but when doing so would make efforts to uphold international norms of territorial integrity. In 1992, Moscow's legacy military presence in Georgia also became involved in a conflict defending an ethnic minority enclave. In addition, Russia maintained a military presence in other regions to quell discord such as in Tajikistan, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Second, Russia set the precedent that borders in its near abroad were fuzzy and defined by history and Russian politics, not territorial boundaries. Third, threats against Russians living outside the Russian Federation were considered in Russia's sovereign space, and thus the case of Moldova became treated as a defense of Russia's national sovereignty. Fourth, this understanding about sovereignty disentangled the right of self-determination from the competing norm of territorial integrity.

As such, Russia is sovereign and can therefore act by exception in its near abroad when Russians themselves or Russian national interests become threatened. This dialectical approach to sovereignty can be thought of like this: Russia respects Moldova's sovereignty, but Russia

cannot ignore what Moldova does with it.²⁹⁷ On top of this rule of law perspective, Russia then applies another interpretation of Moscow's sovereignty—the right to decide for all Russians. As long as Moldova's sovereign decisions do not infringe upon this broader understanding of sovereignty—an enduring historical and cultural identity of Russia as an exceptional nation—then Moscow will observe non-interference norms. Yet, if Moldova pursues a path in contradiction to Russian national interests, Moscow will intervene as necessary and present a rationale of self-determinism for Russians or self-defense for Russia.

Interestingly, the Russian constitution which was ratified one year later in 1993 reflects Russia's experience in Moldova. It is hard to say Moldova was on the minds of those who drafted the constitution, but nevertheless the document provides more clarity on how Russia prioritizes the sovereign elements of territory and self-determination. In numerous articles, the constitution clearly supports the international norm of territorial integrity and the norm of sovereignty as singularly exercised across the totality of state territory. But at the same time, Article 61, par. 2, implies that the Russian president has a moral obligation to intervene in cases like Moldova: “The Russian Federation shall guarantee its citizens protection and patronage abroad.”²⁹⁸ The synthesis of these opposed ideas has become the policy of preserving a Russian space within the territorial confines of another state. In short, freezing it place.

High Threats and Low Relative Power: A Tale of Two Military Sandboxes

²⁹⁷ A similar argument is made about Russia-Ukraine relations in: Vladimir Socor, “Putin Offers Ukraine ‘Protection’ For Extending Russian Black Sea Fleet’s Presence,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 3, no. 200 (October 30, 2006), <https://jamestown.org/program/putin-offers-ukraine-protection-for-extending-russian-black-sea-fleets-presence/>.

²⁹⁸ “Конституция Российской Федерации [Constitution of the Russian Federation]” (Yuridicheskaya literatura, 2009), <http://www.constitution.ru/>.

Children love to play in sandboxes, a space dedicated to creation and destruction. For adults, a “sandbox” refers to a permissive and benign environment, sometimes virtual, in which one can conduct trial and error experiments with minimal risk of collateral damage. Sandbox R&D has become commonplace in software development, especially in cyber security.²⁹⁹ Modern militaries also sandbox their tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP) with a host of techniques ranging from computer simulations and desktop war games to training exercises with live fire tests. The low-risk nature of a sandbox environment, however, comes with a cost of accepting varying degrees of uncertainty regarding real wartime effectiveness. Such uncertainty arises from the complex nature of modern warfare in which anticipated battlefield effectiveness breaks down against an unpredictable, thinking adversary. Carl von Clausewitz referred to this kind of uncertainty as the “fog of war.”

An ideal military sandbox, therefore, seeks to retain as many “live” conditions as possible while also mitigating the fog of war to ensure that participating forces can function well enough to at least learn something productive from the effort. This requires striking a balance between sanitized conditions and the risks associated with high political stakes and real-world combat experience.³⁰⁰ As history often shows, sometimes the best sandboxes are unplanned. This was the case for the Russians in Moldova in 1992 and the American-led coalition in Iraq in 1991. In the first instance, the consequences were high in part because what happened in Moldova would have immediate, wide-ranging consequences for Russian foreign policy in its near abroad. Pu

²⁹⁹ Chris Hoffman, “Sandboxes Explained: How They’re Already Protecting You and How to Sandbox Any Program,” How-To Geek, August 2, 2013, <https://www.howtogeek.com/169139/sandboxes-explained-how-theyre-already-protecting-you-and-how-to-sandbox-any-program/>.

³⁰⁰ Vadim Kozhukhovskiy, “Риск как ключ [Risk as a key],” *Voенно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, April 16, 2008, No15 (231) edition.

differently, a good way to establish favorable geopolitical precedents involving the military is by fighting against an overmatched, under gunned adversary on their own soil. This is what happened, even if by mistake, in Moldova.

In the latter case, the sandy flats between Baghdad and Riyadh became perhaps the greatest military sandbox in recent history. Yet at the time, U.S. leaders never expected the first Gulf War to proceed so smoothly with such a one-sided outcome.³⁰¹ Again, history showed us that the best military sandbox includes high stakes and real combat.³⁰² In America's case, it also exhibited a lethal stand-off high-precision kill chain, extremely low friendly casualties and minimal collateral damage even in urban areas. When compared with the state of the Russian military in the early 1990s, the Russian conventional military found itself well behind the U.S. in terms of relative power.³⁰³

Moldova: Consequences for Russian Territorial Integrity

Kishinev's militarization along the border of the PMR beginning in March 1992 presented Moscow with a clear and present danger. Of course, Moldova posed no credible threat to the Russian Federation with which it has no common border. In terms of the strategic environment, one might therefore expect a low "imminence threat danger" in Table 4. But no matter how weak the Moldovan government was vis-à-vis the Russian Federation as two opposing states, the magnitude of the threat to Russians living in Pridnestrovia was unacceptably

³⁰¹ Scott Stump, "Desert Storm, a War Worth Fighting – and Remembering," *CNN*, February 28, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/02/28/opinions/desert-storm-opinion/index.html>.

³⁰² Thomas A Keaney and Eliot A Cohen, "Gulf War Air Power Survey Summary Report" (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government, 1993).

³⁰³ U.S. Department of Defense, "Remarks by Deputy Secretary Work on Third Offset Strategy. As Delivered by Deputy Secretary of Defense Bob Work, Brussels, Belgium, April 28, 2016" (Brussels, 2016), <https://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech-View/Article/753482/remarks-by-deputy-secretary-work-on-third-offset-strategy/>.

high. In effect, the Kremlin came to perceive the people of the PMR as Russian and therefore in need of armed assistance. Similarly, Moscow interpreted the danger to these Russians as consequentially high—as indicated in the “magnitude threat impact” box in Table 4.

Moscow hardliners like Vice President Rutskoi arguably saw a threat picture much larger than just the PMR. They probably feared a failure to act decisively in Moldova would expand Russia’s problems across the near abroad. For example, if Kishinev were to successfully reassert control over the PMR, other non-Russian ethnic majorities would be emboldened to pursue anti-Russian policies against the remaining 25 million Russians living in the near abroad. This is why the stakes were so high and the threat magnitude deemed so consequential. In this sense, the opportunities for Russia to gain in terms of relative power were negligible and likely not even considered—Russia was already the dominant force in the near abroad, and Moscow had neither the desire nor the capability to consider rivaling the U.S. and NATO.

Moreover, the U.S. supported Russia’s intervention in Moldova as a necessary and legitimate peacekeeping mission. In a joint press conference with Boris Yeltsin, President Clinton addressed a question about concern for Russia’s military interventions in its near abroad:

“I think that Russia plainly does have an interest, a significant interest, in what happens on its borders and what happens in countries on its borders. In all of our discussions, President Yeltsin has acknowledged that he respected the sovereignty, the independence, and the territorial integrity of all those countries, but that what happened there affected what happened within his country and that there were things that he might be able to do there in pursuit of stability, without being inconsistent with sovereignty and territorial integrity and independence, that were appropriate.”³⁰⁴

³⁰⁴ “The President’s News Conference With President Yeltsin of Russia,” *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, Compilation of Presidential Documents, 30, no. 39 (October 3, 1994): 1648.

From a distant vantage point, it may well have appeared to Clinton that Russia did in fact respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Moldova. More likely, there simply was not much the U.S. was willing to do in a place called Moldova. As such, President Snegur's requests for OSCE peacekeepers, bringing Moscow up on charges before an international tribunal and declaring the PMR's President Smirnov a second "Saddam Hussein" mostly fell on deaf ears.³⁰⁵

The elephant in the room was of course how Chechnya's separatist leaders would view Russia's defense of self-determination in the PMR. Their logic might follow like this: if the PMR can fight, it must also be legitimate for Chechnya to do the same. In this context, the threat to Russians could quickly escalate inside Russia's borders should Chechnya pursue independence. But damned if you do, damned if you don't—if Moscow had played the situation in Moldova fully in accordance with the rules that President Clinton mentioned, the Chechens may have smelled weakness and pursued independence based on that rationale.

In the end, Russia's chosen path in Moldova laid a foundation for Russia's unique formulation of sovereignty: a double standard justified by a sense of historical justice that transcends the physical borders of the near abroad in a one-way direction emanating from Moscow. This new Russian perspective views sovereignty through a Schmittean lens where the sovereign defines "us" and "them."³⁰⁶ Moreover, the sovereign decides when a state of exception (*Ausnahmezustand*) exists in which laws, rules and norms may be broken unilaterally by the sovereign.³⁰⁷ At the same time, the Kremlin's actions throughout the 1990s were more often

³⁰⁵ Vladimir Emelyanenko, "Россия Между Двумя Берегами Молдовы [Russia between Moldova's Two Banks]," *Izvestia*, July 5, 1992, 4, https://yeltsin.ru/uploads/upload/newspaper/1992/mn07_05_92/index.html.

³⁰⁶ Sergei Melkov, "Войны Будущего Тожественны Власти [Identities of Power are the Wars of the Future]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (ВПК)*, May 16, 2007, No18 (184) edition.

³⁰⁷ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 5–15.

reactive and haphazard as opposed to following a clear logic of sovereignty or any other kind of grand strategy.

A Clear and Present Danger with Unclear Options: The Wild 1990s

Throughout the “wild” 1990s, the Kremlin was constrained by tight timelines, narrow sets of policy prescriptions and no general consensus on how to best engage in its domestic troubles let alone its “near abroad.” Danger seemed to loom around every corner. In short, policy prescriptions never approached optimal as indicated in Table 4. But in geopolitics and competitive statecraft, optimal policy solutions are rarely visible. Instead of prompting questions about optimal solutions in Moldova, the 14th Army’s relative success begs more questions about why Yeltsin abandoned his preferred policy of isolation from the republics and what it meant for Russia’s transition into the world community. Specifically, the reinvigorated engagement policy in the near abroad encouraged an uptick in military political participation and derailed conversion plans for the MIC.

Prior to the Russian intervention in Moldova, there was a clear and present danger. Threats escalated quickly. The civil unrest in December 1991 had by March of 1992 transformed into full economic blockades and frequent shooting across the PMR border. In April, the Kremlin signaled the likelihood for an intervention when Yeltsin formally transferred authority over 14th Army from the CIS governing structure directly and solely to Russia. From Kishinev, this transfer of authority looked very much like a foreign Army was now occupying its territory.

Yet even before the April transfer of authority, the 14th Army had in fact already been directly supporting the PMR. The Soviet Army in the late 1980s and then the units under CIS

command had notoriously poor morale and high desertion rates. In early 1992, numerous officers from the 14th Army broke ranks and joined PMR militias—one even became the commander of the PMR forces and another its defense minister.³⁰⁸ Along with these defections flowed an incredible amount of military equipment, hardware and auxiliary supplies. Kishinev’s increased mobilization in a sense matched the reality on the ground in terms of a localized arms race.

But to hardliners back in the Supreme Soviet, these events looked like an opportunity to compel Yeltsin to take a more assertive approach in the near abroad. Vice President Rutskoi became their voice. He even made unauthorized trips to Tiraspol with Russian Security Minister Victor Barannikov on a private plane provided by Lithuanian-born trade merchant and chairman of *Seabeco*, Boris Birshstein.³⁰⁹ The latter was essential to the ultimate peace agreement per comments by Moldovan president Snegur.³¹⁰ Unlike Rutskoi, Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev generally followed Yeltsin’s direction. According to Selivanova, these two men epitomized the fight over Russia’s Moldova policy:

“During this period, Russia's policy toward the trans-Dniester region proceeded along two diametrically opposed paths. On the one hand, there was the position of the Foreign Ministry that strove to accommodate the mutual interests of the warring parties to the greatest extent possible. On the other hand, there was the line promoted by Russian Vice President Rutskoi and the Supreme Soviet that openly supported Tiraspol.”³¹¹

³⁰⁸ King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, 349–51.

³⁰⁹ V A Kolosov, “Приднестровский Конфликт И Миротворческие Усилия России (Март – Август 1992 Г.) [The Transnistrian Conflict and Russia’s Peacemaking Efforts (March-August 1992).],” *Izvestia Vuzov*, no. 2 (2008): 77.

³¹⁰ “Как Бирштейн Со Снегуром Торговался [How Birshstein and Snegur Traded],” *Moldavskie Vedomosti*, February 21, 2020, <http://www.vedomosti.md/news/kak-birshtejn-so-snegurom-torgovalsya>.

³¹¹ Selivanova, “Trans-Dniestria,” 63.

Lynch characterizes the battle between these two positions as following a policy evolution from disarray to intervention and finally culminating in something called “peacekeeping.”³¹² Once Moscow got its feet stuck in Moldova, the Russia military withdrew from the Warsaw Pact countries but maintained thousands of troops in the near abroad—Moldova, Georgia, Tajikistan, Armenia—and in the parts of southern Russia like Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia.

Gen Lebed’s popularity among his troops and the public exemplified broader trends of military participation in society and politics. First, Lebed’s popularity in part stemmed from his penchant for insubordination. For example, he disobeyed direct orders from Defense Minister Grachev on numerous occasions, including holding his famous press conferences which were explicitly forbidden. Lebed also routinely failed to carry out President Yeltsin’s directives while in Moldova.³¹³ Second, these behaviors, seldom punished, reflected a wider opposition to state policy that was prevalent among military senior leaders. The military as an institution, opposed military downsizing and later, following 9/11, they opposed what they deemed “Moscow’s overly permissive attitude toward NATO expansion, Western attempts to gain a military foothold in the CIS, and the ABM Treaty negotiations.”³¹⁴ Third, military members openly participated in the political process as candidates and by openly voicing their disapproval of state policies. In the early 1990s, the military collectively created an independent political role and voice. The military institutional voice was primarily directed towards its own corporate interests as well as for personal profit.³¹⁵

³¹² Dov Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Cases of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 114–20.

³¹³ Zoltan D Barany, *Democratic Breakdown and the Decline of the Russian Military* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 95–96.

³¹⁴ Barany, 107–8.

³¹⁵ Barany, 78–79.

A similar pattern took shape within the Russian defense industries. At the end of the Soviet period, the MIC employed 12-16 million people out of a working population of 67.7 million.³¹⁶ By 1992, this number dropped to 5 million people. The Soviet legacy of the MIC as an engine of the economy created inertia that pushed against Yeltsin's reforms to downsize and streamline the MIC. Specifically, the law on conversion has been manipulated to effectively resist downsizing the MIC and instead begin to turn large profits especially for export-oriented firms. Malei argues that Yeltsin's head of economic reform, Yegor Gaidar, miscalculated the state of the MIC in 1991. As such, he attempted a wholesale closure of large swaths of the MIC without understanding their political and economic resilience. As such, by 1992, Malei asserts that Yeltsin lost a major political ally due to Gaidar's alienation of the MIC.

Finally, the goal of conversion is to modify MIC industries into parallel capacities. This by definition reduces the Russian state's ability to produce arms and maintain a military. A policy of conversion by definition surrenders capacity and alternative options for reinvestment and military modernization. Many Russians doubted that money promised by the U.S. towards conversion would be remotely close to what would be required. In addition, giving up arms means losing geopolitical parity with America.³¹⁷ But Gaidar and Prime Minister Chernomyrdin argued that Russia had no use of wasting its economy on a second-tier great power status.³¹⁸ As more people within the military and the MIC pushed against conversion, the collective strength of the defense industry began to right size itself. Menshikov argues that mandatory downsizing

³¹⁶ A Kennaway, "The Military Industrial Complex," Federation of American Scientists, March 1998, <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/industry/docs/TheMilitaryIndustrialComplex.htm>.

³¹⁷ Petr Gladkov, "Прощай, Паритет? [Goodbye Parity?]," *Izvestia*, June 28, 1992, 5, https://yeltsin.ru/uploads/upload/newspaper/1992/mn06_28_92/index.html.

³¹⁸ S Men'Shikov, "Development Scenarios for the Military-Industrial Complex," *Problems of Economic Transition* 42, no. 10 (2000): 35.

in a financial crisis is actually counterproductive, especially for Russia's economy. Instead, he advocates rearing during a crisis because "it helps the economy overcome the crisis, reduce unemployment, and raise real wages" in an industry still very far from reaching output capacity.³¹⁹ He presciently opined in 2000 about a secret Russian sauce for state longevity:

"A Russian government that was so bold as to take such a course would gain popularity not only with the army and the VPK, but with the population as a whole, which would gain from the increase in employment and wages. If such a government proved to be so wise as not to use the newly created military potential for foreign adventures and to slow the growth in arms after a certain time as we move closer to full employment, it would be able to remain in power for a long time."³²⁰

The following three chapters will lend insight into the Russian MIC's rebirth in the 2000s.

³¹⁹ Men'Shikov, 41.

³²⁰ Men'Shikov, 41.

Chapter 5 – Georgia 2008: Low Clarity in a Permissive Strategic Environment

“...in the foreseeable future Russia will take its rightful place among the strong, economically advanced and influential states of the world.”

*Military-Industrial Courier (VPK), 2004*³²¹

“...I’m not afraid. We lived with the Russians for 100 years, and I don’t understand why this war happened. I don’t need Americans. I want to live in peace with Russia.”

Eteri, 70-year-old resident of Gori, Georgia, 2008³²²

This chapter examines Russia’s “five-day” war with Georgia, which began on August 7, 2008. Returning to the same table as presented in the previous chapter, Georgia sits in the bottom left quadrant of Table 5 below, which characterizes the Georgian case as confronting Russia in a context of **low systemic clarity** in a highly **permissive strategic environment**. Leading up to this case, Georgia presented Russia with an insidious threat. On the one hand, Tbilisi posed no clear threat to Russian territory whatsoever. In fact, the Georgian military was unable to assert government control over all of its borders, particularly in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, let alone project power northward to threaten Russia (see Figure 10 below for map). But on the other hand, Georgia’s weak control over its border and some parts of its internal territory created a

Table 5 – Post-Soviet Russian Interventions: Systemic Clarity and the Nature of the Strategic Environment

| | | Nature of Strategic Environment (Permissive to Restrictive) | |
|---|--------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| | | Permissive Strategic Environment | Restrictive Strategic Environment |
| Degree of Systemic Clarity (High to Low) | High Clarity | Syria (2015) | Crimea (2014) |
| | Low Clarity | Georgia (2008) | Moldova (1992) |

³²¹ Mikhail Tul’ev, “Устойчивость политической конструкции [Political Stability],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, February 15, 2017, No6 (670) edition.

³²² Aleksandr Khrolenko, “Блицкриг Не Получилось [Blitzkrieg Failed],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 20, 2008, No33 (249) edition.

low-end security problem for Russia. In the first instance, Tbilisi's porous border with Russia's autonomous regions in the North Caucasus, particularly Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan, provided a get-out-of-jail-free-card for anti-Moscow terrorists to flee Russia and gain sanctuary beyond an international border. In a post-9/11 security context, this was a legitimate security concern, but not necessarily a pretext for interstate armed conflict. In the second instance, Georgia remained at odds with Russian peacekeeping efforts in the two "breakaway regions" of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. A cold Tbilisi government offered little hope for partnership on

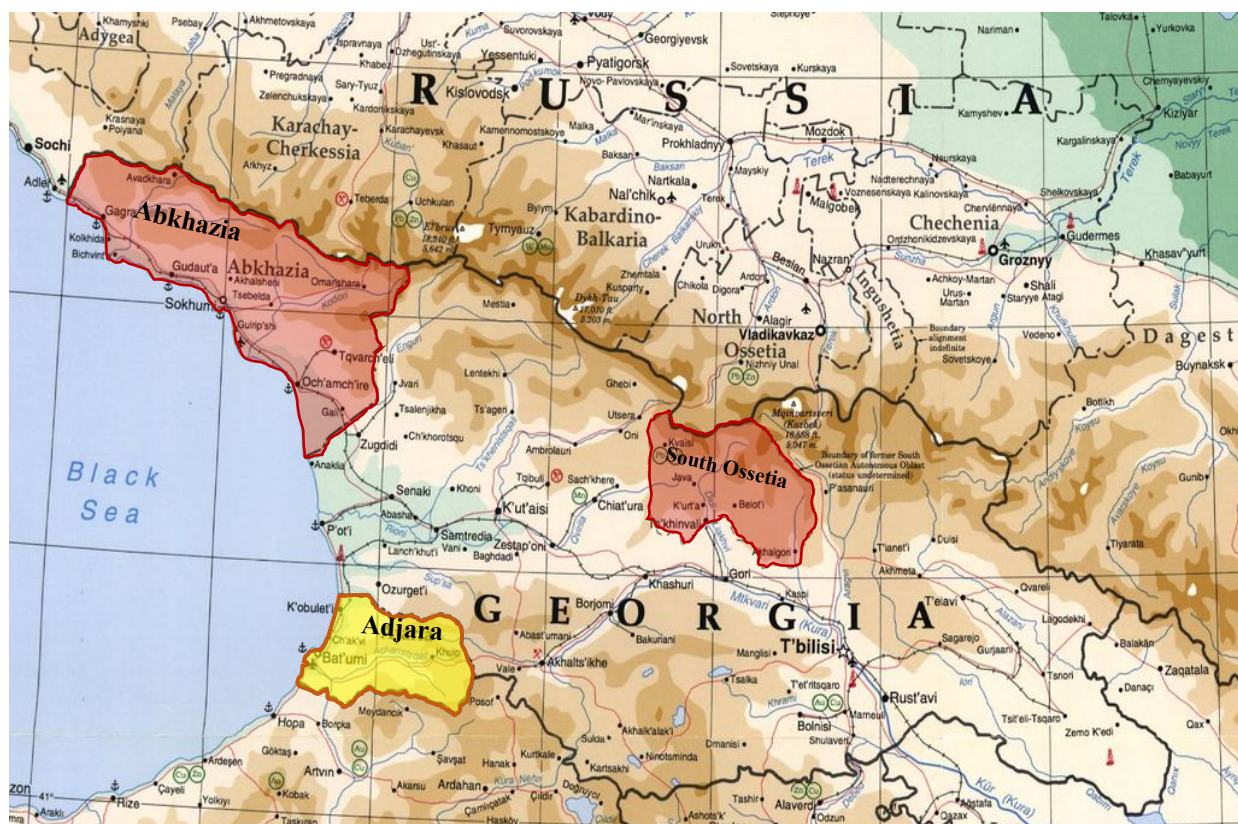


Figure 10 – Map of Georgia. Abkhazia and South Ossetia in red. Image accessed from Library of Congress.

both of these issues and so optimal policy solutions remained elusive. Nevertheless, the permissive environment allowed Russia an opportunity to consider and pursue creative foreign policy pathways that in turn shaped the character of the five-day war. More specifically, the

permissive environment allowed Russia to choose a response unanticipated by Georgia and its NATO backers. What some Western observers depict as unacceptable interstate aggression by Russia, the Kremlin considered mild and proportionate. Similarly, it has been argued in the West that Russia's powerful response to Georgia's internal affairs placed a great shock on the international system with unnecessary threat escalation. From Moscow's perspective, perhaps the five-day war was simply a minor nudge not intended to threaten the world community at large, but rather meant to address a broad range of threats and opportunities with the added benefit of creating a little more geopolitical flexibility for Russia in Transcaucasia. In this way, the timescale of perspective matters: in the immediate term, Russia upset the apple cart; in the long-term, Russia only slightly nudged the system while keeping the same the "rules of the game" in place.

In general, terrorists coming across the border from Georgia posed a low imminent danger to Russia due to the remoteness of the area and the slow pace of travel in the rugged terrain. These were out of the way hiding places far from desirable Russian targets. The Caucasus mountains remain devoid of infrastructure from which "bandits" could conduct swift tactical strikes or project any symmetrical military power. What's more, during the two years leading up to the five-day war, Moscow made sizeable gains on its own side of the border, for example, bringing much-needed stability to Chechnya.³²³ The impact of terrorist activity, however, can never be underestimated.

³²³ Aleksei Matveyev, "Чечня - Уже Пример Соседям [Chechnya - Already an example to the neighbors]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (ВПК)*, October 10, 2007, No39 (205) edition.

Large-scale terror acts such as those that took place in Moscow—apartments building bombings (1999), Dubrovka Theater (2002), Cherkizovsky Market (2006)—or in the towns of Budyonnovsk (1995) and Beslan (2004) levied an incalculable toll on the Russian national psyche and corresponding sense of domestic security. If the U.S. can go to war halfway across the world for nearly two decades as a result of 9/11, it seems reasonable for Russia to take an active stance against terrorists along its own borders. In 2008, due to the common interest and joint efforts tied to fighting global terror, Moscow still supported ISAF in Afghanistan and generally perceived that the U.S. and other NATO states were still valuable partners (i.e. not yet a clear case of “us” vs “them”).³²⁴

In terms of opportunities to make gains in relative power, Moscow had little to salivate over when contemplating an offensive intervention in Georgia. Russia’s military dominance over Georgia was indisputable and picking a fight would likely only tarnish Moscow’s international prestige. Yet, there were several underlying problems involving Georgia that threatened Russia’s national interests, such that when combined in aggregate created an impetus for Russia to take action. In other words, this was a situation in which the Kremlin patiently waited for the right opportunity to seize upon in order to mitigate overlapping threats in a single swoop. Another salient point here is that Russia executed its armed intervention under a well-established pretext of self-defense. Simply put, Russia claims Georgia started it. Moreover, the details—though initially fuzzy due to the warring sides’ competing disinformation efforts—largely corroborate the Russian narrative.

³²⁴ “Новости [News],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, September 3, 2008, No35 (251) edition.

Using material from *VPK*, the three sections below lend more insight into the five-day war. Accordingly, the perspectives present a uniquely Russian take on what Moscow cares about, what actually happened and what the Kremlin did about it. The initial section provides an account of the actual fighting and how hostilities came to an end. These concepts are organized chronologically in three phases of fighting: the onset of hostilities, securing South Ossetia, and establishing conditions for peace. The second section establishes the context in which the Kremlin chose to intervene in Georgia. Here I discuss clarity and the strategic environment caged in President Medvedev's five principles of foreign policy. Finally, a section on lessons learned examines how the Russians performed in the war and how these events shaped both Russia's domestic priorities and geopolitical trajectory into the next decade. These insights help inform us why Russia enters 2014 (chapter 6) facing a new period of high systemic clarity in the international arena.

The Five-Day War

Phase 1 - August 7-8, 2008: "Operation Clear Field." Shortly before midnight Moscow time, the Georgian villages of Nikozi and Ergneti were bombarded with large-caliber artillery. Locals in this part of South Ossetia immediately understood that the Georgian army was now about to storm its capital, Tskhinvali.³²⁵ This began "Operation Clear Field," Georgia's armed assault on South Ossetia that would ultimately lead to a military confrontation with Russia involving 20-30 thousand men on both sides.³²⁶ Tragic as it was, this attack on South Ossetia was not the first, nor did the attack come as a complete surprise. President Saakashvili and his

³²⁵ "Принуждение к Миру [Compelled Peace]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, August 13, 2008, No32 (248) edition.

³²⁶ Пуга Лuchnikov, "О скоротечной кампании в Закавказье [About the fleeting campaign in Transcaucasia]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, August 29, 2012, No34 (451) edition.

administration had been openly discussing plans to reassert government control over all its territory since 2005.³²⁷ Tensions had been on the rise since April when Tbilisi accused Russia of shooting down its Israeli-made UAV flying over Abkhazia. Moscow denied these accusations (US and UK experts could not even agree if it was a MiG-29 or Su-27 that shot down the UAV) and commented that it was odd Georgia refused to acknowledge Abkhazia's claims that it downed a total of seven UAVs between March 18 and May 12, three of which were reported by the UN observer mission in Georgia (UNOMIG).³²⁸

Some Russians wondered, how is it possible that Georgia notices just one UAV missing from their inventory when six others were also downed? Perhaps, Tbilisi did not want to draw attention to the UNOMIG reports that documented many more violations of the 1994 Protocol of the Gali meeting and the Moscow Agreement on a Cease-fire and Separation of Forces which established a security zone between the Abkhaz and Georgian sides. UNOMIG reports indicate that Georgian combat aircraft violated the security zone 158 times in 2007 alone. Georgian Su-25 attack aircraft also violated the zone on April 5 and 13, 2008. In yet another incident reported by UNOMIG, Georgian combat vessels violated Abkhazian waters on May 12, 2008.³²⁹

Here a quick review of recent history is instructive. More than twenty subethnicities are grouped under the broad label of "Georgian," but in fact some are linguistically and culturally very distinctive from the titular ethnic group as observed by J. Hewitt et al.³³⁰ Then there are

³²⁷ Aleksei Matveyev, "Грузинский Плацдарм: Война С Автономиями Неизбежна [Georgian Bridgehead: War with Autonomous Regions Inevitable]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, May 11, 2005, No16 (83) edition.

³²⁸ Artem Troitsky, "Использование Грузинских Беспилотников в Небе Абхазии Неправомерно [Georgian use of drones over Abkhazia is inappropriate]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, July 23, 2008, No29 (245) edition.

³²⁹ Troitsky.

³³⁰ Igor Nikonov, "Грузия: Уроки Истории [Georgia: History Lessons]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, November 12, 2008, No44 (260) edition.

Abkhazians and South Ossetians who have nothing to do with the aforementioned twenty plus Georgian subethnicities. In fact, they fought Georgian forces in 1918 in an effort not to get stuck in an “independent Georgia” following the first world war. Joseph Stalin, an ethnic Georgian, ensured that the Georgian S.S.R. in the 1920s and 1930s remained intact as established, despite local efforts to create separate republics for the non-Georgian peoples of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Adjara.³³¹ With geopolitical foresight, *VPK* likened Stalin’s gift of South Ossetia to Georgia to when “Krushchev gave Crimea to Ukraine in the 50s (author’s translation).”³³²

All three of these ethnic groups claimed independence from Tbilisi amidst the Soviet Union’s collapse. Although President Saakashvili successfully regained the Adjara autonomous region back under Tbilisi’s control in 2004, both Abkhazia and South Ossetia maintained internationally unrecognized self-rule following armed clashes in the early 1990s. For example, in South Ossetia between November 1989 and July 1992, roughly 3,000 civilians were killed and 40 thousand refugees fled north into Russia.³³³ Under various agreements, including the 1992-93 Sochi accords and a U.N. mandate, Russian troops deployed to Abkhazia and South Ossetia to maintain the peace. By 2008, Russian peacekeepers had become a stabilizing fixture in this part of Georgia for over 14 years. Like with Adjara, Saakashvili was ready to regain control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia by whatever means necessary.

August 8, 2008. At approximately 00:42, Mamuka Kurashvili, commander of the Georgian battalion working alongside Russian peacekeepers, called on his counterparts to step

³³¹ Nikonov.

³³² Artem Troitsky, “Для Будущей Победы [For a Future Victory],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 27, 2008, No34 (250) edition.

³³³ Vadim Udmantsev, “Пепел Цхинвали Стучит в Наши Сердца [Tskhinvali’s Ashes Pound in Our Hearts],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 27, 2008, No34 (250) edition.

aside and not intervene in what he called “the establishment of constitutional order in South Ossetia (author’s translation).”³³⁴ In the next few hours, Georgia attacked Tskhinvali with “Grad” rockets, howitzers and heavy mortars. A motorized rifle battalion of Russian peacekeepers under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Konstantin Timerman, 135th Regiment of the 58th Army, positioned itself inside the peacekeeper’s basecamp on the southern edge of Tskhinvali. In all, the Russians had just 220 soldiers because the remaining 250 were widely dispersed in small groups at outposts throughout the area as part of the peacekeeping framework.

For a day and a half, Timerman’s outnumbered men repulsed wave after wave of attacks, despite punishing barrages from artillery, mortars and aviation assets.³³⁵ The Georgians advanced with tanks several times, but the Russians dispersed the accompanying ground soldiers with light arms fire. This left the Georgian tanks isolated and vulnerable to Russian RPGs; as such, the armor withdrew to a safe distance—300 to 500 meters—and resumed direct fire on the Russian peacekeepers. With many men killed or wounded, including Timerman who took large shrapnel from an exploded tank shell, the Russians executed a tactical retreat and relocated to a position 7km away. But not before Timerman destroyed the unit’s secret documents and ordered surplus armored vehicles to be disabled. After two days of rest and medical attention, the Russian peacekeepers rejoined combat operations with the same fighting spirit and skillful leadership as their historical forefathers: the Russian soldiers of 1812 and the Red Army of 1941.³³⁶

³³⁴ “Принуждение к Миру [Compelled Peace].”

³³⁵ “Они Встали На Пути Грузинской Агрессии [On the path of Georgian Aggression],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 20, 2008, No33 (249) edition.

³³⁶ Timur Laturov, “Переписывание Истории Недопустимо [Rewriting history is unacceptable],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 27, 2008, No34 (250) edition.

Nevertheless, other formations of the Georgian army were unimpeded by the Russian peacekeepers and broke into Tskhinvali around 04:20. They followed a path opened by the opening barrages of indirect fire and aviation bombardment. Within half an hour, Russia responded by sending reinforcements through the Roki Tunnel and across the international border from North Ossetia. Such a quick response indicates that Moscow initiated a pre-canned war plan, a standard procedure for most large militaries. In further support of this idea, just three weeks prior to the five-day war, the Russian military held a large-scale exercise called “Kavkaz-2008” in the North Caucasus Military District, involving roughly 8,000 servicemen and 700 armored vehicles.³³⁷ Lessons learned from these practice maneuvers arguably contributed to Russia’s quick response to Georgia’s incursion into South Ossetia.³³⁸

By morning’s end, the geopolitical context of the fighting took shape: conditions on the ground were ugly and worsening, each side blamed the other for the war, and NATO was lining up political support for Tbilisi. Informed about the Georgian invasion via hotline to Tskhinvali, Abkhazia mobilized its militias and later engaged Georgian military formations on the war’s second front.³³⁹ Tbilisi activated its reserve troops and opened a media center dedicated to the war. All Russian TV broadcasts were blocked in the country, yet *Voice of America* coverage doubled.³⁴⁰ Within a day, all internet traffic from .ru domains was blocked in Georgia.³⁴¹ The

³³⁷ “Новости [News],” *Voенно-promыshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, July 23, 2008, No29 (245) edition.

³³⁸ Пуга Кедров, “Война На Фоне Кавказского Хребта [War in the background of the Caucasian Ridge],” *Voенно-promыshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 20, 2008, No33 (249) edition.

³³⁹ Aleksandr Kovyukov, “Помощь Военных Психологов [Military Psychology Assistance],” *Voенно-promыshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 27, 2008, No34 (250) edition.

³⁴⁰ Petr Sukhanov, “Эхо Предвыборной Войны [Echo of an election war],” *Voенно-promыshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 20, 2008, No33 (249) edition; Petr Sukhanov, “Обучили И Оснастили [Trained and Equipped],” *Voенно-promыshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 13, 2008, No32 (248) edition.

³⁴¹ “Принуждение к Миру [Compelled Peace].”

Russian government accused Georgia of widespread disinformation and systematic lies.

Medvedev declared:

“Russia was and is present on the territory of Georgia on an absolutely legal basis, carrying out its peacekeeping mission in accordance with the international agreements that were reached. We have always considered the preservation of peace to be our main task. Russia has historically been and will continue to be the guarantor of security for the peoples of the Caucasus (author’s translation).”³⁴²

Despite Moscow’s claims about the legitimacy of its actions, U.S. and NATO representatives requested Russian forces withdraw immediately from Georgian territory.³⁴³ Ukrainian President Yushchenko also chastised Moscow’s military aggression, to which the Kremlin responded swiftly—Ukraine has no moral authority to teach others, let alone have a role in the conflict’s settlement based on the fact that Ukraine recently “gambled” by arming the Georgian state “to the teeth.”³⁴⁴

Russian forces nonetheless continued south into Georgia. Meanwhile, the Kremlin demanded an emergency meeting in the U.N. Security Council. The Roki Tunnel caused a geographic bottleneck that slowed the Russian advance.³⁴⁵ These formations were further hampered by Georgian artillery fire directed at the tunnel’s southern entrance. Despite these initial impediments, two columns of Russian tanks made their way to Tskhinvali and forced a Georgian retreat. Much of the city was left in ruins with ample evidence of indiscriminate fire

³⁴² The Kremlin, “Заявление Президента России [Statement by the President of Russia],” *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 13, 2008, No32 (248) edition.

³⁴³ “Принуждение к Миру [Compelled Peace].”

³⁴⁴ Илья Кедров, “Проект ‘великая Грузия’ [Project ‘Great Georgia’],” *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 13, 2008, No32 (248) edition.

³⁴⁵ Evgeny Kiselev, “Грузия: До И После Войны [Georgia: Before and After the War],” *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 20, 2008, No33 (249) edition.

from the Georgian army's stand-off attacks.³⁴⁶ Russian forces then pushed beyond the city and began engaging entrenched Georgian positions surrounding Tskhinvali. A concerted effort was placed on flanking artillery positions that continued to shell the South Ossetian capital.

Phase 2 - August 9-10, 2008: "Russia controls Tskhinvali." As Lieutenant General Anatoly Khrulev's column of three dozen vehicles entered Tskhinvali as part of a reinforcement operation from Vladikavkaz, several vehicles took fire from an ambush.³⁴⁷ The Russian general was wounded, likely the main target of a highly successful Georgian special forces unit operating behind enemy lines.³⁴⁸ Several Russian journalists were forced to flee during the shootout that ensued. In the fray, journalists Alexander Kots (*Komsomolskaya Pravda*) and Viktor Sorkirko (*Vesti TV*) ran into a Georgian operative who blocked their way. Kots shouted "I'm a journalist." The Georgian replied, "and I'm a killer."³⁴⁹

Major Denis Vetchinov, who had been injured in the initial attack, picked up a machinegun and provided cover for the journalists and other wounded soldiers. The major's actions drew the enemy's fire and he was wounded again, this time in the head. Determined to protect both his army comrades and the journalists, Vetchinov continued to shoot and scoot, laying down suppressing fire until support arrived to neutralize the threat. Vetchinov's heroic actions went viral back in Russia, great words of praise heaped upon the officer from all involved. It was said he did not just protect the journalists, he also protected Russia itself by ensuring the media could report about the truth in South Ossetia. 18 days after celebrating his

³⁴⁶ Pavel Zavolokin, "После Нашествия Варваров [After the barbarian's invasion]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 20, 2008, No33 (249) edition.

³⁴⁷ "Принуждение к Миру [Compelled Peace]."

³⁴⁸ Aleksandr Khrolenko, "Прикрыл Собой Россию [He Provided Cover for Russia]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, September 17, 2008, No37 (253) edition.

³⁴⁹ Khrolenko.

32nd birthday, Vetchinov succumbed to his wounds not long after the firefight, survived by his wife, Ekaterina, and their two-year old daughter, Masha.³⁵⁰ President Medvedev later awarded the title of Hero of the Russian Federation to both Vetchinov (posthumously) and Timerman.³⁵¹

Just before 10:00 on August 9, Medvedev confirmed that he ordered the commencement of an “operation of peace enforcement (author’s translation).”³⁵² Over the course of the next two days, the Russian military made significant gains in South Ossetia as Russian forces took full control over Tskhinvali. This prompted Saakashvili and the Georgian parliament to declare martial order. With each passing hour, it became more and more clear that Georgian troops had conducted a campaign of genocidal terror in the city and surrounding villages.³⁵³ Medvedev even declared that Russia had stopped the extermination of almost an entire nation.³⁵⁴ By noon on the 10th, the Georgian Foreign Ministry admitted that the South Ossetian capital was under the Russian’s full control. Around supper time, Georgia handed the Russian consul a diplomatic note suing for peace. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said such overtures would be denied until Georgian forces completed a full and unconditional withdrawal from South Ossetia.³⁵⁵

Indeed, Saakashvili’s well-equipped forces maintained attacking Russian positions and resumed shelling Tskhinvali. At least four Russian aircraft were downed by Georgia’s resilient air defense. These losses included a long-range supersonic Tu-22M3 bomber, which was flying high at 10,000 meters and presumably struck by an S-200 SAM system acquired from

³⁵⁰ Khrolenko.

³⁵¹ “Кадры [Personnel],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, August 20, 2008, No33 (249) edition.

³⁵² “Принуждение к Миру [Compelled Peace].”

³⁵³ “Новости [News],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, September 10, 2008, No36 (252) edition.

³⁵⁴ Vadim Udmantsev, “Зверства Режима Саакашвили [The atrocities of the Saakashvili regime],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, August 20, 2008, No33 (249) edition.

³⁵⁵ “Принуждение к Миру [Compelled Peace].”

Ukraine.³⁵⁶ Lt General Yuri Netkachev suspected that Ukrainian mercenaries operated the air defense equipment. With prescient foreshadowing, one *VPK* article opined if in fact Ukrainian SAM operators assisted their Georgian counterparts, “all foreign airlines operating flights to Tbilisi should seriously consider the safety of their aircraft and passengers (author’s translation).”³⁵⁷

Ukrainian pilots may also have been flying Georgia’s effective Su-25 attack aircraft. Indeed, there was ample evidence of international help. Deputy Chief of the General Staff Anatoly Nogovtsyn confirmed reports of non-Georgian soldiers participating in Tbilisi’s offensive.³⁵⁸ Despite a significant influx of modern equipment, recent training with U.S. military advisors and valuable combat experience garnered in support of NATO’s operations in Afghanistan, the Georgian army was simply no match for the sheer size and weight of the Russian military, blunt as it was.³⁵⁹ But Ukraine’s support of Georgia came as a particular stab in the back for Moscow. For example, as recently as 2006 Kiev and Moscow were coordinating for Ukrainian soldiers to conduct S-200 and S-300 live fire training on Russian ranges.³⁶⁰

Phase 3 - August 11-12, 2008: “No One But Russia.” Abkhazian troops had been locked in combat with Georgian forces in the tactically significant Kodori Gorge since the morning of August 9.³⁶¹ The gorge importantly provides key vantage points atop the terrain that descends sharply down to the heart of Abkhazia: the city of Sukhumi. Artillery exchanges

³⁵⁶ Aleksei Matveyev, “Героиновая Атака Саакашвили [Saakashvili’s Heroin Attack],” *Voенно-promyshlenniy kur'er (VPK)*, August 20, 2008, No33 (249) edition.

³⁵⁷ Kedrov, “Проект ‘великая Грузия’ [Project ‘Great Georgia’].”

³⁵⁸ Matveyev, “Героиновая Атака Саакашвили [Saakashvili’s Heroin Attack].”

³⁵⁹ Kedrov, “Проект ‘великая Грузия’ [Project ‘Great Georgia’].”

³⁶⁰ “Новости [News],” *Voенно-promyshlenniy kur'er (VPK)*, August 9, 2006, No30 (146) edition.

³⁶¹ Lev Arnaut and Roland Dzhodzhuа, “После Грузинской Оккупации [After the Georgian Occupation],” *Voенно-promyshlenniy kur'er (VPK)*, August 27, 2008, No34 (250) edition.

between the two sides were sometimes interrupted by strikes from aircraft and ground-launched missiles. By August 12, the Georgian soldiers in the upper Kodori were trapped. That morning, two devastating missile attacks destroyed Georgian weapons caches. This barrage was then followed by the first wave of an Abkhazian assault force—300 soldiers covered by helicopter support. By the time these warfighters made it to Kwabchara and Chkhalt'a, the Georgians had already abandoned their heavy weapons and fled along a safety corridor provided by Russian and Abkhaz forces.³⁶² The Georgians also left behind substantial evidence of American support—large weapons stocks and explosives that had been positioned during the NATO training scheme in which American advisors instructed Georgian troops in the two years leading up to the war.³⁶³

Meanwhile, in cooperation with the Chechen battalion “Vostok” and the Ossetian battalion “Beslan,” Russia’s 693rd motorized rifle regiment cleared the last remaining Georgian forces out of South Ossetia.³⁶⁴ It was now time for Russia to flex its military might and squeeze Georgia geopolitically. To this end, the Black Sea Fleet, led by the flagship missile cruiser *Moscow*, blockaded Georgia’s main ports. This cut the country off from all maritime support and commerce.³⁶⁵ A few Georgian combat vessels attempted to interrupt the Russian navy, but they ultimately proved ineffective and were sunk. Meanwhile, Russian forces continued to root out and destroy Georgian artillery positions until they were forcibly silenced—Georgian forces

³⁶² “Новости [News],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 20, 2008, No33 (249) edition; Arnaut and Dzhodzhuа, “После Грузинской Оккупации [After the Georgian Occupation].”

³⁶³ Aleksandr Khrolenko, “Попытка Вторжения [Attempted Invasion],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, November 26, 2008, No46 (262) edition.

³⁶⁴ Aleksandr Khrolenko, “Псковский Десант [Pskov Airborne],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 27, 2008, No34 (250) edition.

³⁶⁵ Khrolenko, “Блицкрига Не Получилось [Blitzkrieg Failed].”

continued to shell Russian peacekeepers and civilian areas of Tskhinvali despite Saakashvili's claims of a complete withdrawal on August 10.³⁶⁶

As a signature development in the final days of the war, the Russian government began large-scale humanitarian aid shipments to both Abkhazia and South Ossetia.³⁶⁷ This logistical support made an important political point: nobody but Russia delivered much-needed aid to these devastated areas. In tandem with efforts on the ground, Moscow opened up diplomatic channels with the West but refused to negotiate directly with Saakashvili. In addition, Russian ambassador to the UN Vitaly Churkin repudiated claims made by the U.S. that Russia had committed acts of terror against Georgian civilians.³⁶⁸ Ultimately, Georgia signed a ceasefire with Russia, after which Russian forces ceased all combat operations by 15:00 Moscow time. Medvedev declared, “the security of our peacekeeping forces and the civilian population has been restored, the aggressor has been punished and has suffered significant losses.”³⁶⁹ All told, Russia's losses totaled 74 servicemen killed, 171 wounded and 19 missing.³⁷⁰ An estimated 1,400-1,500 civilians also died.³⁷¹

Clarity and Permissiveness in Context: Medvedev's Five Principles

Initial assessments in *VPK* provide a good starting point to assess what happened during the five-day war and why. For example, Georgia purportedly had four goals it wanted to achieve with Operation Clear Field: (1) Military—defeat South Ossetian separatists, neutralize Russian peacekeepers and then control the Roki Pass; (2) Political—expel the Ossetian population who

³⁶⁶ Khrolenko, “Псковский Десант [Pskov Airborne].”

³⁶⁷ Khrolenko, “Блицкрига Не Получилось [Blitzkrieg Failed].”

³⁶⁸ “Новости [News],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, August 13, 2008, No32 (248) edition.

³⁶⁹ “Они Встали На Пути Грузинской Агрессии [On the path of Georgian Aggression].”

³⁷⁰ Udmantsev, “Зверства Режима Саакашвили [The atrocities of the Saakashvili regime].”

³⁷¹ “Принуждение к Миру [Compelled Peace].”

do not want to become Georgian, begin resettlement in South Ossetia and apply for NATO membership; (3) Geopolitical—reduce Russia’s influence in Transcaucasia, open the region to U.S. and Israeli aircraft, and accelerate additional pipeline construction; (4) Technical—gain valuable combat experience and test Georgia’s newly acquired military technology under real conditions.³⁷² On top of this assessment, other articles emphasize Russia’s perceptions about influential systemic stimuli—systemic clarity and the strategic environment—that the Kremlin faced leading up to the five-day war. President Medvedev’s five principles of foreign policy form an instructive framework from which we can flesh out salient elements of context.

Inaugurated on May 7, 2008, President Medvedev encountered the five-day war just inside his first 100 days in office.³⁷³ Two weeks after the war concluded, Medvedev articulated five principles that would shape his foreign policy. Key elements in his remarks built largely upon President Putin’s famous speech before the Munich Security Conference on February 10, 2007.³⁷⁴ In a nutshell, Medvedev said his decisions would be based on the following: (1) Russia recognizes the primacy of international law, which determine the relations between civilized peoples; (2) The world order must be multipolar; unipolarity is dangerous and unacceptable; (3) Russia does not want confrontation with any country, rather it seeks friendship with the U.S., Europe and other nations—not isolation; (4) Russia will protect the lives and dignity of Russian

³⁷² Anatoly Tsyganok, “Грузино-Югоосетинский конфликт и его влияние на Россию [The Georgian-South Ossetian conflict and its impact on Russia],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, December 3, 2008, No47 (263) edition.

³⁷³ “Новый Президент России [Russia’s New President],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, May 7, 2008, No18 (234) edition.

³⁷⁴ “Ралли Россия-НАТО [Russia-NATO Rally],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, November 14, 2007, No44 (210) edition; Yuri Belyaev, “Баланс Сил - Лекарство От Безнаказанности [Balance of Power - The cure for Impunity],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, March 28, 2007, No12 (178) edition; Aleksei Arbatov, “Научиться Слушать И Слышать Оппонентов’ [“Learn to listen and hear the opponents.”],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, May 16, 2007, No18 (184) edition; Georgy Kostev, “Кому Сейчас Принадлежит Военно-морское Искусство? [Who Does Naval Art Belong to Now?],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, April 4, 2007, No13 (179) edition.

citizens "wherever they are," defend its business community abroad, and confront any aggression; (5) Russia, like other countries in the world, has regions with "privileged interests," which are not just border countries.³⁷⁵ The rest of this section organizes contextual data relevant to the Russia's war with Georgia in five bins, each reflecting a different Medvedev principle.

Principle One: Primacy of International Law

Russia recognizes the primacy of international law as the foundation for interaction between civilized nations. The Soviet Union's significant contributions towards defeating German fascism in WWII garnered Stalin a place at the negotiating table in Yalta. It was there that the Soviet ruler participated with his Allied counterparts in shaping how the international system would interact based on foundational legal principles. The Nuremberg tribunals epitomize the value and significance of legal processes in conflict resolution, the identification of criminal actors and the dispensation of justice. In fact, Alexander Bastrykin framed Russia's investigation into Georgian war crimes in context of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.³⁷⁶ Accordingly, 211 investigators interviewed over 6,000 Georgians to validate allegations of Tbilisi's genocide of 1,500 South Ossetians killed in Tskhinvali.³⁷⁷ In this sense, Russia derives benefits from the international system and strives to uphold the status quo.

Events that undermine the international system therefore threaten Russia's core interests. At the time of the five-day war, a Russian take on national interests could be interpreted as a set

³⁷⁵ Tamara Shkel, "Пять Принципов Президента Медведева [President Medvedev's Five Principles]," *Rossiskaya Gazeta*, September 1, 2008, No 4740 Capital edition, <https://rg.ru/2008/09/01/princypi.html>.

³⁷⁶ "Новости [News]," September 10, 2008.

³⁷⁷ Udmantsev, "Пепел Цхинвали Стучит в Наши Сердца [Tskhinvali's Ashes Pound in Our Hearts]."

of objective needs, the fulfilment of which ensures the existence of and opportunities for the progressive development of individuals, society and the state.³⁷⁸ National security is usually understood in Russia to have two elements: on the one hand, as the development of the country and, on the other hand, as guaranteeing that development by ensuring its security. But all this is carried out on the basis of certain national objectives, ideas and other spiritual factors, which together with economic and other material factors determine the national interests of the country. Questions that help define the national interests are thus: What is our place in the world? What kind of state and society do we build, where do we go, for what purposes, and for the military the original question remains: what should we be ready to defend and why?³⁷⁹ For Russia, the abovementioned calculus nests firmly within an understanding that WWII outcomes were just and international law preserves the post-war stability.

Another essential outcome from Yalta was that the great powers had the legitimate authority as victors to redistribute territories and shift international borders—a privileged sovereignty for great powers.³⁸⁰ Yet from that point onward it was enshrined in law that states ought to adhere to the norm against conquest as specified in the U.N. Charter. In this context, Russia perceives itself as a compliant actor. Russia has played the difficult role of peacekeeper across its near abroad where ethnic rivalries still persist. Only Moscow can fulfil this important role because nobody on the ground believes anyone but Russians.³⁸¹ Indeed, the Kremlin views

³⁷⁸ Makhmut Gareyev, “Россия Должна Снова Стать Великой Державой [Russia Must Become a Great Power Again],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, January 16, 2008, No2 (218) edition.

³⁷⁹ Gareyev.

³⁸⁰ “Кое-что Из Истории С Географией...[Something About the History and Georgraphy...],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, December 8, 2004, No47 (64) edition.

³⁸¹ “Новости [News],” August 20, 2008.

itself not only as legally compliant, but more importantly Russia is a good international citizen and a vital contributor to stability in the global community.

At the same time, Russia sees the United States as the rules violator.³⁸² Put bluntly, the U.S. manipulates the U.N. Security Council and routinely violates international law. The U.S. State Department has turned the global community into its legal rubber stamp.³⁸³ For example, the Soviet Union shared with the U.S. 175,000 square kilometers of continental shelf near Kamchatka; but, according to cynical arguments made in Washington, the state that the U.S. made the agreement with—the Soviet Union—no longer exists so in fact the entire continental shelf belongs to America.³⁸⁴ A similar logic has been applied to NATO breaking its promise about no eastward expansion—how can NATO expand towards a country that no longer exists?

Russia seeks to be a good global citizen, but Moscow's primary responsibilities remain vested to its own citizens. At the onset of the five-day war, Medvedev asserted that, "In accordance with the constitution and federal legislation, as President of the Russian Federation, I am obligated to protect the life and dignity of Russian citizens wherever they are (author's translation)."³⁸⁵ Prior to the war, Russia's peacekeeping efforts and parallel fight against international terrorism best highlight the uneasy balance that Russia must strike between safeguarding its own territory and interests while at the same time adhering to international laws and norms. For example, in resolving the conflicts in Georgia during the 1990s, Russia did not annex territory. Russia also did not recognize independence claims made by South Ossetia and

³⁸² Vladimir Dronin, "Западные Эмиссары Подтягиваются На Берега Куры [Western Emissaries Pull Up On the Coast of Kura]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, July 30, 2008, No30 (246) edition.

³⁸³ Sukhanov, "Эхо Предвыборной Войны [Echo of an election war]."

³⁸⁴ Konstantin Kachalin, "Битва За Кавказ [Battle for the Caucasus]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, August 27, 2008, No34 (250) edition.

³⁸⁵ The Kremlin, "Заявление Президента России [Statement by the President of Russia]."

Abkhazia. Instead, Russia established peacekeepers and helped bring in UNOMIG to ensure a multinational, legitimate peace effort.

By the 2000s, Russia pursued a multilateral course based on international laws to combat global terrorism. After the events of September 11, 2001, the U.S. and Russia jointly led efforts to create the Anti-Terrorist Center of the Commonwealth of Independent States (established on June 21, 2000).³⁸⁶ Despite Russia's partnership and restraint in its efforts to combat international terror, Georgia instead encouraged Islamic terrorists to strike Russia. In this way, the Georgian military was not a direct systemic threat to Russian security, but sub-state actors—terrorists—most certainly benefited from Georgia's failure to follow international norms of state behavior regarding terrorists. Tbilisi's behavior in this regard blatantly contradicted international norms.

From the 1990s all the way up to the five-day war, Tbilisi turned a blind eye while anti-Russian terrorists took refuge on its territory. Bandits conducted organized training safely inside Georgia on multiple occasions.³⁸⁷ Tbilisi's security forces were even complicit in Chechen terrorist activity against Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In 2005 while coordinating operational efforts directed against South Ossetian positions in the Pankisi Gorge, Tbilisi offered to pay Chechen fighters \$1,500 per month and \$200 for each day of direct participation in combat operations.³⁸⁸ In 2001 Georgian security services provided logistical assistance to the infamous Chechen bandit Ruslan Gelayev and his band of "wolves," transferring the terrorists from

³⁸⁶ Aleksandr Perendzhiyev, "Доктрина Антитеррора [Antiterror Doctrine]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, March 26, 2008, No12 (226) edition.

³⁸⁷ Aleksei Matveyev, "Обстановка В Чечне Остается Стабильной [The situation in Chechnya remains stable]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, April 27, 2005, No15 (82) edition.

³⁸⁸ Maksim Isayev, "Грузия Готовится К Походу В Южную Осетию [Georgia Is Preparing To Go Into South Ossetia]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 4, 2004, No29 (46) edition.

Pankisi to the Kordori Gorge.³⁸⁹ Interestingly, this is the same Kodori Gorge that later played a significant role in Georgian's Operation Clear Field. More vitally, however, it was groups like Gelayev's that unleashed horror, killing hundreds, in Beslan, North Ossetia.³⁹⁰ In light of such atrocities committed against Russians, the Kremlin's longstanding commitment to Georgia's territorial integrity has been very costly.³⁹¹ Unsurprisingly, some in Russia are asking the diplomats what good is international law if it seems to always turn against Moscow?³⁹²

As another indication of Moscow's desire to uphold global norms, Russia considered but ultimately decided against conducting preemptive strikes against terrorists while located inside Georgia's borders. Public deliberations about preventive strikes began in 2004 after the exploits of Ruslan Gelayev and his cohort of 200 Chechen terrorists in Abkhazia.³⁹³ The problem of preventive strikes against terrorist bases has two components: political and military-technical. From the political point of view, Chief of the General Staff Yuri Baluyevsky confirmed in 2005 that if Russia has information about terrorist bases on the territory of a neighboring state, and a diplomatic solution is not found, then there will be a question of preventive strikes against the terrorists but that remains a decision for the president.³⁹⁴ In December 2004, Sergey Ivanov stressed that, unlike America, Russia has not generated the particular "know how" for

³⁸⁹ "Диверсантов Обезвреживаем Десятками" ["Saboteurs Disarmed by the Dozen.]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, March 23, 2005, No10 (77) edition.

³⁹⁰ Mikhail Khodarenok, "Уроки Беслана [Lessons of Beslan]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, September 8, 2004, No34 (51) edition.

³⁹¹ Aleksei Georgiev, "Чечня: От Боевых Действий - К Мирной Жизни [Chechnya: From Fighting to Peaceful Life]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, April 6, 2005, No12 (79) edition.

³⁹² Boris Podoprigoza, "Победа Во Избежание Худшего [Victory To Escape The Worst]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, September 30, 2009, No38 (304) edition.

³⁹³ "Превентивный Удар [Preventive Strike]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, December 15, 2004, No48 (55) edition.

³⁹⁴ Mikhail Khodarenok, "Удар По Панкисскому Ущелью: Выбор Вариантов [Hitting the Pankisi Gorge: Choice of Options]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, February 2, 2005, No4 (71) edition.

conducting preventive strikes, implying that Russia's military will not contradict the norms of international law.³⁹⁵

Regarding the military-technical aspect of preemption—Russia's tactical arsenal simply did not include the tools necessary for the job. Tu-22 and Tu-160 long-range bombers and their crews had neither the appropriate ordnance nor the proper training to conduct effective strikes against small targets in mountainous terrain. Using heavy ordnance to compensate for a lack of precision might conclude in a fireworks show but without desired results. If true, such strikes would serve only as anti-Russia propaganda. Su-24 fighter aircraft at the time could deliver KAB-1500 precision-strike munitions, but successful employment requires optimal weather and flight paths that remain uncommon in the area. More to the point, the Russian Air Force lacked JDAM-equivalent ordnance that could leverage GPS to achieve a sufficient level of precision.³⁹⁶

Moscow's security situation in Transcaucasia took a turn for the better after 2005, once Moscow finally liquidated top Chechen terrorists Aslan Maskhadov and Shamil Basayev.³⁹⁷ Russia then poured billions of rubles into the North Caucasus to stabilize the region.³⁹⁸ By 2007, the Kremlin had enacted comprehensive programs that revamped the region's FSB and border guard presence. Leading up to the five-day war, Russia commissioned 37 new border outposts and constructed hundreds of apartments for personnel.³⁹⁹ Between 2004 and 2007, 15 billion rubles were spent on forming new mountain brigades for Russia's North Caucasus Military

³⁹⁵ Khodarenok.

³⁹⁶ Khodarenok.

³⁹⁷ Andrei Korbut, "Северный Кавказ Обретает Стабильность [The North Caucasus Gains Stability]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, January 24, 2007, No3 (169) edition.

³⁹⁸ Matveyev, "Чечня - Уже Пример Соседям [Chechnya - Already an example to the neighbors]."

³⁹⁹ Savva Romortsev, "Граница Меняет Облик [The Border Changes it Look]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, May 23, 2007, No19 (185) edition.

District.⁴⁰⁰ Here, 8,000 troops trained in large-scale maneuvers in 2007 a year before “Kavkaz-2008” came to town. All this because terrorist threats still persisted, even despite the rise of Moscow’s hardman in Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov.⁴⁰¹

Meanwhile, Russia watched as the U.S. systematically and hypocritically violated international law in the Balkans. On the one hand, Condoleezza Rice chastised Russia’s five-day war, arguing that promoting stability ought to be done by peaceful means.⁴⁰² Yet on the other hand, the U.S. military used armed force in Kosovo to do the same. Adding insult to injury, Kosovo’s right to self-determination trumped the American position on the sanctity of territorial integrity. In 2007, Kosovo President *Fatmir Sejdiu* proclaimed that he harbored no doubt the U.N. Security Council was ready to adopt a resolution to formally recognize Kosovo as an independent state.⁴⁰³ An article in *VPK* presciently argued at the time that this too favors Moscow as a time will come for Moscow to unilaterally recognize the sovereignty of Abkhazia, Pridnestrovie and South Ossetia.⁴⁰⁴

To be clear, Moscow does not object at all to Kosovo’s independence. However, it does not believe this can be done without the consent of both Belgrade and Pristina. This position is founded in two arguments: first, nobody has cancelled Resolution 1244 of 10 June 1999, which recognizes the territorial integrity of Serbia; second, the Helsinki Final Act of the Conference on

⁴⁰⁰ Aleksei Matveyev, “Бандиту В Горах Не Укрыться [The Mountains Offer Bandits No Shelter],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, August 8, 2007, No30 (196) edition.

⁴⁰¹ Aleksei Matveyev, “Федеральные Структуры: Кавказ Под Нами [Federal Organs: The Caucasus are Under Our Control],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, September 12, 2007, No35 (201) edition.

⁴⁰² Dronin, “Западные Эмиссары Подтягиваются На Берега Куры [Western Emissaries Pull Up On the Coast of Kura].”

⁴⁰³ Andrei Korbut and Vladimir Loskutov, “Российское Вето На Планы Запада [Russian Veto For West’s Plans],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, March 20, 2007, No11 (177) edition.

⁴⁰⁴ Korbut and Loskutov.

Security and Cooperation in Europe of 1975 states that border changes are possible but only with mutual consent from both parties involved.⁴⁰⁵ To this day, Kosovo receives near universal recognition as an independent state. South Ossetia and Abkhazia, in stark contrast, receive no such recognition—just a handful of countries joined Russia in recognizing their independence after the five-day war.⁴⁰⁶ The peoples of Abkhazia and South Ossetia must wonder what is the difference between their right to self-determination and Kosovo's? Apparently, the “Kosovo precedent” is not an American statement about self-determinism but rather one more example of Washington's double standard with respect to international law.

The color revolutions offer another vivid example of how the U.S. undermines the international norms of non-interference through subversive social movements abroad. Four “color revolutions” took place in Russia's post-Soviet near abroad in the four years leading up to the five-day war: the two Rose Revolutions (Georgia, 2003 & 2004), the Orange Revolution (Ukraine, 2004-05), and the Tulip Revolution (Kyrgyzstan, 2005). Collectively, the color revolutions exemplify a people's will to demand free society and fair governance under democratic conditions. Writ large, these revolutions are peaceful, “velvet” movements founded on principles of non-violent protest. The Kremlin, however, did not see these revolutions as organic phenomena. Rather, Russian leaders viewed these revolutions with skepticism and doubt regarding their authenticity.⁴⁰⁷ Moscow perceived these revolutions as externally driven by the U.S. and other Western states as a non-military method for regime change.⁴⁰⁸ From the vantage

⁴⁰⁵ Vladimir Kuznechevsky, “Удар По Послевоенному Устройству Мира [Strike Against The Post-War Mechanism For Peace],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, January 30, 2008, No4 (220) edition.

⁴⁰⁶ “Новости [News],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, September 17, 2008, No37 (253) edition.

⁴⁰⁷ Makhmut Gareyev, ““Расширить И Углубить Фронт Оборонных Исследований” [“Extend and Deepen the Defense Research Front.”],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, December 17, 2008, No49 (275) edition.

⁴⁰⁸ Leonid Barinov, “Идеологические Диверсии - Часть Психологической Войны [Ideological Diversions - Part of Psychological Warfare],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, June 18, 2008, No24 (240) edition.

point of the Kremlin, Russia's sovereign control over its society was now under assault by means other than politics or war.⁴⁰⁹

Russia views these movements less as domestic uprisings but more as international meddling.⁴¹⁰ The U.S. and other states force their liberal values onto other societies under the guise of democratic protest and change. Some criticize the color revolutions as predatory practices designed to cause political change in the most vulnerable countries—Ukraine, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan.⁴¹¹ In these countries the governments and economies are weak. Therefore, manufactured turmoil is quick to levy unnecessary strife and undue harm on the populations that misunderstand the true designs that underpin color revolutions and what processes and funding sources actually drive social action. In this light, Kyrgyzstan is instructive. Its predecessor color revolutions were bloodless.⁴¹² But in Kyrgyzstan the velvet template went off course, resulting in widespread looting, vandalism and violence. Kyrgyzstan may have seen violence due to legitimate social frustration over poverty, unemployment and Akaev's corruption. Perhaps, these were simply the unintended consequences of an externally driven regime change.⁴¹³

Another Russian viewpoint on color revolutions sees them as evidence of a new Cold War. They are a means to expel the Russian military from wherever it operates until it remains only inside Russia.⁴¹⁴ The vacuum created by Russia's withdrawal makes way for a new "U.S.

⁴⁰⁹ Igor Chirnov-Rezakin, "Западное Закавказье: Цели И Методы Их Достижения [Western Transcaucasia: Goals and Methods of Their Achievement]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, July 30, 2008, No30 (246) edition.

⁴¹⁰ Vasily Fartyshev, "Правда, Доступная Немногим [Truth. Available to Few]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, June 6, 2007, No21 (187) edition.

⁴¹¹ Viktor Sokolov, "Победители И Пораженные [Winner and Losers]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, May 18, 2005, No17 (84) edition.

⁴¹² Aleksei Georgiev, "Грузия, Украина, Молдавия, Киргизия... [Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan...]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, March 20, 2005, No11 (78) edition.

⁴¹³ Georgiev.

⁴¹⁴ Sokolov, "Победители И Пораженные [Winner and Losers]."

Area of Responsibility.”⁴¹⁵ In this way, Russia’s victorious outcome in the five-day war undermined the legitimacy of the “Rose” revolution’s drive for social hegemony. Here, Medvedev’s policy to intervene with the armed forces bundled opportunities to accrue strength: push back on color revolutions, preserve Russian lives and dignity, temper NATO ambitions replace Russia in its own near abroad, and solidify an anchor inside Georgia to decisively deny terrorist havens.⁴¹⁶

Well before the five-day war, there were signs that Georgia’s color euphoria was fading. Former Minister of State Security Igor Giorgadze observed already in December 2003, that people needed to somehow live, get jobs, put a roof over their heads and bring bread home to the children, but Saakashvili and men like him are always unable to get Georgia out of a crisis.⁴¹⁷ Hitting on the undemocratic nature of a mob, Giorgadze envisioned great danger for Tbilisi if it continues to pursue an aggressive policy towards South Ossetia. According to Giorgadze, former Soviet Foreign Minister and former Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze warned of a looming disaster in South Ossetia, telling NATO openly back in 2001 that a very big danger is hidden: if Georgia continues to act in spite of Russia, it will lose everything, including its ability to recover its 1991 borders.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁵ Area of responsibility (AOR) is a designation used by the U.S. DoD to designate some combatant command responsibilities according to geographic areas. The article is taking a jab at the AOR concept, which places the entire world under American “responsibility.” This viewpoint criticizes the American AOR designations as indicative of imperialistic or hegemonic designs for global domination.

⁴¹⁶ Andrei Devyatkov, “Смена Акцентов [Change of Accents],” *Voенно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, September 17, 2008, No37 (253) edition.

⁴¹⁷ Sergei Kron, “Эйфория Революции Проходит [The euphoria of the revolution is passing],” *Voенно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, December 31, 2003, No17 edition.

⁴¹⁸ Kron.

For *VPK*, the writing was on the wall about Saakashvili for a long time. This suggests Russia operated in a permissive strategic environment. No singular threat or opportunity forced Moscow's hand prior to 2008. Moscow may have wanted to invade Georgia for a long time, but strategic patience allowed Russia to claim victim status in the conflict and therefore take the moral high ground in the media, especially in Russia, and in diplomatic efforts. Though most Western reflexes found fault with Russia, Human rights Watch confirmed Russia's claims about Georgia's systematic "propaganda and disinformation" during the conduct of Operation Clear Field.⁴¹⁹ Although optimal foreign policy solutions were not to be found, the Kremlin was able to bide its time in search of a lasting solution to ensuring self-determinism for South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

But not everyone saw it like Giorgadze: buoyed by the initial success of the color revolutions, the "velvet" leaders of Georgia and Ukraine travelled to Moldova and effectively formed an anti-Russian coalition, albeit a small one without much power, committing the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development to forming a peacekeeping force of its own.⁴²⁰ According to reports about their secret meeting held in Moldova in 2005, GUAM efforts coalesced around a unified position on separatism: the central authorities must be able to assert full control over all internal regions.⁴²¹ In other words, the GUAM states were signaling to Russia that Moscow's years of peacekeeping efforts would be challenged. This message threatened the self-determinism of repressed minority groups living in the GUAM states specifically, and undermined the livelihood of Russians living in the near abroad more generally.

⁴¹⁹ "Принуждение к Миру [Compelled Peace]."

⁴²⁰ Aleksei Matveyev, "'Оранжевый Реванш' Для Непокорных Автономий ["Orange Revanche" for Disobedient Autonomies]," *Voенно-promыshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, July 20, 2005, No26 (93) edition.

⁴²¹ Matveyev.

Moscow's concerns were not unfounded. During his second "Rose" revolution, Saakashvili amassed an army and threatened military action against Adjara in order to reestablish Tbilisi's authority over the self-declared autonomous region.

Principle Two: The World Must Be Multipolar

In Medvedev's view, a unipolar world is dangerous because it allows the hegemon to violate international rules in violent ways, like America did in Iraq and the Balkans, particularly Kosovo. Here again America is the rules breaker, not Russia.⁴²² Importantly, in a multipolar world it is much harder for a single state to dominate. There is a qualitative component to the concept of safety in numbers that suggests a hegemon can only be confronted by a competing great power(s). Otherwise, a hegemonic state can divide and dominate even when a great number of states exist due to an exceedingly large gap in relative power.

When violating international norms and laws in non-violent ways is not enough for a hegemon to get its way, the American superpower naturally will use force.⁴²³ There are never enough concessions that can please a hegemon—there is almost no country on the planet not subject to American "interests."⁴²⁴ This is how state power works and why a hegemonic America threatens Russia. Compare Russia's military concessions during the 1990s with NATO's and the point becomes clear.⁴²⁵ The American threat is based on military advantage but in fact Russia's

⁴²² "Новости [News]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 28, 2008, No34 (250) edition.

⁴²³ Artem Ivanovsky, "Итоги Пятидневной Войны [Outcomes from the Five-Day War]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, September 3, 2008, No35 (251) edition.

⁴²⁴ Vladimir Prokhorov, "В Обход Всех Правовых Норм [Bypassing All Legal Norms]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 27, 2008, No34 (250) edition; Petr Semenov, "Геополитические Последствия "Нового Американского Века" [Geopolitical Consequences of the 'New American Century']," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, June 11, 2008, No23 (249) edition.

⁴²⁵ Makhmut Gareyev, "Проблемы и решения [Problems and Solutions]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, October 22, 2008, No42 (258) edition.

sovereignty is already under attack by an additional destructive force: the combination of American liberal democracy and globalism.

On the military front, American actions in the area of strategic security threaten Russia the most. Because Russia's conventional military lags well behind the U.S., Moscow relies on its nuclear forces to ensure its national security.⁴²⁶ When dealing with large numbers of nuclear weapons, several assets become of particular importance for ensuring peace: balance, trust and transparency.⁴²⁷ But because the U.S. is the sole superpower with such a disproportionately large advantage in relative conventional power vis-à-vis all others, these assets along with common sense evaporate when Washington sees yet another prize for the taking.⁴²⁸ This behavior is like a spoiled child unopposed in a toy store, or as the Russian proverb goes: *no matter how much you feed a wolf, it still looks into the forest* (author's translation).⁴²⁹ Russia does not want to harm the U.S. per se, rather the Kremlin wants to see restraint.⁴³⁰ In lieu of restraint, American power must be checked through the counterweight of a multipolarity international system.

Moscow accuses America of lacking strategic foresight. Washington's true intentions seem to be geared towards creating a nuclear strike advantage. This shift in mentality is evidenced by America's withdrawal from the ABM treaty in 2002 and its subsequent plans to

⁴²⁶ Gennady Pulin, "Вооруженные Силы: Год Перемен [Armed Forces: Year of Change]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, April 16, 2008, No15 (231) edition.

⁴²⁷ Aleksei Matveyev, "Американская ПРО Оккупирует Польшу [American ABM Occupies Poland]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 27, 2008, No34 (250) edition.

⁴²⁸ Prokhorov, "В Обход Всех Правовых Норм [Bypassing All Legal Norms]."

⁴²⁹ In Russian: Сколько волка ни корми, все равно в лес смотрит, see: "Сколько Волка Ни Корми... [No Matter How Much You Feed A Wolf...]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, April 2, 2008, No13 (229) edition.

⁴³⁰ Aleksei Matveyev, "Откат В Нестабильность Вполне Вероятен [Rollback to Stability Quite Likely]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, January 9, 2008, No1 (217) edition.

position an anti-ballistic missiles system in Europe close to Russia's borders.⁴³¹ Creating a missile shield in tandem with proposed prompt global strike capabilities—the ability to deliver high-precision ballistic strikes with conventional munitions anywhere in the world within one hour of target detection—threatens to negate Russia's strategic nuclear arsenal.⁴³² This kind of imbalance would encourage the U.S. to heighten its already aggressive foreign policy and increase the chances for nuclear miscalculation and catastrophe.

The U.S. argues that its nuclear shield in Europe is extremely limited in capacity and intended to only negate the growing ballistic threat posed by Iran and North Korea—it is not aimed at Russia.⁴³³ If this is true, why does the U.S. simultaneously upgrade similar systems elsewhere in Europe, such as Greenland, that are not tied to the “limited” missile defense system?⁴³⁴ Why won't the U.S. sign an agreement limiting the system to 10 missiles?⁴³⁵ Why won't the U.S. allow Russia to partner with this mutually beneficial technology and host radars in the CIS?⁴³⁶ This Russian line of argumentation is really suggesting the issue at hand—America's real intentions—is scale. What starts out as limited intent under the auspices of restraint can easily scale upwards in capacity at a later date so that the U.S.-Russia nuclear parity shifts to an American advantage.

⁴³¹ Aleksandr Skvortsov, “Для Нас Угроза Реальна [For Us the Threat is Real],” *Voенно-promыshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, June 13, 2007, No22 (188) edition.

⁴³² Aleksandr Kondratyev, “Нужна ли информационная революция в армии? [Do we need an information revolution in the army?],” *Voенно-promыshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, December 10, 2008, No48 (264) edition.

⁴³³ Matveyev, “Американская ПРО Оккупирует Польшу [American ABM Occupies Poland].”

⁴³⁴ Yuri Avdeyevsky, “Противоракетная Оборона В Европе [Missile Defense in Europe],” *Voенно-promыshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, December 26, 2007, No50 (216) edition.

⁴³⁵ Aleksandr Vovk and Vadim Koval, “Гарант Стратегической Безопасности [Strategic Security Guarantor],” *Voенно-promыshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, December 19, 2007, No49 (215) edition.

⁴³⁶ Aleksandr Lidin, “Противоракетная Угроза [Antimissile Threat],” *Voенно-promыshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, October 17, 2007, No40 (206) edition.

In this sense, prompt global strike can be seen as a first strike capability made credible because the missile shield can clean up the remaining second strike capability that Russia might respond with.⁴³⁷ According to Col Gen Nikolai Solovtsov, under no circumstances will Russia allow its nuclear deterrent potential to be devalued.⁴³⁸ Therefore, it was prudent for Russia to demonstrate to the U.S. a willingness to engage in large-scale military operations as was done in response to Georgia's operation in South Ossetia during the five-day war. Russia's resolve in Georgia may have been influenced by U.S. efforts to undermine the nuclear balance with its ABM shield.⁴³⁹ It did not take long for the Kremlin's five-day war to receive high geopolitical marks at home—albeit indirectly—evidenced by President Obama's reversal of the Bush administration's course on missile interceptors based in Europe. In 2009, the U.S. instead chose to implement a ship-based version of the missile shield that better reflected the limited scope that was advertised by Washington.

In a parallel effort to signal both military resolve and disapproval about growing security concerns, Moscow suspended its participation in the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) in 2007.⁴⁴⁰ Moscow's actions arose from the politicization of CFE efforts due to the formation of national blocks based on regional interests and “flank restrictions” that impeded Moscow's ability to combat terrorism on its own territory.⁴⁴¹ Many Western analysts felt instead Moscow's CFE pause was a response to U.S. ABM systems in Europe, but Defense Minister

⁴³⁷ Gareyev, “Проблемы и решения [Problems and Solutions].”

⁴³⁸ “Новости [News],” September 17, 2008.

⁴³⁹ Prokhorov, “В Обход Всех Правовых Норм [Bypassing All Legal Norms].”

⁴⁴⁰ “Новости [News],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, May 9, 2007, No17 (183) edition; Sergei Proklov, “Просто Терпение Лопнуло [Petience Simply Broke],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, July 26, 2007, No28 (194) edition.

⁴⁴¹ Evgeny Vuzhinsky, “Последний Довод России [Russia's Last Argument],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, July 4, 2007, No25 (191) edition.

Anatoly Serdyukov said that could not have been further from the truth. What matters, he said, is "the primacy of international law, military restraint, consideration of each other's security interests and equal dialogue without prior intra-bloc agreements (author's translation)."⁴⁴² With a focus on mutual security interests, Russia pursued further goodwill with the West in regard to the issues of using Russian territory and airspace for the transfer of troops and cargo to Afghanistan.

By 2008, the collapse of the bipolar world and its system of international relations had exposed a number of problems and unleashed an unbridled America.⁴⁴³ Having taken a leading position in the world, the U.S. lost its humanistic democratic traditions in pursuit of a new course in politics, choosing more often violent methods of achieving pseudo-democratic goals without regard to international law.⁴⁴⁴ Furthermore, the U.S. unfairly drives globalization and liberal internationalism to exploit markets and deprive other states from their sovereign right to determine for themselves what form of government to implement and which national interests to pursue.⁴⁴⁵ Alas, Russia cannot escape the world's problems associated with globalization and must seek ways to nudge the system towards multipolarity.⁴⁴⁶

Principle Three: Russia Seeks Neither Confrontation Nor Isolation

Russia does not want confrontation with any country and will not withdraw into isolation. Moscow desires an internationally collaborative approach to development and fair treatment in a

⁴⁴² Gennady Pulin, "Москва И Брюссель Сверили Часы [Moscow And Brussels Calibrate their Watches]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (ВПК)*, June 27, 2007, No24 (190) edition.

⁴⁴³ Evgeny Kiselev, "Плавучие Оазисы Американской Свободы [Floating Oases of American Freedom]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (ВПК)*, June 25, 2008, No25 (241) edition.

⁴⁴⁴ Andrei Voznesensky, "Наступление На Евразию [Attack on Eurasia]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (ВПК)*, May 14, 2008, No19 (235) edition.

⁴⁴⁵ Andrei Devyatkov, "Растаскивание Внимания На Ложные Цели [Diverting Attention to False Targets]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (ВПК)*, September 10, 2008, No36 (252) edition.

⁴⁴⁶ Perendzhiyev, "Доктрина Антитеррора [Antiterror Doctrine]."

globalized world.⁴⁴⁷ Friendly relations are desirable with the U.S., European states and others around the world. It is in this positive frame that Russia places its own actions in Georgia. However, the Kremlin feels other states try to undermine this constructive approach. In 2005, Georgia's former Minister of State Security Irakli Batiashvili felt the same way: "there is a big geopolitical game going on in which Georgia is given a certain role as an irritant to Russia (author's translation)."⁴⁴⁸ Furthermore, Batiashvili asserted that Georgia was not a threat to Russia, and Russian bases in Georgia (Akhalkalaki and Batumi) did not threaten Georgia.

Consequently, for most of the 2000s Russia faced low systemic clarity about Tbilisi's threat intentions. According to Sukhumi analysts, Abkhazia's recent military conflicts showed that most often they started with little political preemptive action from Tbilisi, weak predictions of the enemy's capabilities, and the minimum level of political will necessary in Tbilisi for pursuing state-sanctioned violence.⁴⁴⁹ Russia similarly perceived Georgia as a threat only with low clarity. But what was becoming ever more apparent was NATO's threat signal via expansion and economic activity in the Black Sea region.⁴⁵⁰ In order to deal with NATO's increasing spectrum of interests, Moscow pursued a collaborative, multilateral approach: the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CTSO).⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁷ Aleksandr Selivanov, "Усиливается Противостояние Цивилизаций [The Clash of Civilizations is Intensifying]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, October 24, 2007, No41 (207) edition.

⁴⁴⁸ "Новости [News]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, May 25, 2005, No18 (85) edition.

⁴⁴⁹ Viktor Tropinin, "Сухуми Им Не По Зубам [Sukhumi Is Out of Their League]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, March 14, 2007, No10 (176) edition.

⁴⁵⁰ Yuri Drozdov, "Неравноправное Партнерство [Unlawful Partnership]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, May 11, 2005, No16 (83) edition.

⁴⁵¹ Leonid Ivashov, "ОДКБ - НАТО: Есть Ли Перспективы Равноправного Партнерства? [CSTO-NATO: Any Prospects for an Equal Partnership?]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, June 29, 2005, No23 (90) edition.

In 2005, a NATO representative in Moscow explained the essence of the alliance's post-Cold War transformation: "if we used to be guided by threats, now we are guided by opportunities (author's translation)."⁴⁵² NATO's embrace with Georgia piggybacked on Washington's military investitures into Tbilisi that same year. In 2005, the U.S. spent \$65 million to train and equip new battalions that would form the foundation of a new, modern Georgian Army.⁴⁵³ Tbilisi increased its own military spending to \$324 million for 2005, 21.4% of its budget or roughly 6% of GDP.⁴⁵⁴ These investments brought in NATO advisors at the same time Georgia was finalizing agreements to shutter Russia's legacy bases, holdovers from the Soviet era like the 14th Army in Pridnestrovie but smaller. Here the threat to Russia rested on a belief that NATO facilities, personnel and materiel would replace Moscow's. Therefore, Moscow's downsizing in Georgia will undoubtedly have serious military and strategic consequences associated with the expansion of NATO to the east and redistribution of the superpower's influence in the post-Soviet space.⁴⁵⁵

Moscow's concerns about NATO replacing its influence in the CIS stemmed largely from Georgia's openly declared ambitions about joining the alliance.⁴⁵⁶ Tbilisi ambitiously pursued a series of military modernization efforts. In addition to multiple U.S. sponsored training programs, Georgian troops also participated in ISAF combat operations in Afghanistan. These

⁴⁵² In Russian: "В этом- то и состоит сама суть трансформации НАТО: если раньше мы в своей деятельности исходили из угроз, то сейчас - из возможностей." See: Vadim Udmantsev, "Из Первых Рук. Трансформация НАТО [Firsthand. NATO Transformation]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, June 1, 2005, No19 (86) edition.

⁴⁵³ "Новости [News]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, March 30, 2005, No11 (78) edition.

⁴⁵⁴ Matveyev, "Грузинский Плацдарм: Война С Автономиями Неизбежна [Georgian Bridgehead: War with Autonomous Regions Inevitable]."

⁴⁵⁵ Aleksei Matveyev, "Противостояние. Руки У Тбилиси Развязаны [Confrontation. Tbilisi's Hands Are Untied]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, April 12, 2006, No14 (130) edition.

⁴⁵⁶ Sergei Gorbachev, "В Одностороннем Порядке [In the Unilateral Order]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, January 18, 2006, No2 (118) edition.

troops were considered so experienced that the U.S. rushed them back to Georgia during the five-day war.⁴⁵⁷ Just prior to engaging in armed conflict with Russia in South Ossetia, Tbilisi declared it had formally “joined the NATO codification system (author’s translation).”⁴⁵⁸ Similar trends of controversial NATO expansion were also taking place in Armenia. For example, Yerevan partnered with NATO in joint military exercise “Cooperative Lancer 2008” two months after the five-day war.⁴⁵⁹

In order to counter both NATO’s physical expansion and its uptick in prestige within Russia’s near abroad, Moscow sought out safety in numbers.⁴⁶⁰ During the 2000s, six of the nine original CTSO member states were still in the organization, which was initiated in 1994. In 2005, Moscow decided it was time to strengthen the CTSO more formally, which followed guidelines laid out in the CTSO 2006-2010 plan.⁴⁶¹ These efforts resulted in comprehensive strengthening of interstate cooperation and the formation and development of its collective security system. An integrated air defense system, coordinated by OAO “Rosoboroneksport,” would serve as the backbone for CTSO regional security.⁴⁶² At the Council of Ministers of Defense meeting held in May 2006, the CTSO agreed to begin funding the CIS Joint Air Defense System beginning in 2007.⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁷ “Принуждение к Миру [Compelled Peace].”

⁴⁵⁸ “Новости [News],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, August 6, 2008, No31 (247) edition.

⁴⁵⁹ Andrei Korbut, “Метания Еревана [Yerevan’s Exercise],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, August 6, 2008, No31 (247) edition.

⁴⁶⁰ Andrei Korbut, “ОДКБ Превратилась В Мощный Союз [The CTSO Has Become a Powerful Union],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, October 10, 2007, No39 (205) edition.

⁴⁶¹ “Новости [News],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, May 18, 2005, No17 (84) edition.

⁴⁶² “Новости [News].”

⁴⁶³ Roman Simakov, “Здесь ГУАМ Не Помощник [Here GUAM is Not a Helper],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, June 7, 2006, No21 (137) edition.

The CIS Joint Air Defense System concept was premised on the increasing use of high-precision weapons and the American way of war as demonstrated since the first Gulf War in 1990-91.⁴⁶⁴ The nature of NATO's actions in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq also convincingly suggest that the 21st century will be dominated by defensive systems and other preventive solutions to geopolitical problems.⁴⁶⁵ In American terms, this marks the advent of geopolitically driven A2/AD. When analyzing Russian air defense systems, Russian designers and engineers wondered if the Kosovo precedent would have occurred at all had Belgrade possessed S-300 technology at the time. Considering it was an outdated S-125 system that brought down an F-117 stealth fighter, backers of the CIS Joint Air Defense System had good reason to be optimistic about Russia's next generation of SAM systems in the works.⁴⁶⁶

The S-400 "Triumph" SAM system first went online for combat duty in the Moscow region on August 6, 2007.⁴⁶⁷ According to Russian experts at the time, the S-400 has no analogues in the west. More specifically, the S-400 stands out from all other SAM systems in its shoot-down effectiveness, making significant improvements over the S-300 in "the kill zone," fire performance and interference immunity.⁴⁶⁸ The S-400 also doubled the S-300 target acquisition range and maximum height of engagement. But already in 2007, S-400 designers were looking ahead to the next generation of Russian SAM systems. The concept here is to form

⁴⁶⁴ Boris Chelstov, "Военная Доктрина Требуется Уточнения [Military Doctrine Requires Clarifications]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, April 24, 2007, No16 (182) edition; Yuri Balyko, "Обеспечить Гарантированное Превосходство Тенденции [Ensure Guaranteed Trends of Excellence]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, December 5, 2007, No47 (213) edition.

⁴⁶⁵ Igor Ashurbeyli, "Эпоха Александра Расплетина [The Age of Alexander Raspletin]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, September 17, 2008, No37 (253) edition.

⁴⁶⁶ Ashurbeyli.

⁴⁶⁷ Sergei Starygin, "«Триумф» Уже Состоялся [\"Triumph\" Has Already Happened]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 1, 2007, No29 (195) edition.

⁴⁶⁸ Oleg Falichev, "От С-400 - К Системе Пво-про Пятого Поколения [From the S-400 to the Fifth Generation SAM]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, March 7, 2007, No9 (175) edition.

a CIS-wide fully integrated air and space defense system that can counter NATO aircraft and missile threats of the fifth generation and beyond.⁴⁶⁹ The CTSO conducted command and staff exercise “Rubezh-2008” within this framework in July 2008, just one month before the five-day war with Georgia.⁴⁷⁰

In a sign of geopolitical de-escalation, Moscow received positive signals from NATO indicative of low systemic clarity. Chief among them was NATO’s April 2008 decision to postpone membership for both Ukraine and Georgia at their summit in Bucharest.⁴⁷¹ Some Russian experts were convinced Ukraine was imminently about to join NATO as early as 2005.⁴⁷² Therefore, the postponement for accession into the alliance was looked upon as a favorable step in Moscow.⁴⁷³ The five-day war undoubtedly confirmed for NATO that they were not yet ready to fight against Russia in Transcaucasia. Poland’s former Defense Minister Radek Sikorski opined, “I think the rules have changed in the sense that Europe, in which we could dispense security guarantees to countries without anticipating having to bear any cost for them, has just ended. The Russians have forced us to think in a more disciplined way about the future of NATO, the value of the guarantees, the practicalities that go with them.”⁴⁷⁴ In this sense, the five-day war was Russia’s way to nudge some norms and expectations within the international

⁴⁶⁹ Falichev.

⁴⁷⁰ “Новости [News],” *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, July 30, 2008, No30 (246) edition.

⁴⁷¹ Aleksandr Manachinsky, “Натовский ‘троянский Конь’ В Степях Украины [A NATO Trojan Horse In the Steppes of Ukraine],” *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, June 25, 2008, No25 (241) edition.

⁴⁷² Viktor Sokolov and Natalya Pechorina, “Киев На Пути В НАТО [Kiev On Its Way to NATO],” *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, April 20, 2005, No14 (81) edition.

⁴⁷³ Igor Vasilyev, “Путь В НАТО Под Прицелом Снайперов [Path to NATO In A Sniper’s Scope],” *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, April 9, 2008, No14 (230) edition.

⁴⁷⁴ Peter Cassata, “NATO Says ‘No’ to Georgia and Ukraine ... For Now,” *Atlantic Council*, December 5, 2008, <https://atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/nato-says-no-to-georgia-and-ukraine-for-now/>.

system to a more favorable context, but not an attempt by Russia to undermine the system as a whole.

Principle Four: Defend Russians Anywhere, Confront Aggression

Medvedev assured Russians that the Kremlin will protect them no matter where they are. This includes protecting their dignity and historical identity. These important intangibles, for example, came under attack just a week prior to the five-day war: the Russian nation was forced to watch on TV how Georgian soldiers humiliated Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia by forcibly subduing them and seizing their equipment.⁴⁷⁵ After the five-day war, Medvedev was speaking with proven authority when he assured his electorate that Russia would always have an answer to aggression. He also made it clear that this policy was not limited to the near abroad. Simply put, Medvedev understood Russian businesses and society need protection from external threats. Important questions are why he thought so and to what extent such threats were clearly directed against Russia's territory or core interests. Two key elements that feature throughout the pages of *VPK* help answer this question: the erosion of Russia's historical roots in society and the development of the Georgia-Ukraine-Azerbaijan-Moldova (GUAM) axis.

Patriotism is the foundation of contemporary Russia, its new public and the state building process still under construction.⁴⁷⁶ Patriotism underpins the entire system of development in Russia, and it provides an ideological foundation for the state's vital activities. Therefore, patriotism is essential for the health and growth of all state institutions, including the military. In

⁴⁷⁵ "Грузии Нужна Показательная Порка [Georgia Needs a Good Spanking]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, June 25, 2008, No25 (241) edition.

⁴⁷⁶ Oleg Falichev, "Престиж Военной Службы [Military Service Prestige]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, June 4, 2008, No22 (238) edition.

this context, General of the Army Nikolai Pankov authored a report that asserts government branches at all levels must interact with the institutions of civil society, public associations with patriotic orientations and the main religious confessions to foster Russian patriotism and harness it in the interests of increasing the prestige of military service.⁴⁷⁷ With top officers and soldiers, the quality of the military grows. In turn, a healthy military ensures the safety and security of the Russian state. Yet much progress is still needed in terms of cultivating and maintaining a sense of patriotism within large state-funded enterprises. Analysis from the five-day war, for example, suggested that a great deal of material deficiencies in the Russian army stemmed from gross negligence and mismanagement in the arms procurement industry.⁴⁷⁸

To this end, the Moscow City Government initiated the program "Patriotic education of Moscow youth for 2007-2009."⁴⁷⁹ In similar fashion, federal authorities enacted the state program for "Patriotic Education of Citizens of the Russian Federation" for the period 2006-2010. The MOD also formed a Culture Center of the Armed Forces. In 2007, this organization conducted a conference under the banner "Patriotism of the Peoples of Russia: Traditions and Modernity."⁴⁸⁰ This effort identified areas in which communities can partner with the military to instill patriotic values in Russia's youth, especially in the school systems. These efforts were highlighted as preparing for celebrations to mark the upcoming 65th anniversary of the defeat of the German fascist troops in the Battle of Kursk and the 300th anniversary of the Battle of Poltava.

⁴⁷⁷ Falichev.

⁴⁷⁸ Gennady Pulin, "Потеря Качества [Loss of Quality]," *Voенно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, September 10, 2008, No36 (252) edition.

⁴⁷⁹ "Год Чтения По-русски [Year of Reading in Russian]," *Voенно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, March 14, 2007, No10 (176) edition.

⁴⁸⁰ Falichev, "Престиж Военной Службы [Military Service Prestige]."

The opposite is also true: Anti-Russian sentiments in the near abroad and the West undermine Russia's power. Anti-Russian historical perspectives impede efforts to foster national pride and articulate a sovereign identity with deep cultural roots tied to enduring armed struggles punctuated by great military victories.⁴⁸¹ Outside forces that threaten this sense of pride are a threat to Moscow because they lower the national will that underpins the state's ability to mobilize people and resources towards national security efforts.⁴⁸² In short, Moscow wants its people to remain proud, resilient and historically aware of Russia's position in the international system; and the government wants them to retain the traditional sensibility that Russians are always willing to sacrifice everything in defense of the motherland.⁴⁸³ In short: the state and citizens are strong together and history suggests the former ought to guide the latter.

In July 2007, the International Olympic Committee awarded Russia the privilege to host the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi.⁴⁸⁴ Historically, the Olympics are a source of immense pride for the nation. As such, hosting the Sochi games was seen as a gift from the strong state to its people for an opportunity to bask in national pride and glory on the world stage—the last such experience was at the (boycotted) Moscow Summer Games in 1980. As is often the case, geography means a lot. In this case, Sochi sits on the Black Sea about 150 kilometers from Abkhazia. In other words, Sochi is a stone's throw from where Tbilisi enables Chechen terrorists to subvert autonomous authorities and stage attacks on Russia. Based on proximity, Sochi

⁴⁸¹ Sergei Brezkun, "Тысячелетний Русский Щит [A Thousand-year-old Russian Shield]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, April 9, 2008, No14 (230) edition.

⁴⁸² Vladimir Lutovinov, "Мы Не Вправе Искажать Правду О Великой Отчественной [We are not right to distort the truth about the Great Fatherland]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, July 16, 2008, No28 (244) edition.

⁴⁸³ Brezkun, "Тысячелетний Русский Щит [A Thousand-year-old Russian Shield]."

⁴⁸⁴ Chirnov-Rezakin, "Западное Закавказье: Цели И Методы Их Достижения [Western Transcaucasia: Goals and Methods of Their Achievement]."

became a new target to attack the dignity of the Russian people.⁴⁸⁵ Under UNOMIG, the Russians were rather limited to what peacekeeping forces they could position in Abkhazia. The Kremlin would not invade Georgia simply to gain a more robust security cordon in Abkhazia, yet practically speaking it would make a great deal of sense to ensure Abkhazia was involved in fighting if South Ossetia got into an armed tussle with Saakashvili.

As the text above indicates, Medvedev's fourth principle encapsulates a broad strategic sense of threats and opportunities that give great import to the spiritual, emotional and physical wellbeing of all Russians. As such, Russia's rationale to intervene with armed force in Georgia can be seen in context of Medvedev's desire to protect Russian-speaking ethnic minorities—many of whom hold Russian passports—from a genocidal attack. In contrast, the American military intervention in Kosovo had no rationale to protect Americans. Instead, the U.S. manufactured intent through purported claims of human rights violations in order to seize geopolitical advantage by force.

Principle Five: “Privileged Interests”

Russia is vast and unique, built on a tradition of a powerful state and an influential people of great historical consequence.⁴⁸⁶ This legacy demands what President Medvedev called “privileged interests” in certain parts of the world. Russia's near abroad is undoubtedly “privileged” in this sense. Medvedev, however, cautioned that Russia's interests are not necessarily tied close to its borders. Within the near abroad, Russia's privileged interests include

⁴⁸⁵ Vadim Udmantsev, “На Страже Внутренней Безопасности Государства [On the Internal Security of the State],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, March 12, 2008, No10 (226) edition.

⁴⁸⁶ Boris Bobrov, “Сильная Власть: Теория И Практика [Strong Power: Theory and Practice],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, November 26, 2008, No46 (262) edition.

positioning peacekeepers and military bases close to political hot spots.⁴⁸⁷ Furthermore, projecting Russia's power beyond the near abroad requires positioning strategic assets in specific geographical locations, some of which are not on Russian soil. The most important of these privileged locations plays host to the Russian Black Sea Fleet's: Crimea.

In the 1990s, Russia established peacekeeping as an essential core competency to promote stability throughout the CIS. Peacekeeping efforts in Georgia were not necessarily tied to maintaining a large military presence. For example, Russia agreed to remove all its soldiers stationed in the country as part its legacy Soviet footprint.⁴⁸⁸ This process took many years of negotiation, primarily because Russia had nowhere suitable to house the personnel and equipment.⁴⁸⁹ Arguably, Russia dragged its feet to delay the inevitable withdrawal of bases from Georgia, but in 2007 Russia's last base finally shuttered. Saakashvili called the event "a historic act and one of the great constructive victories of Georgian diplomacy... We believe that military bases in Georgia were a relic of the imperialist past and had nothing to do with good neighborly relations with Russia (author's translation)."⁴⁹⁰

Ironically, the five-day war reestablished Russia's military presence on Georgian soil, albeit in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. According to Moscow, these new troops reflect Russia's privileged position in Transcaucasia. According to Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, "They are not peacekeepers, they are military contingents. Their quantity is determined by the Russian

⁴⁸⁷ Olga Kolesnichenko, "Российские Миротворцы Востребованы Во Многих Странах [Russian Peacekeepers Demanded In Many Countries]," *Voенно-promыshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, July 23, 2008, No29 (245) edition.

⁴⁸⁸ Aleksei Matveyev, "Грузинские Проводы [Georgian Goodbyes]," *Voенно-promыshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, June 8, 2005, No20 (87) edition.

⁴⁸⁹ "Новости [News]," *Voенно-promыshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, March 23, 2005, No10 (77) edition.

⁴⁹⁰ Matveyev, "Противостояние. Руки У Тбилиси Развязаны [Confrontation. Tbilisi's Hands Are Untied]."

Ministry of Defense (author's translation)."⁴⁹¹ This scenario underscores the complex political interplay between basing and peacekeeping. Properly understood, they are different tools for the same purpose, one more sizeable than the other. They both protect Russia's privileged interests and are each calibrated according to Russia's long-term interest of upholding international law and observing the norm of territorial integrity wherever possible.⁴⁹²

On the matter of strategic geography, Crimea has been an essential part of Russia's security calculus since the 18th century. This did not change in the 2000s. According to Russian Admiral Vladimir Masorin, "the area of the Black Sea Fleet is a zone of strategic interests (author's translation)."⁴⁹³ Moscow understood maintaining relations was vital to maintaining the base's lease, due to expire in 2017. As such, the Kremlin invested \$10 million in 2006 towards social development in Sevastopol communities and earmarked another \$4 million in 2007.⁴⁹⁴ These efforts underscore the concerns of both the Russian navy and the local population regarding the lease's renewal status.

But Viktor Yushchenko's Orange Revolution placed the status of Russia's navy base in Sevastopol under serious doubt. The Ukrainian president admitted that on top of rents, real estate and military radio frequencies, "delineation of the border in the Azov, Black Sea and Kerch Strait is a big problem."⁴⁹⁵ Sensing that the base's lease may not be renewed, Masorin assured

⁴⁹¹ "Новости [News]," September 17, 2008.

⁴⁹² Andrei Korbut, "Как Мы Потеряли Аджарию [How We Lost Adjara]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, June 1, 2005, No19 (86) edition.

⁴⁹³ Aleksei Matveyev, "Мид Украины Хочет Крикнуть "Геть!" [MOD of Ukraine Wants to Shout 'Get (Out)!]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 15, 2007, No31 (197) edition.

⁴⁹⁴ Oleg Falichev, "Севастопольский Марш Продолжается [The Sevastopol March Continues]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, October 3, 2007, No38 (204) edition.

⁴⁹⁵ Aleksei Matveyev, "Третья Оборона Севастополя [Third Defense of Sevastopol]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, March 28, 2007, No12 (178) edition.

Ukraine that if the base shuts, “Let the Ukrainian side not worry – all the Black Sea Fleet vessels will depart to the base in Novorossiysk (author’s translation).”⁴⁹⁶ Why put gasoline on a fire and then try and put it out?⁴⁹⁷

The Ukrainian government objected to the Russian Black Sea Fleet taking part in the five-day war with Georgia. As such, Yushchenko’s administration slapped new restrictions on Russia’s Black Sea fleet and personnel in order to disincentivize further provocations against Georgia.⁴⁹⁸ The Russian Foreign Ministry said, “The measures which the Ukrainian side threatens to take against the Russian Black Sea Fleet would not correspond to Russian-Ukrainian agreements,” and emphasized displeasure with Kiev’s material support to Tbilisi by adding “We believe the Ukrainian side should have thought about that when it was supplying arms to the party that started the this conflict (author’s translation).”⁴⁹⁹ With shrewd foresight, *VPK* begged the question about Crimea’s future, “Are we ready to defend Sevastopol ourselves once again (author’s translation)?”⁵⁰⁰

Summing the Five Principles: Low Clarity in a Permissive Strategic Environment

The five-day war and associated episodes highlight the importance of Russia’s military presence in its near abroad. After many years of geopolitical weakness, Russia demonstrated great resolve during the conflict. Indeed, the South Ossetians did not surrender mythical “universal values” as Russian-speaking residents in the CIS because this time the Kremlin’s response was far from the toothless leadership that Russians became accustomed to under

⁴⁹⁶ Matveyev, “Мид України Хочет Крикнуть “Геть!” [MOD of Ukraine Wants to Shout ‘Get (Out)!].”

⁴⁹⁷ Aleksandr Khrolenko, “Киевский Камикадзе [Kiev Kamikaze],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, August 20, 2008, No33 (249) edition.

⁴⁹⁸ “Новости [News],” September 3, 2008.

⁴⁹⁹ Khrolenko, “Киевский Камикадзе [Kiev Kamikaze].”

⁵⁰⁰ “Новости [News],” September 3, 2008.

Yeltsin.⁵⁰¹ Although the exact timing of the conflict with Georgia came as a surprise, the manner in which it unfolded was not. Russia was clearly ready to implement a large-scale invasion aimed to dominate the Georgian army and thereby resolve the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Leading up to the five-day war, Moscow was presented with low systemic clarity and a permissive strategic environment, illustrated in Table 6.

Although the overall clarity is assessed as low in Table 5, more fidelity can be seen in Table 6. To begin with, the permissive strategic environment affords Russia a new luxury that it did not have in the case of Moldova—time to pursue non-reactive policies. During Russia’s posture of strategic patience, multiple opportunities lined up in Moscow’s crosshairs, creating a high sense of clarity about “advantage opportunity.” This opportunity, however, was not perceived in a singular, state-vs-state calculation of relative power. Rather, it materialized as a series of low capable or low imminent threats: Georgia the state, NATO expansion, international terrorists, Sochi, Sevastopol etc. All of these threats happened to line up for Moscow to address in a single military intervention.

⁵⁰¹ Kiselev, “Грузия: До И После Войны [Georgia: Before and After the War].”

First, Tbilisi received the spanking it deserved. This in turn helped signal to NATO that further expansion is fraught with danger. More immediately important, the occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia now denies NATO an easy opportunity to fill the basing void that

Table 6 – Russian Intervention in Georgia: Low Clarity in a Permissive Strategic Environment

| Systemic Stimuli | Stimuli Elements | Element Attributes | Case 2 |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|---------|
| | | | Georgia |
| Clarity | Discernability | Threat Intent | L |
| | | Threat Capability | L |
| | | Threat Imminence (Scope) | L |
| | | Advantage Opportunity | H |
| | | Adversarial Resolve | L |
| | | Opportunity Imminence (Scope) | M |
| | Time Horizon | Threat Signals | M |
| | | Opportunity for Advantage | H |
| | Optimal Options | Threat Policy Options | L |
| | | Opportunity Policy Options | L |
| Nature of Strategic Environment | Imminence (Content) | Threat Danger | L |
| | | Opportunity Attractiveness | H |
| | Magnitude | Threat Impact | L |
| | | Opportunity Impact | L |

Moscow created in 2007 when its last military installation in Georgia closed shop. Third, Russia's enhanced presence in these autonomous regions denies terrorists the safe haven they once found there. Fourth, Russia's lockdown of Abkhazia prevents both Georgian and terrorist elements from attempting to sneak through the Russian border near Sochi. This protects Russia's Olympic project safe to develop facilities and infrastructure. Finally, securing Abkhazia as a basing platform provides a viable backup to Sevastopol should the Yushchenko regime terminate the lease in 2017. Sukhumi, although less than ideal, offers a viable port for housing the portion of the Black Sea Fleet that would otherwise not fit in Novorossiysk.

Although the overall strategic environment is permissive, I assess the “opportunity attractiveness” as high. I doubt Medvedev’s five principles for foreign policy were a product of hindsight and contemplation after the five-day war. Rather the case data suggests it was with careful contemplation that Russia chose to intervene in Georgia. It is very possible the “Kavkaz-2008” military exercise was in fact a rehearsal. Again, this suggests Russia pursued a patient, methodical course of action as opposed to some sort of myopic or emotional (over)reaction. Likewise, the systemic stimuli suggest that Russia did not act out of a revanchist desire to reassemble the former Soviet Union piece by piece. Further evidence for this conclusion can be found in Russia’s target sets: during the five-day war Russia pursued Georgia’s military, yet used great caution to spare civilian centers and economic assets (this limited war approach was criticized by Sokolov and others but praised by Gen Gareyev).⁵⁰² From the actual conduct of the war—diplomatic and military-technical execution—Russia learned many lessons about the nature of its capabilities and deficiencies.

Lessons Learned: Modernize & Immunize⁵⁰³

Moscow’s geopolitical success in Georgia may have castrated Saakashvili’s ability to exert central authority over his own territory, but this process also exposed many deficiencies in the Russian military specifically, and in the Russian approach to diplomacy in general. To some extent, Russian battlefield blunders highlighted that, conventionally speaking, Russia was only a middle power, and remained a far way off from having a credible ability to project power beyond

⁵⁰² Gareyev, “Проблемы и решения [Problems and Solutions].”

⁵⁰³ For a good lessons learned analysis in English, see: Carolina Vendil Pallin and Fredrik Westerlund, “Russia’s War in Georgia: Lessons and Consequences,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies: Crisis in the Caucasus. Russia, Georgia and the West* 20, no. 2 (2009): 400–424, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592310902975539>.

its immediate borders. German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt's observation that Russia is like an "Upper Volta with Missiles" rang true.⁵⁰⁴ Similarly, Google founder Sergey Brin asserted, "Russia is Nigeria with snow." Given all this, Russia naturally accrued many lessons learned during the five-day war. The section below outlines key take-aways highlighted in the pages of *VPK*.

"Made in U.S.A.": Exposing Russia's Military Deficiencies

The five-day war proved that quality tanks like the T-90 are often worth their weight in gold on a contested battlefield, but not every aspect of Russia's military performed up to par in Georgia.⁵⁰⁵ Indeed, Russia's armed forces revealed deficiencies in multiple key areas, but there is hope that Russia may resolve many of these issues in a timely manner thanks to Medvedev's immediate acceptance of public criticism about this and the subsequent prioritization of military modernization in the Kremlin.⁵⁰⁶ To begin with, a brief characterization of the adversary is instructive. Georgia's debut of a professional army can be summed up easily: "made in U.S.A."⁵⁰⁷ In other words, American advisors trained the Georgian army well, and Tbilisi purchased a whole lot of modern NATO-standard kit. Between 2002 and 2007, the U.S. trained 5,000 Georgian soldiers.⁵⁰⁸ All of Georgia's 12,000 soldiers and Ministry of Internal Affairs troops were professional, contracted warfighters.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁴ Sergei Karaganov, "Неочевидный Фактор - Сила Оружия [The Unobvious Factor - The Power of Weapons]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, January 15, 2013, No2 (470) edition.

⁵⁰⁵ Artem Troitsky, "Боевой Опыт Южной Осетии [The South Ossetian War Experience]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, October 1, 2008, No39 (255) edition.

⁵⁰⁶ Pulin, "Потеря Качества [Loss of Quality]."

⁵⁰⁷ Sukhanov, "Обучили И Оснастили [Trained and Equipped]."

⁵⁰⁸ Sukhanov.

⁵⁰⁹ Aleksandr Khrolenko, "Боевой Дебют Профессиональной Армии [Combat Debut of a Professional Army]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, September 10, 2008, No36 (252) edition.

By the time they faced Russian forces in combat, much of Georgia's equipment was superior to that of the Russians, especially regarding legacy Soviet systems that Tbilisi modernized while Moscow did not. Su-25 attack aircraft are a prime example: Georgia's upgraded version could fly freely above Tskhinvali at night but the same Russian aircraft could not.⁵¹⁰ Georgia's air defense systems—queued by passive targeting sensors—clearly outperformed Russian expectations, downing six aircraft.⁵¹¹ Georgia's T-72 tanks were also far superior to their Russian counterparts, again able to fully function at night due to shrewd upgrades.⁵¹² Tbilisi appeared far more capable and prepared in terms of information operations and controlling the media narrative both inside Georgia and outside the region, particularly in the West.⁵¹³ Perhaps simplistic, but arguably the five-day war can also be summed up this way: Georgia prepared well, fought well but ultimately succumbed to defeat due to the sheer size and blunt force of the Russian army—not its military-technical quality. Finally, many Russian experts characterize Georgia's Operation Clear Field as a “Failed Blitzkrieg.”⁵¹⁴

Russian forces, astonishingly, utilized no means of electronic warfare against the Georgian army.⁵¹⁵ Equally troubling, all Russian communications in the first three days of the war were conducted via clear radio transmissions that the Georgians could easily intercept and jam. Russian forces in mountainous terrain had severe problems communicating via military

⁵¹⁰ “Новости [News],” *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, September 17, 2008, No37 (253) edition; Anatoly Zaitsev and Andrei Evdokimov, “Эхо Пятидневной Войны [Echo of the Five-Day War],” *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 7, 2013, No30 (498) edition.

⁵¹¹ Zaitsev and Evdokimov, “Эхо Пятидневной Войны [Echo of the Five-Day War].”

⁵¹² Troitsky, “Для Будущей Победы [For a Future Victory].”

⁵¹³ Igor Panarin, “Инструмент Внешней Политики [Foreign Policy Instrument],” *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 13, 2008, No32 (248) edition.

⁵¹⁴ Илья Кедров, “МВСВ: Задание На Вырост [International Defense Exhibition: Tasked to Grow],” *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, September 10, 2008, No36 (252) edition.

⁵¹⁵ Zaitsev and Evdokimov, “Эхо Пятидневной Войны [Echo of the Five-Day War].”

equipment, at times borrowing satellite and cell phones from journalists.⁵¹⁶ Russia also lacked UAVs and precision-strike weapons.⁵¹⁷ Therefore, manned air force assets were required to fly in contested air space for unnecessarily long periods of time, and this likely contributed to some of the six aircraft shot down by Georgia's IADS. Despite intentions to increase the 14 GLONASS satellites by another ten in 2007, the satellite system performed poorly in the war.⁵¹⁸ There is little need for acquiring high-precision munitions in Russia's arsenal if Moscow intends to rely on commercial-grade GPS.

The "Kavkaz-2008" military exercises may have helped prepare Russian forces to quickly respond to the Georgian operation, but Moscow clearly failed to capitalize on assets organic to the fight. Hundreds of local South Ossetian militiamen and vehicles were mobilized and ready to engage in combat support operations, but Moscow had not coordinated in advance.⁵¹⁹ There simply was no plan to work together. Another failure at the local level was then systematic failure of Russian support troops to cover the flanks for key lines of communication. As a result, Georgian sappers successfully sabotage Russian convoys, including the above-mentioned attack on General Khrulev. Without exception, analysts and participants speak highly about Russian morale on the ground, a serious factor that helped overcome their technical deficiencies.

Given the results of the five-day war and the mixed state of capability across the armed forces, General Gareyev argues that Russia should focus on six areas of modernization heading

⁵¹⁶ Ivan Karev, "Связь Дорогого Стоит [Connectivity is Expensive]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, January 27, 2010, No3 (319) edition.

⁵¹⁷ Kedrov, "Война На Фоне Кавказского Хребта [War in the background of the Caucasian Ridge]."

⁵¹⁸ Svetlana Kuskova, "ГЛОНАСС - Наш Ответ GPS [GLONASS - Our Answer to GPS]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, December 6, 2006, No47 (163) edition.

⁵¹⁹ Zaitsev and Evdokimov, "Эхо Пятидневной Войны [Echo of the Five-Day War]."

into the next decade.⁵²⁰ First, place a premium on strategic modernization and readiness—reject all international trends aimed to diminish Russia’s nuclear capacity or expanding proliferation to a larger “nuclear club.” Second, it remains paramount for Russia to implement a unified system of air and space defense with survival radars and an automated control system.⁵²¹ Third, Russia’s navy requires a qualitative improvement, which hinges on two tasks: resolve the Black Fleet basing schema; invest in scientific research and attract new human talent to ensure required breakthroughs take place in the MIC. Fourth, MIC arms development must focus on systems of weapons rather than individual weapons. Fifth, the modernization process will benefit from a streamlined command structure that provides clarity of vision by eliminating redundancies and overlapping interests.⁵²² Finally, given the media’s attention on Russian intelligence deficiencies during the five-day war, military professionals and the Russian public ought to remember that perfect military intelligence does not exist and probably never will.

Rarity of Solidarity

A key lesson learned from the five-day war was unmasking just how few friends Moscow can rely on when the going gets tough. As in the times of St. Aleksandr Nevsky, who was squeezed between the Teutons in the West and the Horde in the East, the choice of policy is predetermined: it is no longer possible to agree with the West, and there is no allied sincerity with China.⁵²³ In Politics one must not only ask who is the enemy, but also question who is friendly. In this context, the noise surrounding Moscow’s military intervention in Georgia was

⁵²⁰ Gareyev, “Проблемы и решения [Problems and Solutions].”

⁵²¹ Gennady Pulin, “В Ответ На Угрозы XXI Века [Responding to 21st Century Threats],” *Voенно-промышлennyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 22, 2007, No32 (198) edition; Nikolai Frolov, “Главный ТВД Будущего [The Main Theater of Operations of the Future],” *Voенно-промышлennyi kur'er (VPK)*, December 12, 2007, No48 (214) edition.

⁵²² Anatoly Tsyganok, “Меняется Время - Меняется И Военная Доктрина [Times Are Changing - And So Does Military Doctrine],” *Voенно-промышлennyi kur'er (VPK)*, November 7, 2007, No43 (209) edition.

⁵²³ Devyatkov, “Смена Акцентов [Change of Accents].”

only crickets: the CIS countries—especially Belarus, Kazakhstan and Armenia—failed to provide Russia with effective, timely political support.⁵²⁴ Moreover, Viktor Yushchenko in Ukraine proved a loud, anti-Russian critic.

Belarus remains a go-to military partner. In 2007, Russia agreed to outfit Belarus with 27 Iskander batteries by 2020.⁵²⁵ Given America's continued pursuit of a ABM shield stationed in Europe, Iskander and other systems will provide a viable military counter as well as psychological pressure on NATO such that they might reconsider. In the weeks following the five-day war, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov also intimated that Moscow was now ready to reconsider Syria's request for arms purchases. According to Lavrov, Presidents Medvedev and Bashar al-Assad spoke on August 21, 2008 and confirmed Russia's willingness to supply Damascus with defensive weaponry and in no way intends to disrupt the strategic balance of forces in the region.⁵²⁶ Soon after Tskhinvali, Russian missile cruisers sailed around the world off the American shores and docked in Venezuela.⁵²⁷ This demonstration of force indicates two things: Russia is committed to loyal partners even outside the near abroad, but at the same time Russia's friends are few and far between.

NATO is Dangerous

NATO should be considered a dangerous threat to Russian sovereignty and clearly labelled as such. There is an unreconcilable duality to the modern international system that does

⁵²⁴ Aleksei Matveyev, "СНГ: Пора Действовать Более Активно [CIS: Time To Be More Active]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 20, 2008, No33 (249) edition.

⁵²⁵ Pavel Bruntalsky, "“Искандер” Вступил В Психологическую Войну ["Iskander" Has Entered Into Psychological Warfare]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, December 19, 2007, No49 (215) edition.

⁵²⁶ "Новости [News]," August 28, 2008.

⁵²⁷ "“Петр Великий” Против JP Morgan ["Peter the Great" vs JP Morgan]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, February 4, 2009, No4 (270) edition.

not allow for an easy, peaceful relationship with NATO. On the one hand, it is necessary to unite all material and intellectual resources available to the different states in the world in order to solve global security threats and other challenges posed to humanity writ large. Here globalism is good. On the other hand, there are still strong cliques and forces in the world which seek to establish a monopolar world or, in General Gareyev's "simple language," these forces seek "world domination."⁵²⁸ NATO is chief among these negative forces.

The power politics that push for U.S. hegemony have economic underpinnings that cannot be simultaneously realized by other states. The reason here is scarcity. The U.S. has just 5% of the world's population but consumes 50% of raw materials and roughly 25% of the world's oil products.⁵²⁹ Bearing this in mind, it is impossible for all aspiring states to achieve similar levels of consumption in any sustainable reality. Along this path towards post-Cold War dominance, the NATO block has not only lost the sense of its existence, but also has become a dangerous impediment towards collective progress. America's expansion comes at the expense of Russia and others. Liberal international ideology is at an impasse, but progressive powers of any era are dangerous. Russia already learned from history not to give into the progressive concerns: after signing the Brest peace in 1918 and weakened by world war and internal turmoil, Japan and the Western powers invaded Russia under false pretexts—first in Murmansk and next in Vladivostok.⁵³⁰ This is why President Medvedev must nudge the world towards a new security system with a more favorable balance of system benefits.

The Primacy of Nukes is Not Enough

⁵²⁸ Gareyev, "Проблемы и решения [Problems and Solutions]."

⁵²⁹ Gareyev.

⁵³⁰ Timur Latypov, "'Принуждение к миру' и глас народа ["Forced Peace" and the Voice of the People]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (ВПК)*, October 22, 2008, No42 (258) edition.

Russia watched the U.S. operate in the post-Soviet world order and came to a simple conclusion—no conflict is solved in a peaceful, political way.⁵³¹ National interest can only be defended through military power.⁵³² Indeed, the task of politics and diplomacy is, first and foremost, to create favorable conditions for the use of armed forces.⁵³³ The primacy of military power in solving interstate problems in the 21st century mandates that Russia maintain strategic parity with the U.S. This task rests solely on the shoulders of Moscow's nuclear triad.⁵³⁴ The five-day war with Georgia, despite conventional military setbacks, was a geopolitical win.

Yet, given Russia's military deficiencies, it is conceivable that Georgia and NATO may have fought back more than they did if Russia's military was not underpinned by nuclear forces on standby. To be clear, Moscow did not threaten to use these weapons during the five-day war. Their use is a daily constant: an implied potential on both sides of the Atlantic, spoken in the language of deterrence. Nevertheless, Russia must maintain a decisive strategic deterrent, and serial production of the Topol-M is a good start. Beyond the strategic triad, Russia maintains a considerable amount of tactical nuclear weaponry. Some experts argue that Moscow also needs to plus up this unique arsenal in light of the conventional force's failures in Georgia.⁵³⁵

⁵³¹ Gareyev, "Проблемы и решения [Problems and Solutions]."

⁵³² Sergei Brezkun, "Ядерная Геополитика России [Russian Nuclear Geopolitics]," *Voенно-promыshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, February 16, 2005, No6 (73) edition.

⁵³³ Gareyev, "Проблемы и решения [Problems and Solutions]."

⁵³⁴ Vovk and Koval, "Гарант Стратегической Безопасности [Strategic Security Guarantor]"; Sergei Brezkun, "Ядерно-подводный Недобор? [Nuclear Submarine Shortage?]," *Voенно-promыshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, March 5, 2008, No9 (225) edition.

⁵³⁵ Igor Korotchenko, "Хочешь Мира - Готовься К Войне [If You Want Peace, Prepare For War]," *Voенно-promыshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 20, 2008, No33 (249) edition.

Specifically, the Russian army lacks combat ready artillery brigades proficient in 203- and 240-mm guns capable of “bring down nuclear rain (author’s translation)” on an adversary.⁵³⁶

Of all the vital tasks of a government, the chief endeavor must be the development of the economy, because without it, no national security task can be solved.⁵³⁷ Therefore, the pathway to a secure country is not through war, but through the development of its economy. The scale of economic reform required in Russia is so large that either a new Cold War with an associated arms racer or long sustained periods on a wartime footing would significantly impede economic progress. As such, Moscow must pursue peaceful relations within the international system because the economy depends on robust global trade and exchange.⁵³⁸ Some argue that any confrontation between Russia and Europe is unnatural and would be a pernicious blight for all mankind.⁵³⁹ Another prevalent view in Russia on how to balance between national security and economic openness is through educational, religious (Orthodox) and social programs that foster a more resilient and spiritual society immune to Western forms of non-violent attack: information influence, social propaganda, liberal internationalism and all associated means of “velvet” revolution.⁵⁴⁰

National will is not just an endeavor pursued by state run programs, but a movement taken up by society to nurture the citizens’ defense consciousness through patriotic education of young people and a collective effort to raise the health of conscription-age men as well as the

⁵³⁶ Mikhail Khodarenok, “В Ответ На Расширение НАТО [In Response to the Nato Extension],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (ВПК)*, April 7, 2004, No13 (30) edition.

⁵³⁷ Gareyev, “Проблемы и решения [Problems and Solutions].”

⁵³⁸ Gareyev, ““Расширить И Углубить Фронт Оборонных Исследований” [“Extend and Deepen the Defense Research Front.”].”

⁵³⁹ Aleksandr Bogdanov, “Военный Аспект Русского Западничества [The Military Aspect of Russian Westernism],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (ВПК)*, March 12, 2008, No10 (226) edition.

⁵⁴⁰ Gareyev, “Проблемы и решения [Problems and Solutions].”

incentives and prestige of military service.⁵⁴¹ Part of the problem cultivating a positive Russian self-image in society resides outside its borders. One of the most obviously underestimated threats leading up to the five-day war was the role of the information component of civilization development and the inability of the Russian political elite to conduct effective information operations within a globalized world media context.⁵⁴² The great distortion of history about Russia that has become commonplace propaganda in the West is far from harmless. The global application of special information-ideological influences directed against Russia in peacetime has no known precedent and is forbidden by the U.N. Charter.⁵⁴³ Russia therefore needs government and business to partner in forming defensive solutions. In other words, restoration of a foreign policy propaganda machine.⁵⁴⁴ This should include acquiring business stakes in foreign media companies, boosting entities like Russia Today, and creating a domestic holding company for the production of books, video films, video games etc. that would be financed partly by the state and partly by business.⁵⁴⁵

Grand Strategy: What Those Crazy Russians Are (not) Up To

Before arguing what grand strategy is, Ruslan Pukhov tells us what it is not. In the West, analysts and politicians have historically overreacted when the Russian state pursues its national

⁵⁴¹ Sergei Permyakov, “Армия Нуждается В Здоровых Солдатах [The Army Needs Healthy Soldiers],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, September 19, 2007, No36 (202) edition; Sergei Permyakov, “Контракт: Что Не Так? [Contract: What’s Wrong With It?],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, October 24, 2007, No41 (207) edition; Vladimir Sidorov, “Льготы - Пережиток Социализма? [Benefits - Outliving Socialism?],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, December 26, 2007, No50 (216) edition.

⁵⁴² Igor Panarin, “Распад США И Геноцид В Южной Осетии [The collapse of the U.S.A. and the South Ossetia Genocide],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, September 10, 2008, No36 (252) edition.

⁵⁴³ Nikolai Petrov, “Не Дать Перечеркнуть Свое Прошлое [Keep The Past Alive],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, June 4, 2008, No22 (238) edition.

⁵⁴⁴ Panarin, “Инструмент Внешней Политики [Foreign Policy Instrument].”

⁵⁴⁵ Permyakov, “Армия Нуждается В Здоровых Солдатах [The Army Needs Healthy Soldiers]”; Permyakov, “Контракт: Что Не Так? [Contract: What’s Wrong With It?];” Sidorov, “Льготы - Пережиток Социализма? [Benefits - Outliving Socialism?].”

interests.⁵⁴⁶ An unfounded conspiracy theory insists that Russia leaders maintain a secretive, deeply thought-out, purposeful and comprehensive strategic plan and everything that they do falls in line accordingly. This Western paranoia has been applied without exception to all Russian leaders from Peter I to Nicholas II and all Soviet leaders from Lenin to Gorbachev. Medvedev and Putin fare no differently. Putin's desire for multipolarity in the international system, for example, is seen at in the worst case as a secretive desire to supplant the U.S. as world hegemon, and in the best case Moscow "only" wants to recreate the USSR. To Russian analysts, these Western fears are as hollow as the West's self-denial about the hypocritical, dual-standard by which the U.S. dominates the world.

Grand strategy is not a collection of strategy documents put out by a government.⁵⁴⁷ It remains a contemporary trend to publish dozens of national security statements, planning documents and policy visions for all areas of governance.⁵⁴⁸ The Kremlin now publishes these documents too, most notably, the National Security Strategy and the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation.⁵⁴⁹ Russia's security situation responds very poorly to formalization—these documents are too conditional, schematic and detached from real activates—and therefore these policy texts do not reflect the real security situation in Russia.⁵⁵⁰ The key point here is that these

⁵⁴⁶ Ruslan Pukhov, "Есть Ли В России "Большая Стратегия?" [Does Russia Have A Grand Strategy?]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, September 12, 2012, No36 (453) edition.

⁵⁴⁷ Konstantin Sivkov, "Стратегию Национальной Безопасности Разрабатывали Двоечники [The National Security Strategy was developed by Flunkies]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, April 3, 2013, No13 (481) edition.

⁵⁴⁸ In contrast to K. Sivkov cited above, some argue that the planning and strategy documents published by the state in fact serve a valuable organizational purpose. Nevertheless, they do not express a Russian grand strategy in Brands' definition from Chapter 1. For more on Russian planning documents, see: Viktor Bakhrushev, "Стратегия Национальной Безопасности Глазами Двоечников [National Security Strategy Through the Eyes of Flunkies]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, February 26, 2014, No7 (525) edition; Still others find the current process of strategy documents pointless, see: Fedor Sergeev, "Стратегия Бюрократов, А Не Защитников [Strategy of Bureaucrats, Not Soldiers]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, February 22, 2014, No2 (520) edition.

⁵⁴⁹ Pukhov, "Есть Ли В России "Большая Стратегия?" [Does Russia Have A Grand Strategy?]."

⁵⁵⁰ Karaganov, "Неочевидный Фактор - Сила Оружия [The Unobvious Factor - The Power of Weapons]."

documents are not at all decisive for the actions of the Russian leadership, but rather politically propagandistic, or as Pukhov describes them: benevolent.⁵⁵¹

Instead, the grand strategy in Russia around the time of the five-day war should be conceptualized less formulaically and more as a vague mix of formal and informal processes. The Kremlin's strategy of action for ensuring an enduring and secure Russia is a "bizarre" compromise between the actions of various factors, groups of influence (including the MIC) and others, and in many ways represents a "zigzag" between declared objectives and harsh reality.⁵⁵² But there is indeed a theory or undercurrent of logic that connects the vital actions of the state. This theory has two elements: a powerful military with unyielding popular support. Due to complex, unsecure nature of the world, these two ideal components are never realized but endlessly sought after. In this way, we can see in 2008 that Russia begins to tie all vital state activities to a logic of military modernization and cultivation of a Russian national will widely embraced in society.⁵⁵³

Conclusion

Before, during and after the five-day war with Georgia, Russia was committed to acting within the international system as understood by the MIC. This is not a surprise. Many aspects of international law and norms serve the interests of middling-to-great powers like Russia. Without norms and international laws, power alone becomes the decisive arbiter for states with competing interests. In the post-Cold War international system, traditional middle rival transnational organizations and movements, "acting as the conscience of a global civil society that sees foreign

⁵⁵¹ Pukhov, "Есть Ли В России "Большая Стратегия?" [Does Russia Have A Grand Strategy?]."

⁵⁵² Pukhov.

⁵⁵³ Pukhov.

policy elites as being too closely knitted into the web of conformity with hegemonic rules and the benefits derived from such conformity.”⁵⁵⁴ Some middle powers like Russia and Brazil also seek to “challenge existing power hierarchies and adopt strategies more befitting their statuses as rising powers, regional powers, or both. In either case, global rebalancing makes these middling powers even more pivotal in the interactions between China and the United States.”⁵⁵⁵

Regarding Medvedev’s fourth principle of foreign policy (protect Russians), current norms surrounding the “responsibility to protect” (R2P) can serve Russian interests well considering that large Russian populations reside outside the borders of the Russian Federation. In this view, Russia has a moral and legal obligation to intervene across state borders in cases of genocide and other human atrocities. Labonte explains R2P as a “set of principles and norms adopted by heads of state at the U.N. General Assembly’s 2005 World Summit to help resolve a ‘wicked problem’ in international politics: the perpetration of mass atrocity crimes against civilians.”⁵⁵⁶ The R2P concept features two distinct obligations. First, a state’s primary responsibility is to provide security and ensure the observance of human rights within their sovereign territory. As a secondary obligation, R2P asserts that the international community of states must intervene in extreme cases of civil war, genocide or other crises for humanitarian reasons. This latter role directly contradicts the non-intervention norm and by consequence creates an avenue to legally legitimate rationales for Russia’s military intervention in Georgia and beyond.

⁵⁵⁴ Andrew Cooper, Richard Higgott, and Kim Nossal, “Relocating Middle Powers: Australia and Canada in a Changing World Order,” *Etudes Internationales* 25, no. 4 (1994): 858–61.

⁵⁵⁵ Matthew Stephen, “The Concept and Role of Middle Powers during Global Rebalancing,” *Seton Hall Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations* Summer/Fall (2013): 51.

⁵⁵⁶ Melissa Labonte, “R2P’s Status as a Norm,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Responsibility to Protect*, ed. Alex J. Bellamy and Tim Dunne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 133.

As the above suggests, not all of Medvedev's five principles are in congruence with international laws and norms. Most significant among these is the assertion that Russia maintains "privileged" spaces of interest outside of Russia. This is something far more exclusive than R2P. Moscow's self-declared right to extend its own sovereignty beyond Russia clearly contradicts the foundational principles of international law enshrined in the U.N. Charter. Before the five-day war, Medvedev's fifth principle would have sounded like old-school bluster with a 19th century stylistic delivery. But after neutering Georgia politically, Russia's claims of privilege did not fall on deaf ears. Tbilisi's ill-conceived attempt to "clear" the "field" in South Ossetia unintentionally invited Russia's military back onto its territory indefinitely.

Thus, Georgia lost its place as a nexus of growing western interests and NATO activism—Tbilisi died geopolitically in 2008 at the hands of the Russian army. Moreover, Georgia must now seriously consider Russian national interests when pursuing its own, perhaps even before considering its own interests. It is this outcome that marks a significant shift in Russian state behavior—the return of military-ensured spheres of influence. Therefore, in context of grand strategy, Russia's systemic nudge during the 2000s is the establishment of a "privileged" sphere of influence. With the Kremlin's new spheres firmly in place, all diplomatic dealings outside this area can once again move along in accordance with the international system's laws and norms. Multilateral partnerships can resume unimpeded, such as Russia's sustained commitment to fighting international terrorism and facilitating safe logistical lines into NATO's ISAF operations in Afghanistan. In 2007, for example, Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov insisted that "The horizons of Russian-NATO cooperation can be expanded under one condition: if the evolution of the alliance ceases to be motivated by projects from the

political past (author's translation)."⁵⁵⁷ Finally, Russia will reassess its capabilities and interests in order to drive the Russian people ever onward towards progress. Military modernization and resilient patriotism now form a bedrock to the Kremlin's theory of success.

⁵⁵⁷ Putin, "Москва И Брюссель Свели Часы [Moscow And Brussels Calibrate their Watches]."

Chapter 6 – Crimea 2014: High Clarity in a Restrictive Strategic Environment

"One must be able to predict and be prepared to take advantage of differences between allies. Certain undertakings, such as demonstrative warfare on one front, which would be a mistake in a war against a single state, could be optimal in a war against a coalition if they are appropriate to the differences in the political interest represented by the coalition."

Aleksandr Andreevich Svechin⁵⁵⁸

"...and, you know, Fuck the EU."

Victoria Nuland, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State⁵⁵⁹

"...the superiority one has or gains in war is only the means and not the end; it must be risked for the sake of the end. But one must know the point to which it can be carried in order not to overshoot the target; otherwise instead of gaining new advantages, one will disgrace oneself."

Carl von Clausewitz⁵⁶⁰

"Sovereign is he who decides on the exception."

Carl Schmitt⁵⁶¹

Moscow's 2014 annexation of Crimea is discussed in Russia almost exclusively according to a rationale of long-awaited justice: "the return of Crimea to Russia." Indeed, this is how most Russians actually see it—Crimea is Russia (and always has been).⁵⁶² Yet, all but a small handful of states have chastised Russia's actions on the peninsula, labelling the reunion move as illegal "annexation." This condemnation butts in stark contrast to Moscow's maternal euphemism. Such a profound juxtaposition begs the obvious: who is right and who gets to

⁵⁵⁸ Svechin, *Strategy*, 142.

⁵⁵⁹ "Ukraine Crisis: Transcript of Leaked Nuland-Pyatt Call," *BBC News*, February 7, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26079957>.

⁵⁶⁰ Clausewitz, *On War*, 570.

⁵⁶¹ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁵⁶² "70 Percent of Russians Say Crimea Annexation Was Good for the Country," *The Moscow Times*, March 15, 2018, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2018/03/15/70-percent-of-russians-say-crimea-annexation-was-good-for-the-country-a60811>; Mike Eckel, "Poll: Majority Of Russians Support Crimea Annexation, But Worry About Economic Effects," *Radio Free Europe*, April 3, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/poll-majority-of-russians-support-crimea-annexation-but-worry-about-economic-effects/29859570.html>.

decide? In this light, the case of Crimea can be summed by four quotes. Carl Schmitt's observation above suggests it is a sovereign's right to both identify and act upon a political state of exception (*Ausnahmezustand*). As such, Putin must consider himself as sovereign.

Aleksandr Svechin's advice reminds the Russian strategist that exceptional opportunities can be found when an adversary presents in the form of a coalition. In Kiev's case, a victim's instinct to fight in self-defense struggled in tension with European backers who insist upon peaceful dialogue. On top of this patron-client dynamic, another key coalition partner had its own ideas on how to move forward in the weeks prior to the annexation, expressed over an unsecure line in U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland's blunt position, "Fuck the EU." Clausewitz completes this logic by reminding the military strategist not to push armed conflict past its point of culmination. Otherwise, seizing advantage through an exception may backfire and thereby prove to be folly.⁵⁶³

If Putin, as sovereign in the Schmittian sense, played his cards right, then he has not overshot the mark and therefore finally returned Crimea to Russia, like a victimized child reunited with her mother after an unjust separation. Instead of an idyllic hug and joyful tears, a bushwhacked Kiev probably sees it more like from the eyes of an alleged deadbeat dad, handcuffed in the backseat of a police car after unwittingly triggering an "amber alert." But viewed from the perspective of Braudel's *longue durée*, Crimea's return is not a flashpoint attack against the international system. Rather, it appears to be one more small, subtle nudge in

⁵⁶³ For a similar logic about this Clausewitz quote in context of hybrid warfare, see: Offer Fridman, *Russian "Hybrid Warfare" Resurgence and Politicisation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 177.

Russia's perennial struggle to encourage favorable conditions and position itself prominently within the concert of states.

Table 7 below places Crimea as case of high clarity in a restrictive strategic environment. The notable change from the two previous cases is the shift from low to high systemic clarity. In other words, Russia now sees a clear and present danger in Ukraine. Russia now committed to clearly calling out who constitutes "us" and "them."⁵⁶⁴ Here, the obvious problem of identifying what is Russian territory and what belongs to Ukraine places into question where international law racks and stacks with national power and state sovereignty. In terms of imminence, the threats facing Moscow looked ready to inflict damage in short order. What's more, these threats also had the potential to dramatically shift the perceived balance of forces in the region.

Table 7 – Post-Soviet Russian Interventions: Systemic Clarity and the Nature of the Strategic Environment

| | | Nature of Strategic Environment (Permissive to Restrictive) | |
|---|--------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| | | Permissive Strategic Environment | Restrictive Strategic Environment |
| Degree of Systemic Clarity (High to Low) | High Clarity | Syria (2015) | Crimea (2014) |
| | Low Clarity | Georgia (2008) | Moldova (1992) |

For Moscow in late 2013, NATO's possible expansion into Ukraine looked like the worst-case scenario, while a loss of basing rights to its Black Sea Fleet's home in Crimea appeared like the least that Russia must suffer. With no optimal policy options readily apparent, the Kremlin nevertheless saw fleeting opportunities inherent to NATO's interest in the region.

⁵⁶⁴ Leonid Ivashov, "Через Призму Угроз России [Through The Prism of Russia's Threats]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, 20 February 2013, No7 (475) edition.

Moscow's opportunity to intervene militarily in Crimea and therefore irreparably place into questions Kiev's viability as an alliance member looked to be a high-risk, high-reward prospect. A successful Russian intervention, or some other form of decisive action, taken to alter Ukraine's pro-European political trajectory might not only deny further NATO expansion on its borders, but Russia may also once again establish itself as a great power with conventional capabilities and national interests that must be considered carefully by other states including America.

In 2005, *VPK* warned of the growing possibility of Ukraine's inclusion into NATO and Russia's subsequent loss of basing rights in Crimea. At the time, one of the signs that Ukraine was thought to soon join NATO was Yushchenko's statement that "the deployment of the Russian fleet in Sevastopol does not interfere with Ukrainian's dialogue with NATO and the EU (author's translation)."⁵⁶⁵ *VPK* then presciently opines, "So what can be done to, if not save, at least partially restore our lost face? Strange as it may seem, there are many paths (author's translation)."⁵⁶⁶ By early 2014, however, Moscow was running out of options and time—the permissive foreign policy environment of 2008 had now become severely restricted with little room for policy maneuver.

The Kremlin now faced a clear and present danger. Security on Russia's Western border depends on maintaining a unique and special relationship with Ukraine.⁵⁶⁷ Yet, the threat of Ukraine ceding control of Crimea to NATO appeared imminent. If realized, Russia's security would be severely undermined. Kiev had signaled to NATO its clear intentions to exit Russia's

⁵⁶⁵ Sokolov and Pechorina, "Киев На Пути В НАТО [Kiev On Its Way to NATO]."

⁵⁶⁶ Sokolov and Pechorina.

⁵⁶⁷ Graham Allison and Dmitri Simes, "Россия И Америка: Скатывание К Войне [Russia and America: Stumbling to War]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, May 27, 2015, No19 (585) edition. Note: *VPK* translated and published this article originally published in *The National Interest* (20 Apr 2015).

sphere of influence and move towards the EU. At the time, the anticipated damage to Russia's privileged interests looked grave. Moscow's remaining windows of opportunity to salvage the situation were narrow and fleeting. It may have looked to Kremlin elites like a case of *dammed if you do, dammed if you don't*: sit by idly while NATO gains a foothold in Ukraine or intervene and save Crimea, but likely risking Russian influence in the rest of Ukraine. Clearly, if Russia was going to take action it needed to do so quickly—in a matter of days, perhaps weeks.

The case of Crimea illustrates that systemic stimuli had changed since the five-day war in 2008, and now presented Russia with a new context within which to deal with the threats emanating from Ukraine. Indeed, Russia had much to worry about, but it also could take solace in how the results of the five-day war with Georgia solidified over time. While there was still the illusion in Tbilisi that Georgia could regain its lost regions in return for certain actions or concessions, virtually all researchers and experts admit that Abkhazia and South Ossetia are lost to Tbilisi forever.⁵⁶⁸ Knowing this helps us to understand why Russia's self-perception of relative power increased vis-à-vis the West, despite the many well-documented military shortcomings Moscow experienced on its way to castrating Saakashvili's army in South Ossetia.

Heading into 2014, a growing viewpoint in Russia sees the main threat to the stability of Europe as the rivalry between Russia and the West vying for international prestige in the post-Soviet space—a new Cold War.⁵⁶⁹ The rest of this chapter will place the case of Crimea into this intensifying conflict between East and West. First, I explain the contest for Crimea from the Russian MIC viewpoint.

⁵⁶⁸ Zaynab Bakhturidze, "Россия - Грузия: В Новом Измерении [Russia - Georgia: In A New Dimension]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, August 15, 2012, No32 (449) edition.

⁵⁶⁹ Bakhturidze.

Contest for Crimea: Citius, Altius, Fortius... Insolentius

Putin, playing the benevolent sovereign, commuted the prison sentence of former oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky as a gesture of international goodwill to set off the 22nd Winter Games in a proper Olympic spirit. Sochi, blessed with a warm climate and fresh sea breezes, boasts newly widened boulevards lined with palm trees that give sharp rise to the rugged Caucasus mountains. These snow-capped peaks witnessed all the anticipated sporting drama and more: geopolitics once again became infused in the world of amateur sports and hijacked its sense of goodwill among nations.⁵⁷⁰ Indeed, the Olympic games proved an ironic backdrop to the political contest unfolding just across the Black Sea in Ukraine.⁵⁷¹

It is hardly a coincidence, according to Russian analysts, that the aggravation of political crises in the post-Soviet space concerning Russia for the second time in a short period took place during the Olympic games.⁵⁷² The first instance was in 2008, when George Bush sat quietly in the Beijing Summer Games while his man, Mikhail Saakashvili, sent Georgian troops into South Ossetia. Then Prime Minister Putin received the news in circumstances that arguably inhibited his participation in Russia's decision making. Convenient? Given that "God loves the Trinity," shall Russia expect another war while the Games are held in Japan?⁵⁷³ Or will the point be moot because all Russia's athletes will still be banned?

It would be more than naive to think that Russia's leadership will watch with "Olympic calm" as a neighboring country's government collapsed, let alone such a closely linked state like

⁵⁷⁰ Bryan Fogel, *Icarus*, Sports Documentary (Netflix, 2017), <https://www.netflix.com/title/80168079>.

⁵⁷¹ For an overview of Cold War era Olympic politics, see: Toby C. Rider, *Cold War Games: Propaganda, the Olympics, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016).

⁵⁷² Evgeny Satanovsky, "Все Только Начинается [It's Just Beginning]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, March 19, 2014, No10 (528) edition.

⁵⁷³ Satanovsky.

Ukraine.⁵⁷⁴ While Russian viewers watched American-born Vic Wild—thanks to his newly acquired Russian citizenship and a massive injection of training funds—parade two gold medals in snowboarding on perfectly-choreographed TV, the Russian government shifted its eyes to the mass-protests unfolding in Kiev’s Independence Square with the same laser-focused attention to detail as it did implementing its state-run doping machine in Sochi.⁵⁷⁵ The “Euromaidan” movement started out as kind of a student protest against moves by Ukrainian President Yanukovich to cancel Kiev’s implementation of an association agreement with the EU, and instead favor increased economic ties with Moscow. But Euromaidan quickly morphed into something much much larger.

Euromaidan also turned tragically violent. Moscow accuses radical fascists, such as “Right Sector” of infiltrating the protests and sparking the violence.⁵⁷⁶ In turn, Euromaidan leaders blamed Yanukovich’s security forces of murder. Either way, between February 18th and 20th, 77 protesters were killed, many shot by sniper teams from the infamous “Berkut” riot police.⁵⁷⁷ Many more were killed or injured over the entire course of protests, which began in November 2013 and concluded when Ukraine’s parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, voted to remove Yanukovich from power on February 22, 2014. That was the same day Russia’s new favorite son, Vic Wild, won his second gold medal in men’s snowboarding back in Sochi. Russia

⁵⁷⁴ Satanovsky.

⁵⁷⁵ “WADA Statement: Independent Investigation Confirms Russian State Manipulation of the Doping Control Process,” *World Anti-Doping Agency*, July 18, 2016, <https://www.wada-ama.org/en/media/news/2016-07/wada-statement-independent-investigation-confirms-russian-state-manipulation-of>.

⁵⁷⁶ Konstantin Sivkov, “Украина: Период Полураспада [Ukraine: Period of Partial Decay],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, March 19, 2014, No10 (528) edition.

⁵⁷⁷ Marik Krutov, “Wanted Man: Notorious Ukrainian Berkut Commander Gets Second Crack At Protesters -- In Moscow,” *Radio Free Europe*, August 13, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-berkut-commander-gets-second-crack-at-protesters--in-moscow/30107804.html>.

was winning on the snow and in the ideologically driven politics of sport, but Moscow's man in Kiev was forced to flee the country in a stunning geopolitical blow to the Kremlin.

Yanukovich's dramatic flight to Russia caused great consternation surrounding the succession of power. Indeed, was his ouster even legal? Some Western media sources even questioned the legitimacy of how events unfolded.⁵⁷⁸ A defiant Yanukovich, once safely in Moscow, declared that his ouster was illegitimate and that he was still the rightful president of Ukraine. Russia's position was clear: an unconstitutional coup d'état usurped power from Yanukovich.⁵⁷⁹ Whether or not he was a good president or a just a crook, it is clear that Yanukovich was overthrown by force and illegally ousted, as evidenced by the armed mobs that ransacked his residences. There was and remains no such basis for the president's removal from power, based on the notion of his purported self-removal, in the Ukrainian constitution. Moreover, there were insufficient votes in the Verkhovna Rada required for his lawful removal. It is therefore no coincidence that Western diplomats and the mass media in general remain silent on the question of legitimacy of the post-Yanukovich authorities in Kiev.⁵⁸⁰ What's more, the Rada also took the opportunity to repeal the 2012 law on the principles of the state language policy, signaling that Moscow may be right about repression of Ukraine's Russian speaking populations.

A day after these votes in the Rada, Russia officially closed the 22nd Winter Olympiad with massive fireworks and celebrations: Russia was declared the winner with an impressive

⁵⁷⁸ Daisy Sindelar, "Was Yanukovich's Ouster Constitutional?," *Radio Free Europe*, February 23, 2014, <https://www.rferl.org/a/was-yanukovichs-ouster-constitutional/25274346.html>.

⁵⁷⁹ Sergei Mironov, "Реакция На Насильственную Украинизацию [Reaction To Forced Ukrainianization]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, April 9, 2014, No13 (531) edition.

⁵⁸⁰ Mironov.

haul of 33 medals (13 gold, 11 silver, 9 bronze). Within a week, Russia's armed forces sprang into action and captured an even bigger prize: Crimea. For a moment, the Olympic irony looked as if Kiev had pulled off the coup of a century right under Putin's nose, while he remained handicapped by the political spotlight of hosting all the world at "Putin's games." Euromaidan's painful victory, however, took a turn towards catastrophe as a Russian master class in military intervention delivered perhaps the best executed *fait accompli* in modern history: bloodless and without a single shot fired (as far as the media was able to report on).

Exceptional Times: February 20 – March 18, 2014

During the operational phase of returning Crimea to Russia, Moscow's troops took control of the peninsula through various maneuvers beginning on approximately February 20. These forces remained in place until March 16, when Crimeans voted by referendum in favor of independence and becoming a part of Russia. On March 18, Russia's government formally approved the formal integration of Crimea and Sevastopol as two new administrative entities within the Russian Federation. During this time, *VPK* published four weekly issues. The first of these issues (no 6, 19-25 February) contained an article about the political divide in Ukraine. The premise here is that there are two halves of Ukraine, east and west. Each half votes for one of two political vectors, one towards Europe and the other towards Moscow. Essentially, the article summarized the situation with highly predictive accuracy: "there will be a serious battle for Ukraine" and "it is highly probable that the confrontation will result with the disintegration of Ukraine into two parts (author's translation)."⁵⁸¹

⁵⁸¹ Konstantin Sivkov, "Украина Уже Поделена [Ukraine Already Divided Up]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, February 19, 2014, No6 (524) edition.

In *VPK*'s perspective, too much focus in the media was placed on the domestic context in Ukraine, with Euromaidan and so forth, and too little attention on the geopolitical significance of Ukraine.⁵⁸² This argument followed with several key points. First, Ukraine is a main link between the EU and Russia and each side has a lot to gain by fixing Kiev in its political and economic orbits. Second, Ukraine serves as a political springboard for post-Soviet consolidation of Slavic peoples along with Belarus and Russia. Together these three countries form the Eurasian Slavic core with shared history and culture. Third, Russia and the EU have different economic infrastructures and Maidan leaders articulated that they presented Ukraine with a binary choice, either or but not both. Fourth, loss of Ukraine in its orbit would place undue territorial pressure on Russia, given NATO's continual expansion eastward. Fifth, the loss of the naval base at Sevastopol and other important elements of navy infrastructure in Crimea, used by the Russian armed forces, will mean the actual expulsion of Russia from the entire Black Sea basin. Even with Sevastopol in hand, Russia already feels its Black Sea Fleet is at a disadvantage vis-à-vis NATO assets.⁵⁸³

For the abovementioned reasons, Ukraine cannot be fully independent. Ukraine's right to sovereignty is not the same as others. It must lean either to Europe or to Russia.⁵⁸⁴ If Kiev shifts to the EU, it will almost assuredly enter NATO too. Ukraine's inclusion in NATO will lead to a vast majority of the Black Sea's coastline coming under control of the alliance. Only a little area, from Sochi to Novorossiysk, will remain under Russian control. This would suit NATO's wartime logistical lines into the Middle East but would at the same time virtually deny Russia the

⁵⁸² Sivkov.

⁵⁸³ Konstantin Sivkov, "Оборона На Море [Defence On the Sea]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, December 18, 2013, No49 (517) edition.

⁵⁸⁴ Sivkov, "Украина Уже Поделена [Ukraine Already Divided Up]."

ability to maintain a powerful fleet in the Black Sea. In the economic context, Ukraine's shift to the EU would harm not only its own economy but also Russia's.⁵⁸⁵ Ukraine would merely become a hub for American shale-gas exports to Europe, offloaded by ship and piped elsewhere. As such, a committed shift by Kiev to the EU is actually an affront to Russian sovereignty. As such, it means war.

Fait Accompli: What Else Is There To Say?

The world watched as Crimea's streets became populated with "little green men," also known as "polite people," who wore uniforms sans insignia—but everyone knew they were Russian soldiers. Many of the polite green Russians donned "balaclava" facemasks, which gave the appearance of a historical hoodwink tied with deep irony to Lord Cardigan's "Light Brigade" that charged its way to disaster at the Battle of Balaclava during the Crimean War.⁵⁸⁶ Here's what those four issues of *VPK* had to say about the little green men and their amazing, bloodless takedown of Crimea:

⁵⁸⁵ Igor Kravchenko, "Украина Отказывается От "Сапсана" [Ukraine Turned Down The 'Falcon']," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 14, 2013, No31 (499) edition.

⁵⁸⁶ Valentin Osipov, "Разграбление Крыма [Looting Crimea]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, January 31, 2018, No4 (717) edition.

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If *VPK* had an audio version, it would have sounded like crickets.⁵⁸⁷ Their operational security and professional discipline must be commended—loose lips sink ships, or in Russian *nye baltai!* The cadre of Russian patriots who deliver *VPK*'s collective content had to have known what was taking place on the ground in great detail and could have provided an illuminating play by play, albeit slight delayed due to the weekly nature of the publication. But they did not. Interestingly, they did during the five-day war with Georgia. In fact, one author apologized for leaving out 15-hours of reports about Russia's maneuvers in South Ossetia, and he kindly printed them in the next issue just in case you noticed.⁵⁸⁸ Later, with Syria, we see the same enthusiasm to provide operational updates and commentary about tactics, techniques and procedures in the first possible issue.⁵⁸⁹ As such, the Georgia and Syria coverage makes the deviation in coverage for Crimea so noticeable. But this makes sense as most everything about Crimea is an exception when compared to other cases of Russian military intervention.⁵⁹⁰

Because the voice of the MIC is of prime interest in this case, the reader must seek out operational details elsewhere, of which there is no shortage.⁵⁹¹ Perhaps focusing on operational details would be a distraction analogous to *VPK*'s criticism of the media's pre-annexation focus on Ukraine's domestic politics. The real story is geopolitical—it is about degrees of sovereignty.

⁵⁸⁷ A few articles addressed unrest in Ukraine but stayed away from discussing in any way the Russian military intervention, instead focusing on the Ukrainian government's domestic failures and assessing the potential for a color revolution in Russia. See for example: Konstantin Sivkov, "Украинский Урок Российской Элите [Ukrainian Lesson for Russian Elites]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, 26 February 2014, No7 (525) edition.

⁵⁸⁸ See for example: Laturov, "'Принуждение к миру' и глас народа [\"Forced Peace\" and the Voice of the People]"; Khrolenko, "Блицкрига Не Получилось [Blitzkrieg Failed]."

⁵⁸⁹ Aleksei Ramm, "Сирийский Старт Российских Летчиков [Syrian Start for Russian Pilots]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, October 7, 2015, No38 (604) edition; Mikhail Khodarenok, "Земные Риски Воздушных Снайперов [Ground Risks for Aerial Snipers]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, October 7, 2015, No38 (604) edition; Evgeny Satanovsky, "Идем На Восток [We're Going East]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, October 7, 2015, No38 (604) edition.

⁵⁹⁰ Konstantin Sivkov, "Повстанцы Против Мятежников [Rebels Against Rebels]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, February 18, 2015, No6 (572) edition.

⁵⁹¹ Michael Kofman et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine" (RAND, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2017); Richard Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015); Pashinsky, "'I Serve the Russian Federation!' Soldiers Deployed during the Annexation of Crimea Speak."

It is not about anything tactical or what Western critics label as “hybrid.”⁵⁹² According to General Gareyev, “if the use of any non-military means in an international confrontation is war, then the whole of human history is war (author’s translation).”⁵⁹³ In the exceptional case of Crimea, tactical details only detract from Russia’s strong strategic game and why Moscow chose the path it did.

Putin: A Modern Day Pericles

Moscow turned its eyes from winning gold medals in Sochi to claiming another golden prize—Crimea—first and foremost due to the actions of the U.S. and Ukraine. In short, Crimea was always Russian—Ukrainian in name only after 1954—and Putin simply demonstrated this as fact. Russia’s armed intervention in Crimea did not materialize according to an introspective Russian plot to strengthen a domestic political position or to realize some secret quest to reestablish the Soviet Union, whether partially or in full. Essentially, President Putin decided that events surrounding the illegal ouster of President Yanukovich in Ukraine infringed upon Russia’s sovereignty. The Kremlin has consistently defended the final Helsinki Declaration of 1975 and the principles it enshrined: the inviolability of borders, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of foreign states.⁵⁹⁴ Yet the international system has no perfect arbiter to resolve the contradictions that rise between these competing norms as well as when norms contradict a sovereign’s national interests.

⁵⁹² Russian military scholars argue that in fact the U.S. wages in so-called “hybrid warfare.” Color revolutions and other non-military attacks conducted against societies and governments are just one example. See Chapter 8 for more analysis on this; as example of this argument, see also: Aleksandr Vladimirov, “Против Всех [Against Everyone],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, February 25, 2015, No7 (573) edition; “Стратегические Цели Национальной Безопасности,” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, April 3, 2013, No13 (481) edition.

⁵⁹³ “Стратегические Цели Национальной Безопасности.”

⁵⁹⁴ Evgeny Satanovsky, “Большая Восточноевропейская Политика [Great Eastern European Policy],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, April 9, 2014, No13 (531) edition.

Russia's sovereignty and security are tied directly to Crimea. Since its creation, Sevastopol has served as the Russian Black Sea Fleet's home. For some outsiders, however, the Crimea of 2014 was technically on the other side of an international border, therefore not Russian.⁵⁹⁵ According to this legalistic viewpoint, Ukraine was Crimea's supreme authority. Yet, others wonder if U.S. and NATO partnerships with Ukraine violated the non-interference norm because in fact the will of the people in Crimea was to maintain pro-Moscow foreign policy. The case of Crimea essentially asks this: is the matter of state sovereignty superordinate or subordinate to the authority of the U.N. or any other non-state entity? From the Kremlin's view, the return of Crimea to Russia is also an effort to nudge the system towards an acceptance that international norms are subordinate to state interests.

Indeed, the argument that Kiev is sovereign over Crimea due to borders and territorial integrity fell flat in Moscow for several reasons. First, many Russians feel nothing out of the ordinary in fact took place—great power exceptions are normal. The key here is that, like Thucydides observed over two millennia ago, what is right and just is only a question for equals to discuss (i.e. Ukraine is not Russia's equal peer in terms of power and prestige). Three additional points of rationale underpin the notion of a sovereign's right to exception: Moscow's national security hinges upon military infrastructure placed in Sevastopol under non-standard circumstances of shared sovereignty; when international norms present unfair contradictions they are resolved by exception; and Russia has the right to follow precedents set by America's actions of exceptional nature. Russia's final rationale for the return of Crimea primarily addresses its

⁵⁹⁵ Hathaway and Shapiro, *The Internationalists: How a Radical Plan to Outlaw War Remade the World*, 390–95.

domestic audience: Crimea was, is and will always be Russian no matter how nicely the Kremlin addresses the issue with brotherly Ukraine.

In an address before representatives of the State Duma, Federation Council, heads of Russia's regions and civil society representatives, President Putin presented the abovementioned rationale for accepting Crimea into the Russian Federation. In many ways, this speech is like Pericles calling upon Athens' sense of honor and legacy of great victories to bravely pursue a just destiny under writ by a tradition of military might. To begin with, Putin asserts Russia's reasonable right to pursue national interests. What is more, he finally acknowledges Russia's military intervention—despite numerous denials and contradictory propaganda in the previous month:

“Today, it is imperative to end this hysteria, to refute the rhetoric of the cold war and to accept the obvious fact: Russia is an independent, active participant in international affairs; like other countries, it has its own national interests that need to be taken into account and respected.

At the same time, we are grateful to all those who understood our actions in Crimea; we are grateful to the people of China, whose leaders have always considered the situation in Ukraine and Crimea taking into account the full historical and political context, and greatly appreciate India's reserve and objectivity.”⁵⁹⁶

With this argumentation, Putin nudged the idea that state interests supersede international norms during the normal course of international affairs. In other words, this is simultaneously an attempt to preserve the international system and to shape how it prioritizes evolving norms. Beyond asserting support from other states, the inclusion of China and India implies that a multipolar order exists, and that Russia will respect the national interests of other great powers.

⁵⁹⁶ Putin, “Address by President of the Russian Federation (Kremlin Translation).”

At the same time, Putin implies that Crimea is historically exceptional. Indeed, Putin goes on to make his full case for the return of Crimea to Russia. He starts by evoking Russia's sovereign right to pursue its own security as well as ensure regional stability. In short, Putin identifies a clear and present danger:

“Crimea is our common historical legacy and a very important factor in regional stability. And this strategic territory should be part of a strong and stable sovereignty, which today can only be Russian. Otherwise, dear friends (I am addressing both Ukraine and Russia), you and we – the Russians and the Ukrainians – could lose Crimea completely, and that could happen in the near historical perspective. Please think about it.”

Here, Putin also asserts the existence of overlapping sovereignty based on history and national identity. In this context, Putin implies that a weak Ukraine could not effectively maintain sovereignty over Crimea should push come to shove.⁵⁹⁷ Because of shared sovereignty, however, Putin claims the sovereign right to remedy the danger. This is similar to but not wholly analogous to a ship's executive officer relieving a ship's captain from duty. Rather in this case, a senior captain (Moscow) assumes command following a lack of confidence in the predecessor (Kiev). Following this analogy, both Ukraine and Russia are on one team, but the former lost its way and therefore was reprimanded accordingly.

A weak government in Kiev was not enough to pose a threat to Crimea's existence under Ukraine's rule. A strong NATO posed a direct threat to Russia's national security and subsequently prompted Putin's intervention in Crimea. The combination of these two conditions is what drives Putin's clear establishment of “us” vs “them:”

⁵⁹⁷ For a weapons systems analysis of how Ukraine's airpower evaporated through post-Soviet era downsizing, see: Konstantin Fedorov, “ВВС Украины: Прерванный Полет [Ukraine Air Force: Interrupted Flight],” *Voenna-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPR)*, April 2, 2014, No12 (530) edition.

“Let me note too that we have already heard declarations from Kiev about Ukraine soon joining NATO. What would this have meant for Crimea and Sevastopol in the future? It would have meant that NATO’s navy would be right there in this city of Russia’s military glory, and this would create not an illusory but a perfectly real threat to the whole of southern Russia. These are things that could have become reality were it not for the choice the Crimean people made, and I want to say thank you to them for this.

But let me say too that we are not opposed to cooperation with NATO, for this is certainly not the case. For all the internal processes within the organisation, NATO remains a military alliance, and we are against having a military alliance making itself at home right in our backyard or in our historic territory. I simply cannot imagine that we would travel to Sevastopol to visit NATO sailors. Of course, most of them are wonderful guys, but it would be better to have them come and visit us, be our guests, rather than the other way round.”⁵⁹⁸

NATO expansion into Ukraine was seen by Putin as an exceptional affront to Russia. Perhaps he felt this way because NATO crossed a certain threshold of tolerance not tripped by the alliance’s previous expansions, or simply because Russia perceived its own relative power in a new light, or both. Russia’s geopolitical success in 2008 in Georgia, backed with a successful military modernization program, suggests that Russia enjoys a heightened self-perception of power. Regardless of the calculus, the important message here is that exceptional circumstances require exceptional measures.

In context of the exception, Putin makes the case that Crimea should actually receive the same right to self-determination as Ukraine. Like Pridnestrovia, Crimea presents another example in which the international community’s steadfast commitment to *uti possidetis* does not uniformly adhere to social-historical geography:

“As it declared independence and decided to hold a referendum, the Supreme Council of Crimea referred to the United Nations Charter, which speaks of the right of nations to self-determination. Incidentally, I would like to remind you that when Ukraine seceded

⁵⁹⁸ Putin, “Address by President of the Russian Federation (Kremlin Translation).”

from the USSR it did exactly the same thing, almost word for word. Ukraine used this right, yet the residents of Crimea are denied it. Why is that?”⁵⁹⁹

Putin was therefore forced to declare his exceptional actions as right and just in context of Washington’s own behavior. Indeed, even America’s actions are at times exceptional—example, Kosovo.⁶⁰⁰ Putin observes Russia’s right to follow the precedents, often unilateral in nature, established by the U.S. for resolving international disputes by means clearly in contradiction to international law and norms:

“Moreover, the Crimean authorities referred to the well-known Kosovo precedent – a precedent our western colleagues created with their own hands in a very similar situation, when they agreed that the unilateral separation of Kosovo from Serbia, exactly what Crimea is doing now, was legitimate and did not require any permission from the country’s central authorities. Pursuant to Article 2, Chapter 1 of the United Nations Charter, the UN International Court agreed with this approach and made the following comment in its ruling of July 22, 2010, and I quote: ‘No general prohibition may be inferred from the practice of the Security Council with regard to declarations of independence,’ and ‘General international law contains no prohibition on declarations of independence.’ Crystal clear, as they say.

I do not like to resort to quotes, but in this case, I cannot help it. Here is a quote from another official document: the Written Statement of the United States [of] America of April 17, 2009, submitted to the same UN International Court in connection with the hearings on Kosovo. Again, I quote: ‘Declarations of independence may, and often do, violate domestic legislation. However, this does not make them violations of international law.’ End of quote. They wrote this, disseminated it all over the world, had everyone agree and now they are outraged. Over what? The actions of Crimean people completely fit in with these instructions, as it were. For some reason, things that Kosovo Albanians (and we have full respect for them) were permitted to do, Russians, Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars in Crimea are not allowed. Again, one wonders why.”⁶⁰¹

Putin’s commentary clearly expresses his rationale for the return of Crimea to Russia. Namely, Putin is sovereign to act by exception. This involves a two-fold process. First, he identifies the

⁵⁹⁹ Putin.

⁶⁰⁰ Bakhturidze, “Россия - Грузия: В Новом Измерении [Russia - Georgia: In A New Dimension].”

⁶⁰¹ Putin, “Address by President of the Russian Federation (Kremlin Translation).”

exceptional threat, placed in terms of us vs them. Next, he has the sovereign right to choose how to deal with this clear and present danger. At the same time, he takes the opportunity to illustrate the ills of American unilateralism and Washington's hegemonic double standard—do as I say, not as I do. This issue finds historical underpinnings in Thucydides' observation about justice among states: "you know as well as we do that right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must."⁶⁰² In this Peloponnesian context, Putin is like a modern-day Pericles and perhaps Washington is not analogous to an ascendant Athens, but rather fading like Sparta.

The Ukrainian Dialogue

In keeping with the image of Athens, it is instructive to draw parallels between Pericles and Putin. The lesson here is twofold. First, let us consider Ukraine as a minor power subordinate to Russia, or at least inside the Kremlin's perceived sphere of influence. If a junior member tries to switch sides or leave, the senior member must enforce solidarity or risk suffering further defections. Consider the *Melian Dialogue*: Athens eradicated an entire island community—Melos—because the local leaders misguidedly pursued an exit from Athens' Delian league. Instead, Melos preferred an alliance with Sparta, but would settle at least for some sort of neutrality. Fatefully, the leaders of Melos refused to accept its position inside Athens' sphere of influence and consequently they were ruined. Perhaps 2014 witnessed a *Ukrainian Dialogue*: a show of weakness from Moscow had the real prospect of severely damaging the Kremlin's credibility elsewhere. Fortunately for Kiev, the Kremlin's solution was far more civilized than the Athenian approach.

⁶⁰² Thucydides, *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, 352.

A second lesson from Thucydides is that small states can pose hidden liabilities to great powers when mutually committed by alliance. Moreover, Svechin's observation about fighting coalitions gains traction when applied to a modern context. Here, the lesson is for NATO more than Russia. Just as was the case during the Peloponnesian Wars, the interests of small states can suck an entire alliance into war. Like with Melos, this is because of credibility.

If an alliance fails to act, its reputation and prestige will likely suffer. Think NATO's Article V—the organization would be finished for all practical purposes if a member state is attacked but the others failed to respond with a common defense. In this context, NATO and the EU were way ahead of themselves in courting Kiev because their willingness to accept political consequences was disproportionately undersized in relation to the threat imposed on Moscow by offers of European integration to Ukraine. Here a pathway to the EU is the obvious first step towards NATO membership and therefore expansion into Russia's strategic sphere of national interests. Arguably, a lack of understanding or a willful disregard for Ukraine's self-interests, history and local politics got the EU, the U.S. and NATO into trouble.⁶⁰³ And, “fuck the EU,” right? The mixed signals and contradictory interests among Western states underscores Svechin's insights about the unique advantages one can leverage when fighting against a coalition such as NATO.

Svechin's logic of dividing coalitions can be understood through German political scientist Marina Henke's explanation of “automaticity.”⁶⁰⁴ This is the idea that all states in a coalition naturally coalesce around common problems. Put another way, a coalition is assumed

⁶⁰³ “Крым: Статус Референдума Изменен [Crimea: Referendum Status Modified],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, March 5, 2014, No8 (526) edition.

⁶⁰⁴ Marina E. Henke, *Constructing Allied Cooperation: Diplomacy, Payments, and Power in Multilateral Military Coalitions* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), 8.

or implied to act with a homogeneity of purpose or a unified togetherness when confronted by threats. Henke, however, reminds us that international relations theory has not yet addressed the aggregate effects of institutions across a coalition. In other words, the military aspects of the NATO alliance are just one lane in a much larger connection of interests that bind a coalition together. Membership in the EU, for example, pulls some NATO members in different directions. It is in these other lanes of connection where Svechin is instructive: the Russian strategists can always find and exploit areas of coalition interaction that have little to no harmony of interests or solidarity of effort. This turned out to be the case in Crimea.

Clearly, Ukraine's Western backers had significantly less political will than Kiev in terms of committing armed forces to fight in Crimea. Many Western sons would likely have died for a cause unknown to them and their loved ones. Indeed, Ukrainian society connects with Russia in ways that the EU and NATO did not (do not) fully understand or appreciate. In many ways, Ukraine and Russia are like a divorced couple that split when the Soviet Union fell apart, and the two states remain unsure about how to best pursue the new terms of their relationship. Ironically, Ukraine may actually have chosen to fight Russia to the death had it been alone when the little green men appeared. This is exactly what Yulia Tymoshenko said would happen if the U.S. and U.K. failed to guarantee Ukraine's security as promised. Specifically, she asserted that the current mobilization of men in Ukraine would culminate with them dying for their country unless the West helps to stop Russian aggression.⁶⁰⁵

⁶⁰⁵ Christiane Amanpour, "EXCLUSIVE: Tymoshenko Speaks to Amanpour," video (CNN, March 3, 2014), <https://www.cnn.com/videos/world/2014/03/03/ukraine-yulia-tymoshenko-christiane-amanpour-full.cnn>.

Yet, in the first place it seems implausible that Russia would have intervened in Crimea without a proper motive, such as NATO's romance with Kiev. The Russian MIC clearly posits that reclaiming Crimea occurred out of security fears and in a reaction to the threat of more NATO expansion, not by self-initiated motives on Russia's part, such as a desire for more territory. After all, Russia is a middling power that thrives on the stabilizing benefits of the global order.⁶⁰⁶ Russia remains a norms enforcer, not an agent of anti-system upheaval. But, when the security stakes became real, Moscow intervened in Crimea and the West balked. With no stomach for a direct conflict with Moscow, European states convinced Ukraine to pursue diplomacy, not war. In doing so, the West was forced to acknowledge Moscow's power and sovereignty under circumstances that clearly undermined NATO and American prestige.⁶⁰⁷

VPK conducted a series of three interviews in the months leading up to the return of Crimea to Russia that shed light onto the Thucydidean truths that underpin why states go to war. A useful way to view these interviews is as part of a *Ukrainian Dialogue*—local insights that confirm the serious dangers that NATO should also have seen. In each case, a former Ukrainian senior official commented on the political tensions between Kiev and Moscow. Each interview took place in the months or weeks just prior to Moscow's intervention. In my reading, each interviewee considers himself a frank professional and committed Ukrainian patriot, and as such they all delivered honest feedback that arguably avoided, for the lack of a better phrase, sucking up to Moscow in any way. Yet, each interview also seems to understand that somehow Ukraine and Russia are not on equal footing and so discussions about what is right and just are ultimately

⁶⁰⁶ Satanovsky, "Все Только Начинается [It's Just Beginning]."

⁶⁰⁷ Evgeny Satanovsky, "Украина Как Четвертый Рейх [Ukraine As The Fourth Reich]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, April 2, 2014, No12 (530) edition.

reduced to who holds the power to decide. In this way, these interviews shed an interesting angle on the status of Crimea and validate the idea that Moscow followed clear national interests to prevent the loss of its Black Sea Fleet's basing rights on the peninsula. Key takeaways from each interview are provided below.

The first interview, roughly four months before Russia's intervention in Crimea, captured the perspectives of Lieutenant General Victor Hvozd, former head of the Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ministry of Defense (HUR MOU) in 2008-2010, and head of the geopolitical thinktank "Borysfen Intel." Hvozd asserted that Ukraine was increasingly vulnerable to attacks in the information sphere and "this is a complex and complicated problem, and it poses a direct threat to the existence of Ukraine as an independent state (author's translation)."⁶⁰⁸ As an example, Hvozd cited Russian disinformation made about his alleged participation in the 2008 five-day war:

"I can give an example of active information war from my own biography. In 2011 Oleg Glazunov's book *Georgian Intelligence: A Secret War Against Russia* was published in Russia, in which the author writes, '...according to the Russian security services, a group of Ukrainian military intelligence officers under the leadership of an employee of the state intelligence service of Ukraine, Colonel Victor Hvozd, took part in the events in South Ossetia.' I am, of course, pleased that he calls me a professional, but this is complete madness from the author, especially since at the time I was at the opposite end of Europe... This is all done in the spirit of the Soviet KGB propaganda which allows any means to achieve its goal. Do you think this is constructive for relations between our countries? I think not. It only turns many away from such a fraternal bond."⁶⁰⁹

Hvozd goes on to say that not just he is the target of Russia information warfare, but all of Ukraine is under a "tsunami" of Russian propaganda:

⁶⁰⁸ Tatyana Savchenko, "Разведчик - Это Образ Жизни [Intelligence Agent- A Way Of Life]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, November 6, 2013, No43 (511) edition.

⁶⁰⁹ Savchenko.

“TV presenters of Russian state channels are already tired of mocking Ukraine and its leaders. The air is full of Russian programs, bookstores are bursting with Russian literature, and the pro-Russian lobby in Ukraine feels better here than in Russia. What can I say? Well done. This is the way to protect your nation, your state. What about us? Slaves. There’s still a lot to do to change the [Ukrainian] slave mentality. But what’s been imposed on us for centuries can’t be changed in a single day (author’s translation).”⁶¹⁰

When asked about the future of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet in Crimea, the former Ukrainian spymaster’s words now seem prophetic:

“From the moment of its foundation, Sevastopol was a Russian naval fortress, and from the end of the 19th century it has been the main port for the Black Sea Fleet. And its loss would be a huge geostrategic blow and a loss for Russia even greater than the collapse of the Soviet Union. Therefore, it is necessary to treat it calmly and with understanding, not to provoke our friends. Time will put everything in its place.

From the point of view of Sevastopol’s importance as a navy base in the Black Sea, where the Russian fleet is actually blocked by NATO forces that can control the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, it is of no value. In terms of demonstrating force as a regional leader in the post-Soviet space and as a tool for Moscow to scare Georgia, Ukraine or someone else, it may make sense. From the point of view of international law, Sevastopol is the territory of Ukraine and only force can change this.”⁶¹¹

The second interview, which took place a month later, highlights the unique perspectives from Yuriy Yekhanurov, a former Ukrainian Prime Minister (2005-06), Minister of Defense (2007-09) and first deputy head of the Ukrainian Presidential Secretariat (2009-10). Yekhanurov asserted that if Russia’s MIC businessmen are friends with brains, they will see that they too can profit from Kiev’s growing ties to the European market.⁶¹² This is because international cooperation will remain an indispensable attribute of the arms trade.⁶¹³ Regarding possible losses

⁶¹⁰ Savchenko.

⁶¹¹ Savchenko.

⁶¹² Tatyana Savchenko, “Курсом На Евросоюз [Heading towards the European Union],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, December 4, 2013, No47 (515) edition; Sokolov and Pechorina, “Киев На Пути В НАТО [Kiev On Its Way to NATO]”; “ОПК России И Украины - Разрыв Невыгоден [DIC of Russia and Ukraine - Rupture Not Profitable],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, March 5, 2014, No8 (526) edition.

⁶¹³ “Украина Реорганизует ВПК [Ukraine Reorganizes Its MIC],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, October 23, 2013, No41 (509) edition.

for Russia's MIC due to Kiev's shift towards the EU, Yekhanurov argued that *VPK*'s viewers are well aware that the Russian MIC already pursues a policy of maximum independence for its armed forces and security agencies from foreign supplies.

Yekhanurov was also asked several questions about Russia-Ukraine relations and the status of Crimea. Although he did not comment directly on whether or not Russia and Ukraine were competing in an information war, he clarified useful terms, such as "information campaign" and "information operations (author's translation)."⁶¹⁴ In doing so, he prompted an inquiry into whether or not Kiev was susceptible to propaganda scripts as were Libya and Syria. Here, the *VPK* interviewer is insinuating that Ukraine's information warfare enemy is actually the U.S., not Russia. Building on that idea, the interviewer asks Yekhanurov whether or not Ukraine is endangered by Romanian, Turkish, Crimean Tatar or other threats. The former Ukrainian official suggested that these were not sources of any immediate danger. Finally, regarding the Black Sea Fleet, Yekhanurov stated that he follows what is enshrined in the Ukrainian constitution (i.e. territorial control of Crimea), but suggested that agreements about Sevastopol's future should and will be unambiguously decided at the negotiation table.⁶¹⁵ In other words, Russia in fact shares sovereign control over the fate of Crimea.

Less than a month before Russia's intervention in Crimea, *VPK*'s third Ukrainian interview pulled insights from another former senior official, Colonel General Ihor Smeshko, head of the Ukrainian HUR MOU (1997-2000) and Security Service of Ukraine (2003-05), and at the time of the interview, president of the Center for Strategic Research and Analysis.

⁶¹⁴ Savchenko, "Курсом На Евросоюз [Heading towards the European Union]."

⁶¹⁵ Savchenko.

Smeshko was at one time alleged to have poisoned Viktor Yushchenko in 2004, and therefore perhaps the interviewer expected the discussion with him to be solidly pro-Russian.⁶¹⁶ In reality, the two sparred over local cultural nuance, such as disputing details of Cossack history in Ukraine and Russia. Smeshko pulled the conversation to the present, and quipped, “In my opinion, without a democratic and prosperous Ukraine, there can be no democratic and prosperous Russia (author’s translation).”⁶¹⁷

The interviewer, Savchenko, then takes a dig at the former spy master with her follow up question, “It is amazing that you, general, are a professional military man, and you already believe in European democracy? Does it stem from your long occupation of science, cybernetics and systems analysis, or from your work in the West? (author’s translation)”⁶¹⁸ Smeshko, unapologetically affirms his trust in the Western system:

“I really sincerely believe in democracy—especially in the 21st century and in the middle of Europe. Only a balance of interests and an optimal distribution of rights and duties between a citizen and the state can guarantee the sustainability of the complex system of governance in a modern state. And only democracy—as an intermediate form of state governance that lies in between the two antagonistic extremes of autocracy and anarchy—can guarantee both the rights and freedoms of individual citizens and at the same time sustain the progressive development of the state as a whole (author’s translation).”⁶¹⁹

The interview then addresses a logical democracy-related topic—color revolutions in Ukraine.

VPK asked Smeshko, “What is the difference between Maidan 2004 and today’s [2014] Maidan? (author’s translation).”⁶²⁰ Here, the reply is instructive because we hear a point of view

⁶¹⁶ Tatyana Savchenko, “Україна: Рождение Гражданского Общества [Ukraine: Birth of Civil Society],” *Voennyi-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, January 29, 2014, No3 (521) edition.

⁶¹⁷ Savchenko.

⁶¹⁸ Savchenko.

⁶¹⁹ Savchenko.

⁶²⁰ Savchenko.

that suggests Kiev is now and has been a long way off from EU material because even the pro-Western leaders are not committed to democratic reform. First, Smeshko asserts that Western support for the anti-Kuchma opposition leader Yushchenko did not play a decisive role in the elections. Instead, “Maidan of 2004 arose because the authorities running the country [President Kuchma] failed to prepare a presidential candidate successor [Yanukovych] who would have the authority and status of a national political leader. The [Yanukovych] presidential campaign and the conduct of elections agitated the other half of the country with suspicions of falsification (author’s translation).”⁶²¹

Interestingly, Smeshko argues that the Orange Revolution’s hero, Viktor Yushchenko, was at best a “passive democrat (author’s translation).” He elaborates:

“Strange as it may seem, the reverse in democracy’s development in Ukraine started with him [Yushchenko]. Being a democrat in words, and perhaps his soul, he was however judging by his actions an autocrat. He did nothing to further develop the state’s power through democratic institutions or strengthen the country’s rule of law system. If you remember, as president, he was chronically short of power and he dreamed of returning to the presidential form of government.

Without destroying the configuration of democratic institutions that came before him, Yushchenko was at the same time the first to introduce mass lawlessness with the dismissal of tens of thousands of professional civil servants due to ‘revolutionary necessity’ in order to replace them with his political supporters. He also created a new personnel precedent: the practice of politically motivated appointments of people practically from the street to the highest positions in the security services of the state (author’s translation).”⁶²²

Smeshko’s commentary underscores that Ukraine’s western partners should have heard alarm bells or seen the danger of Russian intervention looming at every step of Kiev’s march towards the EU. Here is why—based on the end results, Moscow saw the regime change had little to do

⁶²¹ Savchenko.

⁶²² Savchenko.

with democracy or real integration with the west. It was about Ukrainian corruption that was not in harmony with anything democratic. Smesko observes that Yushchenko in 2004 and the opposition in 2013 “only use democratic rhetoric and the ‘European brand’ in order to get absolute power in the country (author’s translation).”⁶²³ Why should the Kremlin believe this was not by foreign design? In other words, NATO’s goal, via overlapping EU mechanisms, is to secure an anti-Kremlin puppet government in Kiev, not foster any meaningful progress for the Ukrainian people.

Smeshko argues that the Maidan of 2013 resulted from “galloping corruption in the country, especially in the sphere of the state apparatus, law and order and justice, as well as the authorities’ low culture and unprofessionalism in conducting a dialogue with the people.”⁶²⁴ In this way, Yanukovich followed Yushchenko’s precedent of filling the government with his people who were prioritized graft and power consolidation over social-economic progress. Moreover, the protests were directed against the political opposition just as much as they were anti-Yanukovich:

“Euromaidan arose as a result of the protest actions of the most active students. At first, even in Lviv, the protesters refused to allow opposition representatives to the podium. It was as unexpected for the opposition leaders as it was for the country’s leadership. This confirms that both the current political force in power and the political forces of the official opposition lagged behind their people for many years (author’s translation).”⁶²⁵

For Smeshko, this confirms that both the current political force in power and the official opposition have not learned to govern in a new, Western way. They are still interested only in their personal power, not in strengthening the state’s democratic institutions. In this way,

⁶²³ Savchenko.

⁶²⁴ Savchenko.

⁶²⁵ Savchenko.

ironically, Smeshko asserts that the first two presidents of Ukraine (Kravchuk and Kuchma) were more dedicated to the constitution than even Yushchenko.

Regarding the violence of Maidan, Smeshko argues that this was entirely predictable. Another *VPK* article makes the same case, arguing that most citizens in fact support the police in their task of establishing law and order.⁶²⁶ Senior leaders in the government, especially in the security apparatus, should have foreseen what would take place given the laws in place that guide Ukraine's path towards Europe. What's more, the reactions of foreign countries should have been clearly anticipated on all sides. Without saying it directly, Smeshko suggests the West should have expected violence on the streets and anticipated Russia's strong geopolitical concern. Similarly, the violence against protesters by the Berkut and other law enforcement agencies, was entirely foreseeable. Yet, Smeshko also asserts that "the current opposition leaders have no program and no strategic vision of building real democracy in Ukraine. In this respect, they are far behind even the students who started Maidan 2013 (author's translation)."⁶²⁷ When combined, these two aspects of Ukrainian society—predictable violence and no real commitment to democracy anywhere in mainstream politics—make Ukraine a very dangerous minor member in anyone's coalition because local interests have a high chance of contradicting the interests of the main power. For Russia, this played out in a *Ukrainian dialogue*. For NATO, the delusional pace of securing Ukraine in its orbit was clear folly, and the return of Crimea to Russia, although exceptional, was predictable.

Ukraine's Civil War Breaks Stereotypes

⁶²⁶ Roman Ilyushenko, "Уроки Недавнего Прошлого [Lessons from the Recent Past]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, February 12, 2014, No5 (523) edition.

⁶²⁷ Savchenko, "Украина: Рождение Гражданского Общества [Ukraine: Birth of Civil Society]."

While this case focuses on Russia's intervention in Crimea in relation to the other cases of Moldova, Georgia and Syria, I would be remiss to ignore entirely Russia's subsequent participation in the armed unrest in Eastern Ukraine. For the purposes of this paper, the events in Donbass that unraveled after the return of Crimea to Russia do not offer enough new material in terms of clarity or the strategic environment to warrant an addition case. Nevertheless, the civil war ongoing in Eastern Ukraine break recent stereotypes about internal conflict. In this way, the events in Eastern Ukraine support the idea that Crimea is an exceptional case.

Four key elements of the civil war in Eastern Ukraine are different than the recent cases of Yugoslavia, Libya and Syria.⁶²⁸ First, these three countries experienced armed revolts against their legitimate rulers. In Kiev, however, the Euromaidan protests deposed the legitimate leader and replaced him by what Moscow sees as a coup d'état—and the West seems to ignore.⁶²⁹ From this point of view, the actions of the new authorities are perceived as harmful to the state, while the actions of the rebellious regions, Luhansk and Donetsk, are seen as unambiguously fair and an attempt to preserve the democratic status quo. In other words, it is the rebels who seek to preserve a multicultural state, while the post-coup leaders seek to rule by autocracy. Second, the coup concedes a moral high ground to the Donbass. This in turn provides an undeniable psychological advantage to the rebellious regions in combat. Prior to receiving support from Russia, this moral factor enabled the under gunned and outnumbered self-defense forces of Donbass to significantly exceed the influence of the numerical and technical superiority of the Kiev-backed army.

⁶²⁸ Sivkov, "Повстанцы Против Мятежников [Rebels Against Rebels]."

⁶²⁹ Mironov, "Реакция На Насильственную Украинизацию [Reaction To Forced Ukrainianization]."

Third, the two opposing forces confronted one another along a clear front, similar to WWII but very different from Yugoslavia, Libya and Syria. The clear front allowed for classical combat techniques to be applied in offensive operations, defensive actions and encirclements. In short, the battle on the ground looks a lot like WWII but on a smaller scale. These conditions favor the well-trained, educated volunteers drawn to the cause of Donbass. Fourth, the unity of military governance was maintained throughout the conflicts in Syria, Yugoslavia and Libya. In Ukraine, however, the central authorities are often disorganized and unable to effectively manage military operations with singular cohesion. Instead, pro-Kiev militia groups such as “Right Sector” have withdrawn their subordination to the military leadership, particularly on the front lines where cohesion matters most. Moreover, the governor of Dnipropetrovsk Kolomoisky openly refused to obey central authorities in Kiev, declaring himself an independent military and political entity within Ukraine. For all these reasons, the Russia’s forays into Crimea and Eastern Ukraine remain an exception to other recent cases of military intervention.⁶³⁰

...Fool Me Twice, Shame On Me

The 2004 Orange Revolution overruled a run-off election that saw Viktor Yanukovych defeat Viktor Yushchenko after widely alleged voting irregularities were reported to have swung the election. A month later, a third presidential election, deemed fair by an army of over 12,000 international monitors, mostly from Europe and the U.S., was won by Yushchenko. The demonstrators that protested the rigged run-off were the key ingredient in the Orange Revolution. For 17 days, these masses withstood the bitter winter conditions to demand a new election. The

⁶³⁰ Sivkov, “Повстанцы Против Мятежников [Rebels Against Rebels].”

orange movement had all appearances of legitimacy—homegrown, grassroots movement reclaiming their democratic institutions through power of the people.

Interestingly, Viktor Yanukovych again won the presidential election in 2010, but this time it was in fact deemed legitimate. It turns out this former felon did enjoy wide popular appeal after all. However, a second wave of orange supporters took to the streets in 2014 to protest against his pro-Moscow policies, unwilling to allow the democratic process to take its due course. Ultimately, they prevailed, this time forcing Yanukovych to flee to Russia after the capital erupted in street violence. Rule by the mob, however, usually does not end well. In this case, the first orange revolution may have succeeded due to Moscow's passive naivete about regime change, but by 2014 Moscow could only blame itself if it failed to take corrective action.

The Maidan-inspired coup that took place in Kiev, tacitly endorsed by the West during the Sochi Winter Games, forced Yanukovych out before Russia could support a legitimate domestic process to resolve the political debate surrounding the government's fluctuating policies on European integration. Because Yanukovych was so quickly deposed, the Kremlin's hand was forced. Simply put, fool me once shame on you, fool me twice shame on me. As such, the Russian intervention in Crimea stemmed in part from a desire to negate a recurring trend—color revolutions.⁶³¹ Moscow also wanted to prevent a similar disruption making its way to Russia. Russia's actions were motivated by two additional threats that converged alongside the color threat: an unrestrained American hyperpower and an anti-Kremlin information war directed towards Russian society from outside its territorial borders.

The Colors of Velvet

⁶³¹ “Необходима Школа Стратегического Управления [A Strategic Management School is needed],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, November 27, 2013, No46 (514) edition.

Well before his Crimea speech, delivered with its bold Periclean confidence, Putin's sovereign logic and theory of success featured throughout the MIC's discourse on international relations and foreign policy. In the articles of *VPK* we can see elements of Russian grand strategy taking shape, especially regarding the need to implement military modernization and promote a patriotic national will as a vaccine against outside interference.⁶³² Here, grand strategy is not always explicit. Rather, we can infer it from context and a repetition of content in conceptual harmony with the Kremlin's actions. These matching patterns first appeared in relation to the events preceding the five-day war, and they strengthen during the lead up to the return of Crimea to Russia. Of prime importance to the Kremlin was preventing a color revolution reaching Russia. In other words, Moscow felt directly threatened by American soft power.⁶³³ Specifically, U.S. hegemonic power shaped international institutions and norms to pushed back Moscow's influence all the way to its own borders. The Kremlin found this double standard unacceptable, but more so it takes umbrage to such a black and white perspective that denies Russia's history and rightful heir to varying degrees of shared sovereignty throughout its near abroad.

Georgian political scientist Alexander Rondeli argued that the collapse of the U.S.S.R. created a new political reality based on new inter-state relations between former subjects of a common union.⁶³⁴ Two key points can be taken from these new arrangements in international relations. First, these new relations involved highly consequential territorial splits.

⁶³² Konstantin Sivkov, "Вакцина От 'цветной' Заразы [Vaccine For Color Revolutions]," *Voенно-промышлennyi kur'er (VPK)*, April 24, 2013, No16 (484) edition.

⁶³³ Makhmut Gareyev, "На "Мягкую Силу" Найдутся Жесткие Ответы [There are Tough Answers to Soft Power]," *Voенно-промышлennyi kur'er (VPK)*, December 4, 2013, No47 (515) edition.

⁶³⁴ Bakhturidze, "Россия - Грузия: В Новом Измерении [Russia - Georgia: In A New Dimension]."

“If we consider the countries that were part of the USSR to be elements of the system, then each of these elements had some or other possibilities that turned after leaving the Soviet Union into a means not only of interstate bargaining, but also of political blackmail. Sometimes it was just the territory of the state, or rather, a favorable location. Sometimes it was energy raw materials and other natural treasures. Often it was a political position and foreign policy choice in the system of international relations (author’s translation).”⁶³⁵

Second, these splits created new rights and obligations based on new national borders. As far as Moscow is concerned, however, new rights threatened to mute or eliminate previous security expectations that spanned across what were once just internal Soviet borders. According to *VPK*, little in fact has changed in international affairs since the Cold War ended:

“And here is the most interesting thing. The scenario of world politics has changed, there are new participants in political action, which brought the need to update the existing and take into account new realities, but the conditions of the game remained the same, they have not changed. And one of these conditions is the need to make a choice and indicate your position (author’s translation).”⁶³⁶

Essentially, former Soviet states had one choice to make: serve Russia or serve the U.S.

For Moscow, Kiev neither fully understood this choice nor the new obligations which Ukraine was required to uphold in exchange for its newfound sovereignty. Apart from the Baltics, the former republics were still on the same team so to speak. The world of arms control provides a good example of just how clear this team split was. For example, the Open Skies agreement is executed in a clear “us” vs “them” protocol for notification and observation quotas.⁶³⁷ This West-vs-Russia arrangement did not unfold in 1989 when the treaty was first put to paper, but over a decade after the Soviet Union collapsed. Indeed, when the treaty first entered into force in 2002, NATO countries immediately agreed not to overfly each other which

⁶³⁵ Bakhturidze.

⁶³⁶ Bakhturidze.

⁶³⁷ Nikolai Kolomeitsev, “Выполнять Нельзя Отказаться? [Unable to Refuse Fulfillment?],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, May 14, 2014, No17 (535) edition.

essentially formed two blocks, aligning NATO and NATO-aspiring nations on one side, and Russia and close CIS signatories on the other.⁶³⁸ Russia and Belarus were joined together as a single entity for the purposes of quotas, and Ukraine was in practice on their “team” due to the clear East-West split in overflights.

Although the Soviet Union collapsed over two decades prior to the intervention in Crimea, the arms control world largely still aligns its activities along a bi-polar, U.S.-Russia orientation. This is because many arms control measures are Cold War legacy agreements in which Russia simply replaced the Soviet Union. It is also because many in both the West and Russia still see themselves as great powers in competition. This Cold War security logic reinforced Russia’s self-belief that it rightfully enjoys a sphere of influence over its non-NATO near abroad. New Start remains solely a U.S.-Russia endeavor, highlighting that both countries are the world’s two nuclear superpowers with China a distant but growing competitor. Regarding multilateral agreements, Russia suspended its participation in the CFE in 2007 over the East-West split in terms of implementation. Specifically, Russia withdrew after the failure of CFE parties to exchange outdated flank criteria (i.e. limits on troops positioned in border areas) with updated numbers that better reflect a post-Soviet security environment.

By 2015, Russia quit the CFE outright because the agreement denied Russia’s unique national interests and cultural obligations. The case of the failed CFE further reinforces the idea that Russia enjoys privileged interests abroad. To this point, NATO’s own behavior, as evidenced in Open Skies implementation, treated Ukraine as being in the East alongside Russia.

⁶³⁸ Oleg Falichev, “Оружие Доверия [Weapons of Trust],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, May 20, 2015, No18 (584) edition; Pál Dunay et al., *Open Skies: A Cooperative Approach to Military Transparency and Confidence Building* (Geneva: UN Institute for Disarmament Research, 2004), 143.

Ironically, NATO itself therefore reinforced Russia's belief that the alliance understood Moscow's sovereign security interests in Crimea. Unsurprisingly, Ukrainian inspectors began flying with Western colleagues over Russia after 2014.

Indeed, I remember my Russian counterparts' livid reaction in Moscow when they had been notified that Ukrainian personnel would begin participating in other nations' Open Skies flights over Russia. Simply put, Kiev had for many years underestimated to what extent post-Soviet territorial splits endangered its own security. Think here about death by a thousand cuts: CIS members were threatened because by definition as new states they invited many new ways for outside forces to weaken them through division. The Baltics saw this reality and quickly joined NATO. The remaining CIS states—in the Kremlin's view—remained under Russia's sphere of influence to varying degrees depending on Russia's perceived interests. Of chief importance to the case of Crimea, Russia-CIS common interests were eventually split and compromised via a specific Western mechanism of soft power: the color revolutions.⁶³⁹

Kiev also failed to grasp the concept of Crimea's shared sovereignty. In 2008, for example, President Yushchenko signed two decrees (NN 705 and 706) that contradicted the 1997 basic agreements regarding the Black Sea Fleet.⁶⁴⁰ Specifically, Kiev introduced a new permitting procedure intended to restrict the movements of Russian naval vessels and disband a previously simplified procedure for crossing the border. Anything that weakened the Black Sea Fleet threatened Russia's national security and the national security of all states under its nuclear umbrella.⁶⁴¹ Yushchenko, the beneficiary of the "orange" revolution, was taking these actions in

⁶³⁹ Gareyev, "На "Мягкую Силу" Найдутся Жесткие Ответы [There are Tough Answers to Soft Power]."

⁶⁴⁰ "Украина Ставит Рогатки [Ukraine's Slingshots]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, April 24, 2013, No16 (484) edition.

⁶⁴¹ Konstantin Sivkov, "Горячие Черноморские Камушки [Hot Black Sea Stones]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, January 23, 2013, No3 (471) edition.

response to Moscow's five-day war with Georgia. For sure, Moscow saw it as no coincidence that Georgia at the time was also led by a leader placed into power as a result of a color movement, the "pink" revolution. These new Ukrainian measures, in conjunction with Ukraine's overtures to NATO, were in a sense an abdication of its claim to sovereignty because these actions opened the door for de facto NATO control of Crimea.

In this way, both Saakashvili and Yushchenko clarified for Moscow that "peaceful" color revolutions in effect are real geopolitical weapons—soft power.⁶⁴² These color revolutions resulted in regime change. Once in power, new leaders pivoted their national foreign policy trajectories away from Russia's sphere of influence and towards NATO. Yet, a significant portion of Ukrainians consider Russia as a brotherly nation and prefer a pro-Moscow orientation in government.⁶⁴³ In fact, over half of all Ukrainians have relatives living inside Russia.⁶⁴⁴ As such, Russia understood that color revolutions were not organically driven by a democratic consensus of the people.⁶⁴⁵ Instead, small groups of extreme radicals were enabled from abroad. It was hard for any onlooker to not see what the U.S. was doing. As such, Russia understood it must resist this kind of soft power attack in a logic similar to that in Maurice Ogden's poem *The Hangman*. Namely, if Russia fails to protect other states from color attacks, then there will be no states left to help Russia when it too (inevitably) comes under such an attack.

⁶⁴² Konstantin Sivkov, "'Цветной' Сценарий Для России ["Color" Scenario For Russia]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, April 3, 2013, No13 (481) edition.

⁶⁴³ Darya Ivashkina, "Более Половины Украинцев Считают Россиян Братским Народом [More than Half of Ukrainians Consider Russians as a Brotherly Nation]," *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, December 18, 2016, <https://www.kp.ru/daily/26621.7/3638719/>; Tatyana Savchenko, "Украина Реформирует Армию [Ukraine Reforms Its Army]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, September 25, 2013, No37 (505) edition.

⁶⁴⁴ "У Половины Украинцев Есть Родственники в России [Half of All Ukrainians Have Relatives in Russia]," *Segodnya*, November 28, 2011, <https://www.segodnya.ua/ukraine/u-poloviny-ukraintsev-ect-rodctvenniki-v-roccii-277869.html>.

⁶⁴⁵ Evgeny Satanovsky, "Урок Украинского [Ukrainian Lesson]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, March 12, 2014, No9 (527) edition.

Some Russian MIC experts posit that color revolutions result in regime change through an identifiable and deliberate process. This process requires a key requisite condition: a society ripe for “bifurcation (author’s translation).”⁶⁴⁶ In essence, the U.S. uses color revolutions to exploit conditions that allow for a state to become divided. Once divided, a new regime can be installed under the appearance and legitimacy of a pro-democracy process. Six conditions must be met to achieve the desired social rupture that allows for regime change by way of color revolution: access to detailed information about the target society’s social system and an understanding of which institutions control development in the state’s current form; sufficient time and opportunities to achieve a bifurcated state; accurate identification of stable options for the state once bifurcation takes place; uncovering, at least in general terms, the bifurcation resolution mechanism as well as means to influence the system during the color process; sufficient management tools available to develop the state’s system as desired; and the ability to predict with sufficient accuracy the results of bifurcation management.⁶⁴⁷

In 2013, one concept to counter color revolutions in Russia articulated a five-step process to build national resiliency.⁶⁴⁸ A recommended deadline for its completion was set at October or November of 2013, the time when Euromaidan actually kicked off in Kiev. The first stage, which lasts two to five months, should consolidate domestic political power by eliminating contradictions and mutual distrust between opposition and ruling parties. Second, an effort towards “designation of the guilty (author’s translation)” will discredit leaders of liberal-Western groups and individuals. Of prime importance is to lay on them the blame for the economic, legal

⁶⁴⁶ Konstantin Sivkov, “Управляемый Хаос Подбирается К России [Managed Chaos Moves Towards Russia],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 7, 2013, No30 (498) edition.

⁶⁴⁷ Sivkov.

⁶⁴⁸ Konstantin Sivkov, “Профилактика “Цветного” Недуга [“Color” Disease Prevention],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, May 15, 2013, No18 (486) edition.

and social collapse of the 1990s.⁶⁴⁹ The third stage, “cleansing the top (author’s translation)” seeks to remove the most influential of the pro-Western liberals from positions of authority. The worst offenders, like Anatoly Serdyukov and Anatoly Chubais, should be prosecuted for their crimes against Russia. Fourth, the centers of organization among any “color” movements must be paralyzed by discrediting them and then isolating them from public discourse. Finally, Russian authorities must eliminate the conditions for the emergence of “color revolution.” Primarily, this requires stage must focus on economics (denying liberal funding) and ideological factors (moral-psychological support for the public). Here, it remains an important task to remove Western liberals from Russia’s media space.⁶⁵⁰

Nuclear America: A First Strike Hyperpower

For the time being, modern Russia, which inherited the nuclear and space technologies from the USSR, cannot be destroyed militarily without consequence.⁶⁵¹ But the world’s balance of power is always under threat of changing.⁶⁵² Beyond its soft power and color revolutions, America continues to advance its hegemonic advantage to such an extent Russia’s nuclear deterrence capability is under threat of becoming inadequate to protect its national interests.⁶⁵³ The U.S. nuclear strategy prioritizes a number of proactive measures to prevent or disrupt a retaliatory nuclear strike from Russia.⁶⁵⁴ The American strategy hinges upon the creation of high-precision strategic weapons with conventional warheads paired with a new generation of

⁶⁴⁹ Sergei Pershutkin, “Право Сильного [The Right of the Strong],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, February 18, 2015, No6 (572) edition.

⁶⁵⁰ Sivkov, “Профилактика “Цветного” Недуга [“Color” Disease Prevention].”

⁶⁵¹ Satanovsky, “Украина Как Четвертый Рейх [Ukraine As The Fourth Reich].”

⁶⁵² Konstantin Sivkov, “Главный Козырь США [USA’s Main Trump Card],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, July 24, 2013, No28 (496) edition.

⁶⁵³ Mikhail Tsyrvkov and Andrei Shushkov, “Перспективы Ядерной Триады США [Prospects for the US Nuclear Triad],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, September 18, 2013, No36 (504) edition.

⁶⁵⁴ Gareyev, “На “Мягкую Силу” Найдутся Жесткие Ответы [There are Tough Answers to Soft Power].”

advanced ABM systems.⁶⁵⁵ In addition, the Russian military anticipates American special aviation units to be trained and tasked to penetrate into an enemy's rear prior to the onset of hostilities and destroy strategic nuclear assets.⁶⁵⁶ Finally, the American militarization of space is inevitable and as a consequence Russia's nuclear assurance will be undermined.⁶⁵⁷

An initial undertaking towards countering the American nuclear strategy can be found in nudging the international system through a combination of diplomacy and new approaches to military organization.⁶⁵⁸ Specifically, some MIC specialists argue Russia ought to pursue a policy of preventive strikes.⁶⁵⁹ This policy would establish Russia's right to use force in the event its second-strike capabilities became compromised. These strikes would be targeted against assets in order to restore Russia's full strategic deterrence. Four steps can be taken towards building this capability. First, Russia must establish guidelines on how to organize the military to conduct preventive strikes. This should include increasing submarine and surface launched cruise missile inventories to 1000-1200 units and long-range air launch cruise missile stocks to approximately 800. Second, Russia must make a political statement and declare its willingness to conduct these kinds of strikes. Third, Russia can seek out international legal frameworks that legitimize preventive strikes as an instrument against inevitable aggression. Here, a clear system of signs and criteria of inevitable aggression and the conditions for a legitimate preventive strike

⁶⁵⁵ Leonid Orlenko, "Денег Надо Вдвое Больше [Double the Money is Needed]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, May 22, 2013, No19 (487) edition.

⁶⁵⁶ Gareyev, "На "Мягкую Силу" Найдутся Жесткие Ответы [There are Tough Answers to Soft Power]."

⁶⁵⁷ Igor Ashurbeyli, "Милитаризация Космоса Неизбежна [Militarization of Space Is Inevitable]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, March 5, 2014, No8 (526) edition.

⁶⁵⁸ Vladimir Ostantkov, "Есть Ответ И На Американские Хитрости [There's An Answer To American Tricks]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 7, 2013, No30 (498) edition.

⁶⁵⁹ Konstantin Sivkov, "Право На Удар [Right To Strike]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, March 5, 2014, No8 (526) edition.

should be fixed at the international level. Finally, Russia must conduct a series of demonstrative exercises to practice preventive strikes.⁶⁶⁰

Information Wars

Almost all public institutions in Russia, primarily mass media and religious organization, cultural institutions, NGOs, and public movements funded from abroad engage in information warfare.⁶⁶¹ The war being waged consists of an aggressor state substituting the basic values of the nation-victim for the psychological attitudes and myths of the aggressor. This fight takes place in the mental space of human society. If Tunisia and Egypt were the first auditions of this new kind of revolution, then Libya was the first real combat operation of the West's worldwide information network war waged against unwanted regimes. These instances mark an evolution over America's wars in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq, where Washington used the full capacity of its resources but relied heavily on armed conflict. Major General Zolotarev calls this Western strategy of systematic regime change "managed chaos."⁶⁶² Another key aspect with American info wars is this: Russia is a malign actor, especially after Moscow's intervention in Crimea.

Some Russian MIC experts believe there is no point in discussing the legality or illegality of Russia's actions towards Ukraine.⁶⁶³ According to this perspective, it is only necessary to compare Russia's actions with the operations of NATO and its Western coalitions in Yugoslavia, North Africa, Central Asia and the Middle East. From such a comparison, Moscow can be seen

⁶⁶⁰ Sivkov.

⁶⁶¹ Vladimir Zolotarev, "Когда Нация Становится Жертвой [When the nation becomes a victim]," *Voенно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, May 1, 2013, No17 (485) edition.

⁶⁶² Zolotarev.

⁶⁶³ Satanovsky, "Все Только Начинается [It's Just Beginning]."

as nothing more than a student taking notes and learning from the environment's examples.⁶⁶⁴

Many in the NATO military leadership will admit to this conclusion.⁶⁶⁵ At the same time, however, Russia will remain the aggressor in the world media regardless of the real situation on the ground in Ukraine. Because the ongoing informational and ideological war against Russia will not stop, there is no need for Russians to even read the foreign press. Focus should instead be placed on what is necessary: resist hostile propaganda.

Information wars remain a very real factor in geopolitics.⁶⁶⁶ From a Russian perspective, info wars encompass a wide range of advocacy activities used to influence the psyche and behavior of people, society as a whole, as well as measures to combat an adversary's use of these influences.⁶⁶⁷ Some experts in the Russian MIC argue that Russian leaders, like those during the Soviet Union, underestimate the American threat in this realm of warfare. Indeed, information warfare is considered one of the most effective means of interstate confrontation, especially when viewed from a cost analysis perspective.⁶⁶⁸ Others suggest that America's reliance on the informational domain of warfare in Ukraine indicates the gradual weakening of the Western world.⁶⁶⁹ In either case, the Russian army set out in 2014 to maintain a cyber enterprise dedicated to conducting information operations in both peacetime and wartime.⁶⁷⁰ This will help Moscow

⁶⁶⁴ Damir Ivletshin, "Общественность на фронте информационной войны [The public on the front of information warfare]," *Voенно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, October 22, 2008, No42 (258) edition.

⁶⁶⁵ Satanovsky, "Украина Как Четвертый Рейх [Ukraine As The Fourth Reich]."

⁶⁶⁶ Igor Panarin, "Система Информационного Противоборства [Information Warfare System]," *Voенно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, October 15, 2008, No41 (257) edition.

⁶⁶⁷ Vadim Udmantsev, "Боевая Служба и Видеоконтроль [Combat Service and Video Control]," *Voенно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, March 4, 2009, No8 (274) edition; Anton Dozhnikov, "Когда Повстанцы Эффективнее Армии [When the rebels are more effective than the Army]," *Voенно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, June 4, 2014, No20 (538) edition; Oleg Falichev, "Оружие Асимметричного Ответа [Asymmetric Weapons]," *Voенно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, May 14, 2014, No17 (535) edition; Fedor Valentinov, "Братъ Языка - Прошлый Век [Common Language - Last Century]," *Voенно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, March 18, 2015, No10 (576) edition.

⁶⁶⁸ Konstantin Sivkov, "Хуже Иприта [Worse Than Mustard Gas]," *Voенно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, August 14, 2013, No31 (499) edition.

⁶⁶⁹ Satanovsky, "Украина Как Четвертый Рейх [Ukraine As The Fourth Reich]."

⁶⁷⁰ "Создается Киберкомандование [Cybercommand Created]," *Voенно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, October 16, 2013, No40 (508) edition.

combat the anti-Russian narrative that currently spans all possible media platforms in what can also be described as a psychological war.⁶⁷¹ This insight provides a good segue way into Moscow's takeaways from Crimea and the identification of the Kremlin's next lines of effort in its competition with the West.

Lessons Learned

The Kremlin may have successfully returned Crimea to Russia, but this exceptional intervention has prompted many questions about Moscow's mistakes and imperfect policy towards Ukraine over the previous decades. Many Russian MIC experts believe that the Kremlin lacked a coherent strategy towards Ukraine. More specifically, this position asserts that it was not Russia that purposefully influenced the situation in Ukraine but was guided by the trends of the situation in the country, the direction of which was determined by other forces and states.⁶⁷² In general terms, the great miscalculation of Russia's policy towards Kiev was to rely solely on economic leverage, especially subsidized hydrocarbons. Questions also abound regarding Russia's domestic performance as it relates to national security. In this context, the MIC observes three key groups of lessons learned from the intervention in Crimea: sanctions, military modernization, and fostering a clear Russian community identity.

Sanctions

In the wake of Crimea's return to Russia, Western states levied sanctions against Russia in an attempt to force Moscow to reverse its course. For Russia, the lesson learned is that sanctions are simply the cost of doing business, but they are not necessarily to be feared. Western

⁶⁷¹ Vladimir Zolotarev, "Психологическая Война Уже В Киберпространстве [Psychological Warfare Already in Cyberspace]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, April 24, 2013, No16 (484) edition.

⁶⁷² Konstantin Sivkov, "Крым Выиграли, Украину Проиграли [Crimea Won, Ukraine Lost]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, March 26, 2014, No11 (529) edition.

sanctions in reality are more a “war of nerves (author’s translation)” than an actual attempt to strangle Russia’s economy.⁶⁷³ These kinds of sanctions may hurt but are arguably ineffective in the long-run—take Iran for example.⁶⁷⁴ Because most sanctions against Russia largely spare essential businesses and are directed mostly towards individuals, the Russian economy will likely weather the storm. This is certainly true for the Russian MIC and its weapons export businesses. According to the Commission on Military Cooperation held in January 2015, the volume of Russian military export deliveries in 2014 were mainly on target, with sales in excess of \$15 billion.⁶⁷⁵ In addition, Russia concluded new export contracts valued at approximately \$14 billion. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) confirms Russia’s booming weapons export business.

In 2013, Russia continued to rank second in the international arms market, behind only the United States in terms of sales.⁶⁷⁶ At the same time, the gap between the two countries narrowed significantly in 2009-2013. In 2004-2008, the United States accounted for 30 percent of the international arms market, while Russia accounted for 24 percent. In 2009-2013, the gap was reduced to just two percent, with the U.S. market share dipping to 29 percent and Russia's climbing to 27 percent. As such, the 2015 announcement of Russia’s \$15 billion in deliveries in 2014 confirms the positive trend in Moscow’s ability to reliably deliver increasing volumes of military exports despite international sanctions. Russia’s annual military export salons, such as the famous International Aviation and Space Show (MAKS), also saw an uptick in interest and

⁶⁷³ Satanovsky, “Урок Украинского [Ukrainian Lesson].”

⁶⁷⁴ Evgeny Satanovsky, “Отсроченная Конкуренция [Delayed Competition],” *Voенно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, April 1, 2015, No12 (578) edition.

⁶⁷⁵ Nikolai Novichkov and Dmitry Fedyushko, “Проекция Силы [Force Projection],” *Voенно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, June 3, 2015, No20 (586) edition.

⁶⁷⁶ Novichkov and Fedyushko.

participation.⁶⁷⁷ Another area of surging Russian military exports since 2011 involves a new emphasis on providing improved training, maintenance support, and supply of equipment, spare parts, tools, and accessories (much like the American Foreign Military Sales construct).⁶⁷⁸

Russia's unsuccessful purchase of two French Mistral Class helicopter carriers exemplifies why sanctions will likely prove ineffective in forcing Moscow's policies towards Ukraine.⁶⁷⁹ Just as Russia was on the cusp of hosting the Winter Games in Sochi, it was also welcoming much-heralded progress on its two Mistrals, named *Vladivostok* and *Sevastopol*, that were due to enter service in 2015 and 2016 respectively.⁶⁸⁰ While French sailors were training their Russian counterparts on the first Mistral class vessel, however, NATO partners offered to buy the boats if France agreed to cancel the order with Moscow as part of sanctions for the annexation of Crimea.⁶⁸¹ In practice, the drawn-out drama surrounding the fate of the Mistrals signaled to all parties that Western sanctions were supported with varying commitment across capitals. The rub for Paris was that Russia had agreed to purchase the two boats for roughly \$1 billion, most of which was paid up front.

Russia's intervention in Crimea alone was seemingly not enough for France to cancel the lucrative contract—France apparently needed guarantees on the \$1 billion before returning Moscow's sizeable down payment. Ultimately, France terminated the contract with Russia, but

⁶⁷⁷ Nikolai Novichkov, "Престиж Российских Выставок Растет [Prestige of Russian Exhibitions Growing]," *Voенно-промышленный кур'ер (VPK)*, November 20, 2013, No45 (513) edition.

⁶⁷⁸ Vasily Sychev, "Пирамида Военного Экспорта [Military Export Pyramid]," *Voенно-промышленный кур'ер (VPK)*, October 30, 2013, No42 (510) edition.

⁶⁷⁹ "Без "Мистралей" Обойдемся [We will make it without Mistrals]," *Voенно-промышленный кур'ер (VPK)*, March 26, 2014, No11 (529) edition.

⁶⁸⁰ "Мистрали" Начнут Службу На Тихом Океане ["The Mistrals" Start Pacific Ocean Service]," *Voенно-промышленный кур'ер (VPK)*, February 26, 2014, No7 (525) edition.

⁶⁸¹ "Мистрали" В Россию Не Пускать ["Mistrals" Disallowed For Russia]," *Voенно-промышленный кур'ер (VPK)*, April 9, 2014, No13 (531) edition.

only after securing a new contract with Egypt.⁶⁸² Interestingly, Egypt then agreed terms to buy Russia's 50 KA-52 helicopters that were already built to place on the Mistrals, and further contracted Russian companies to modify and the outfit the vessels to support this new rotary aviation hardware.⁶⁸³ This deal may in fact have worked out better for Moscow than initially planned. Moscow's need for the Mistrals was questionable, given the vessel's documented vulnerabilities and limitations.⁶⁸⁴ In addition, an inefficient MIC contracting policy allowed Minister Serdyukov to single-handedly agree to the purchase price, considered by many as highly overpriced.⁶⁸⁵ Thus, cutting the deal saved money and face.

What's more, the Kremlin secured another politically beneficial arms deal with Cairo that involved many weapons systems—from MiG-29 fighters to advanced SAM systems. This robust purchase, funded by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, went through despite sanctions against Russia.⁶⁸⁶ This helped Moscow reestablished its goodwill and partnership with Egypt in a time when many Egyptians felt betrayed by Washington's nonsensical support of the Muslim Brotherhood.⁶⁸⁷ In the wake of General el-Sisi's ouster of Mohammed Morsi and his radical Islamic cohorts from power, Washington punished Egypt for its military coup. For example, the U.S. halted delivery of F-16 fighter aircraft in 2013 and demanded Cairo refrain from buying

⁶⁸² “Рособоронэкспорту 15 Лет [Rosoboronexport turns 15],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, November 4, 2015, No42 (608) edition.

⁶⁸³ “Египет Соглашует Начинку “Мистралей” С Россией [Egypt Agrees Russian Upgrades For ‘Mistrals’],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, October 21, 2015, No40 (606) edition.

⁶⁸⁴ Konstantin Sivkov, “Позор По Имени “Мистраль” [The Shame Called ‘Mistral’],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, November 20, 2013, No45 (513) edition; Ruslan Pukhov, ““Мистраль” И История Российского Военного Импорта [The ‘Mistral’ and Russia's History of Military Imports],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, February 9, 2011, No5 (371) edition.

⁶⁸⁵ Oleg Falichev, “Двойные Стандарты ГОЗ [Double Standard in Military Purchases],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, June 19, 2013, No23 (491) edition.

⁶⁸⁶ “Российское Оружие Для Египта [Russian Arms For Egypt],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, February 26, 2014, No7 (525) edition.

⁶⁸⁷ Marina Sapronova, “Египет: Хаос, Сумятица, Неразбериха [Egypt: Chaos, Disarray, Confusion],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, July 31, 2013, No29 (497) edition.

advanced weapons from Moscow.⁶⁸⁸ Yet, in the coming months the Egyptian president lamented broken diplomatic ties with Washington due to American support for Syrian rebels—Cairo, like Russia, backs Assad in Damascus.⁶⁸⁹ In other words, the Obama administration opened the door and Putin walked right into Egypt. In Afghanistan, President Karzai’s government also continued to purchase Russian helicopters out of sheer practicality—Russian-made weapon systems are a cheaper, better fit for many armies around the world.⁶⁹⁰

Arguably, the most important sign that Western sanctions against Russia are not working is that we see no Kremlin policy reversal on Crimea, let alone in Eastern Ukraine. The Mistrals episode illustrates two additional factors that favor Moscow. First, as mentioned above, French reluctance to cancel its \$1 billion contract with Russia shows how Western powers can be split politically based on differing economic interests. Second, Russia showed great diplomatic creativity and flexibility in working with Egypt. Not only did Moscow help Cairo out with its new purchase, but it also showed Cairo that Russia could be a much more understanding—perhaps more stable—partner given the chaos in the Middle East, particularly related to anti-government movements in Egypt and Syria. Given the wide variance of reliance on Russian-supplied energy resources in the EU, it appears a patient Russia can not only survive economic sanctions, but it can also remain politically engaged thanks to a robust arms export industry.

Modernization Vector

⁶⁸⁸ “Поставка F-16 Египту Остановлена [F-16 Delivery to Egypt Halted],” *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, July 31, 2013, No29 (497) edition.

⁶⁸⁹ Marina Sapronova, “Сирия, G8 И Особая Позиция России [Syria, the G8 And Russia’s Special Position],” *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, July 10, 2013, No26 (494) edition.

⁶⁹⁰ “Санкции Против Рособоронэкспорта [Sanctions Against Rosoboronexport],” *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, April 2, 2014, No12 (530) edition.

As was discussed in the previous chapter, Russia identified the need for a nuclear modernization program to ensure strategic deterrence through a credible second-strike capability.⁶⁹¹ Russia also relies on non-strategic nuclear weapons to deter NATO aggression into its own territory.⁶⁹² Yet, as the case of Crimea has demonstrated, there is a very real threat that the two sides could trade blows in a conventional conflict at some point in the near future. If a conventional conflict were to take place between Russia and the U.S. or NATO, it would likely occur in close proximity to Russia. Moscow's military is simply not tooled for global engagement, but rather to compete for regional dominance with a very limited ability for global reach.⁶⁹³ While Russia made significant headway in post-2008 military modernization, the operations in Crimea exemplify Russia's continued need for modern conventional weapons systems to penetrate into areas under Russia's privileged interests. Moreover, some MIC experts argue that Russia would not use nuclear weapons on or near its soil even if it was about to suffer a conventional defeat because the repercussions of breaking the nuclear taboo would only further outcast Russia in the international community.⁶⁹⁴

Indeed, Russia's most important task may be achieving conventional parity with NATO.⁶⁹⁵ This is because Russia relies too heavily on its nuclear deterrence. Additionally, key aspects of military modernization were severely derailed by Defense Minister Serdyukov's

⁶⁹¹ Mikhail Tsytkov and Andrei Shushkov, "Авиационный Компонент Ядерной Триады США [US Nuclear Triad Aviation Component]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, October 2, 2013, No38 (506) edition.

⁶⁹² Aleksei Ramm, "Великий Воин И Защитник "Искандер" [Great Warrior and Defender 'Iskander']," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, February 12, 2014, No5 (523) edition.

⁶⁹³ Konstantin Sivkov, "Кто Правит На Море, Тот Правит И На Суше [Whoever Rules the Sea Rules the Land]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, June 4, 2013, No21 (489) edition; Oleg Falichev, "Войска ВКО: Болезни Роста [Air And Space Forces: Growth Problems]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, October 9, 2013, No39 (507) edition; Konstantin Sivkov, "Убийственная Правда [The Damning Truth]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, October 2, 2013, No38 (506) edition.

⁶⁹⁴ Konstantin Sivkov, "Инструмент Последнего Рубежа [Instrument of the Last Frontier]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, December 4, 2013, No47 (515) edition.

⁶⁹⁵ Vasily Burenok and Lev Lysenko, "Мифы Ядерного Разоружения [Myths of Nuclear Disarmament]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, January 29, 2014, No3 (521) edition.

shortsighted program cuts and personal corruption—he was sacked and replaced by Sergei Shoigu in 2013, a move well received by the MIC.⁶⁹⁶ Despite its shortcomings, the military reform launched in 2008 under Serdyukov surpassed all previous efforts.⁶⁹⁷ For some, the most surprising and revealing aspect of his military reform since is just how successful it has been despite a lot of obstacles and ambiguous attitudes.⁶⁹⁸ But with Shoigu’s appointment, the Russian MIC began a new and reinvigorated era of independence in scientific thought and a dedicated push for domestic control over technological innovation.⁶⁹⁹ This included substantial efforts to weed out corruption through increased transparency via mandatory reporting mechanisms, tightened banking rules and the bulk of payments only after delivery.⁷⁰⁰ It is in this era of new professionalism that officials started referring to the MIC as the Defense Industrial Complex (DIC).⁷⁰¹ Shoigu was also charged with the huge task of equipping 70% of Russia’s military with new, modern weapon systems by 2020.⁷⁰²

Meanwhile, according to Deputy Prime Minister Rogozin, the U.S. has already for a decade worked on perfecting a concept of a global strike blitz—the ability to take down another nuclear-armed state without suffering unacceptable damage.⁷⁰³ Some argue such an attack may even use nuclear weapons in a first strike.⁷⁰⁴ Even before Crimea-sanctions set in, Russian

⁶⁹⁶ Oleg Falichev, “Вернуть Доверие Общества [To Restore Society’s Trust],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, December 11, 2013, No48 (516) edition.

⁶⁹⁷ Konstantin Sivkov, “Доведенные До Нового Облика [A New Look Is Complete],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, January 16, 2013, No2 (470) edition.

⁶⁹⁸ Karaganov, “Неочевидный Фактор - Сила Оружия [The Unobvious Factor - The Power of Weapons].”

⁶⁹⁹ “Основной Вектор Развития России [Russia’s Main Vector of Development],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, November 13, 2013, No44 (512) edition.

⁷⁰⁰ “Воры В Мундирах И Пиджаках [Thieves In Uniforms And Suits],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, May 22, 2013, No19 (487) edition.

⁷⁰¹ Karaganov, “Неочевидный Фактор - Сила Оружия [The Unobvious Factor - The Power of Weapons].”

⁷⁰² “На Сильных Не Нападают [Don’t Attack the Strong],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, March 27, 2013, No12 (480) edition.

⁷⁰³ Makhmut Gareyev, “Последовательно Отстаивать Национальные Интересы [Consistently Defend the National Interests],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, January 22, 2014, No2 (520) edition.

⁷⁰⁴ Mikhail Tsyrcov and Andrei Shushkov, “США Готовят Ядерный Удар По России [USA Preparing Nuclear Strike Against Russia],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, September 25, 2013, No37 (505) edition.

experts identified that its MIC must become more self-reliant because even in the best of time the U.S. export control regime undermines Russia's ability to reach technological parity through cooperation.⁷⁰⁵ Self-reliance must also mean less expensive solutions given Russia's mere \$65 billion in defense spending in 2012 compared with America's over \$600 billion and China's \$120 billion.⁷⁰⁶

Under Shoigu's leadership, the Ministry of Defense created a new service branch: the Air and Space Forces of the Russian federation, seven years before the U.S. followed suit.⁷⁰⁷ While the move in the U.S. has been mocked by the Democrat Party establishment, the Russian government has modernized its approach to both non-contact warfare and integrated air and space defense. A prime example is Russia's combat training tests of the new A-235 anti-satellite and ballistic missile defense system, which is set to replace the aging A-135 "Amur."⁷⁰⁸ Looking to employ a system of systems approach, Russian efforts to modernize its military organization have set out to create a reconnaissance-strike complex that combines missile, artillery, space and aviation assets into a single information space for complex combat operations.⁷⁰⁹

In 2013, Russian experts argued that the military and political situation in the world once again clearly demonstrated the desire of Western states to achieve their goals by military means.⁷¹⁰ To achieve their aims, the U.S. and allies use a full range of non-nuclear weapons from

⁷⁰⁵ Sergei Denisentsev, "Технологический Железный Занавес Для России [Technological Iron Curtain For Russia]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, November 6, 2013, No43 (511) edition.

⁷⁰⁶ Orlenko, "Денег Надо Вдвое Больше [Double the Money is Needed]."

⁷⁰⁷ Kirill Makarov and Sergei Yagolnikov, "Вопрос Государственной Важности [Question of National Importance]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, September 11, 2013, No35 (503) edition.

⁷⁰⁸ "Систему Про Москвы Обновят [Moscow ABM System Update]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, May 1, 2013, No17 (485) edition.

⁷⁰⁹ Igor Artamonov and Roman Ryabtsev, ""Бог Войны" XXI Века ["God of War" of the 21st century]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, 24 April 2013, No16 (484) edition.

⁷¹⁰ Aleksandr Travkin, Aleksandr Belomytsev, and Marat Valeev, "Надо Формировать Новый Вид Вооруженных Сил [We need to form a new type of armed forces]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, September 25, 2013, No37 (505) edition.

terrorist proxies like Al-Qaida in Libya and Syria or large-scale strikes by aircraft and cruise missiles like in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁷¹¹ Therefore, any modernization program must be able to counter Western threats through the realization of continually accelerated qualitative advances in integrated air defense systems, information warfare, UAVs, robotics and advanced command and control systems.⁷¹² In addition, General Gerasimov argued that the State Armament Program for 2016-2025 ought to include the development and funding of a “military science complex (author’s translation).”⁷¹³ Rogozin’s Public Council of the MIC initiative is another strong initiative aimed at bridging public-private gaps—private business is more dynamic, efficient and innovative than state-run entities, but they also covet profitability and predictability.⁷¹⁴

Within this framework, special attention should be paid to training scientific personnel and strengthening the capacity of research organizations. DARPA and the U.S. “Third Offset” offer interesting models to follow, but Russia must spend wisely in order to achieve real progress in technological modernization of its armed forces.⁷¹⁵ Indeed, the cost to field new military weapon systems continues to rise. At such a high cost, the real strength of a modern army is not so much its quantity but rather its quality.⁷¹⁶ A new aspect of Russia’s military modernization focuses on non-hardware factors that improve qualitative power: professionalism of soldiers, art of leadership and morale of the troops.⁷¹⁷ Here Russian experts are talking about a system of

⁷¹¹ Vyacheslav Tetekin, “НАТО Издали И Изнутри [NATO From Afar and Inside],” *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, July 10, 2013, No26 (494) edition.

⁷¹² Gareyev, “На “Мягкую Силу” Найдутся Жесткие Ответы [There are Tough Answers to Soft Power]”; Travkin, Belomytsev, and Valeev, “Надо Формировать Новый Вид Вооруженных Сил [We need to form a new type of armed forces].”

⁷¹³ Valery Gerasimov, “Генеральный Штаб И Оборона Страны [The General Headquarters And National Defense],” *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, February 5, 2014, No4 (522) edition.

⁷¹⁴ “ВПК: На Перекрестке Дорог [MIC: At A Crossroad],” *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, March 27, 2013, No12 (480) edition.

⁷¹⁵ Vladimir Korchak, Evgeny Tuzhikov, and Leonid Bocharov, “Сколько Стоит Военная Наука [What’s Military Science worth?],” *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, July 17, 2013, No27 (495) edition.

⁷¹⁶ Vladimir Zolotarev, “Духовно-нравственные Ориентиры Реформы [Spiritual and Moral Orientation Reforms],” *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, April 17, 2013, No15 (483) edition.

⁷¹⁷ “ВПК: На Перекрестке Дорог [MIC: At A Crossroad].”

spiritual and moral criteria and at the same time about simple norms of military service: honor, courage, duty, dignity, military brotherhood, love of nation and loyalty to the best of military traditions.⁷¹⁸

Quality of life issues dominated military modernization efforts under Defense Minister Shoigu. It was argued that the military will not improve until it can attract the nation's best talent with offers of a desirable professional environment. Three key issues underpinned the debate on improving military quality of life. First, restricting the forces for a more professional structure of volunteers. A new emphasis on the importance and prestige of military schools underpins this initiative.⁷¹⁹ For example, the Suvorov Military School now once again leads the military's Victory Day parade in Red Square.⁷²⁰ Second, a push for better military facilities and support structures, such as access to health care and education. President Putin urged similar improvements be made across the entire Russian MIC as well due to a growing shortage of technical experts.⁷²¹ Third, quality housing for military soldiers and officers became a very public issue.⁷²²

At the same time, the Russian military and MIC places a lot of attention to the high-tech threat of U.S. net-centric warfare. On the modern battlefield, Russian experts envision troops interacting in real-time through the use of networked command and control, space-based

⁷¹⁸ Zolotarev, "Духовно-нравственные Ориентиры Реформы [Spiritual and Moral Orientation Reforms]."

⁷¹⁹ Oleg Falichev, "Военные Вузы - Обратный Ход [Military Universities - Backtracking]," *Voенно-promyshlennyy kur'er (VPK)*, October 16, 2013, No40 (508) edition.

⁷²⁰ "Училище, Убитое Трижды [Schools, Killed Three Times]," *Voенно-promyshlennyy kur'er (VPK)*, July 31, 2013, No29 (497) edition.

⁷²¹ Oleg Falichev, "Кадровый Голод В ОПК Сохраняется [Staff Shortages in DIC Continue]," *Voенно-promyshlennyy kur'er (VPK)*, August 14, 2013, No31 (499) edition; Igor Nikonov, "Кадровый Голод В ОПК [Staff Shortage in the DIC]," *Voенно-promyshlennyy kur'er (VPK)*, May 29, 2013, No20 (488) edition.

⁷²² "За Достойный Уровень Службы И Жизни [For A Worthy Level of Service and Life]," *Voенно-promyshlennyy kur'er (VPK)*, December 4, 2013, No47 (515) edition.

navigation systems, electronic maps, and other adaptive communication technologies. For others, however, the world of 2013—on the eve of action in Crimea—looked ripe for technological and hardware breakdowns on the battlefield.⁷²³ Indeed, contemporary warfare, when fought in dense urban areas or without a clear identification of combatants, can devolve into conditions that preclude such a high-tech approach to warfare. Instead, the long-forgotten means of command and control—roaming groups of 20-30 men, signal flags, dedicated messengers and many delays—must be maintained in parallel to training with modern kit.⁷²⁴ Indeed, there are historical examples that over-expenditure of expensive high-precision and anti-radar weapons may force a power like America to peace talks at which point it experiences relatively small losses from combat operations that quickly outweigh possible gains—material, political, moral-psychological or other.⁷²⁵ In this more rudimentary sense of urban and suburban conflict, the Russia government also looks to its collective identity as a source of power.

Defending The Russian World

MIC experts assert that events surrounding Crimea directly affect Russia’s national interests and hostile threats remain as close as possible to Russian borders. As such, it remains more important than ever to focus on the revival and consolidation of the social and cultural core: Russia’s people.⁷²⁶ This aligns with the Russian government’s “triune system (author’s translation)” of ensuring national (military, state and public) security.⁷²⁷ A way forward may be

⁷²³ Vasily Burenok, “Как Обеспечить Обороноспособность России В Будущем? [How to Ensure Russia’s Defense Capability in the Future?],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, October 9, 2013, No39 (507) edition.

⁷²⁴ Burenok.

⁷²⁵ Konstantin Sivkov, “Как Сорвать Блицкриг Альянса [How to Break the NATO Blitzkrieg],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, March 27, 2013, No12 (480) edition.

⁷²⁶ Roman Ilyushenko, “Острая Стадия Раздвоения Патриотизма [An Acute Phase of Patriotic Division],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, January 22, 2014, No2 (520) edition.

⁷²⁷ Here, the author cites the Russian National Security Strategy document: Fedor Sergeev, “Второй Генштаб Страна Не Потянет [The Second General Staff Can’t Pull The Country],” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, October 30, 2013, No42 (510) edition.

found by avoiding vague notions about a deceptive future, and instead focusing on the time-tested past.⁷²⁸ This rich history can be likened to a nesting doll with many faces: Kievan Rus', Moscow, the Russian Empire, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, the Soviet Union, and the current Russian Federation.⁷²⁹ It is not a question of patriotism or nationalism, simply a matter of being Russian. Count Suvorov emphasized the power of simplicity: “we are Russians and that is why we will win! (author’s translation).”⁷³⁰ Likewise, Count Rumyantsev wrote that, “We [Russians] have little in common with other European nations (author’s translation).”⁷³¹

Today, one can feel the Russian government under Putin’s leadership tilt towards the revival of patriotism and defending the consciousness of the population.⁷³² This is not an easy task in conditions of rabid liberalism and anti-Russian sentiment. Foreign governments and media enable a “fifth column” inside Russia that attempts to weaken its statehood, cause social decay and demoralize the population.⁷³³ The fifth column has a clear ideology of liberal fundamentalism that aims to justify the process of Russia’s final post-Soviet transformation into a raw material appendage of the West.⁷³⁴ During the height of the Euromaidan protests in Kiev, the fifth column inside Russia was accused of trying to “Ukrainianize” the country.⁷³⁵

⁷²⁸ Roman Iyushenko, “В Поисках Ума, Чести И Совести Эпохи [In Search of Wisdom, Honor and Conscience],” *Voенно-промышленный кур'ер (VPK)*, November 13, 2013, No44 (512) edition.

⁷²⁹ Iyushenko, “Острая Стадия Раздвоения Патриотизма [An Acute Phase of Patriotic Division].”

⁷³⁰ Iyushenko.

⁷³¹ Zolotarev, “Духовно-нравственные Ориентиры Реформы [Spiritual and Moral Orientation Reforms].”

⁷³² Ivashov, “Через Призму Угроз России [Through The Prism of Russia’s Threats].”

⁷³³ Ivashov.

⁷³⁴ Konstantin Sivkov, “Разрушить Россию [Destroy Russia],” *Voенно-промышленный кур'ер (VPK)*, April 2, 2014, No12 (530) edition.

⁷³⁵ Sivkov.

Besides a liberal-minded fifth column, many foreigners, such as migrant workers, refugees and internally displaced people, pose another threat to Russian social stability. Here, Central Asia is a constant source of migratory influx—in 2013 Russia had an estimated 15 million illegal immigrants and expected another 10 million by 2020.⁷³⁶ These groups can also threaten to collapse Russia's economic stability, health institutions and other environmental management systems. For Russia, it would be counterproductive to rely too heavily on international organizations, such as the UN and NGOs, due to contradictions between international and local interests and cultures.⁷³⁷ At the same time, international organizations must be leveraged whenever practical due to a general increase in societal expectations about collateral damage, humanitarian hardship, death and destruction.⁷³⁸

Investing in societal resilience equates to waging battle before armed hostilities begin.⁷³⁹ A number of problems are generally associated with activities conducted by the military during peacetime conditions to harden the nation against outside threats.⁷⁴⁰ In this way, patriotism and territorial defense are linked. As the experience in Ukraine has shown, in conditions of social and political instability, a territorial defense must counteract hostile forces both on domestic territory and in border regions that together form a sovereign space.⁷⁴¹ Here, the first fight is to defend

⁷³⁶ Artem Ivanovsky, "Миграция Как Военная Угроза [Migration As a Military Threat]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, April 24, 2013, No16 (484) edition.

⁷³⁷ Evgeny Satanovsky, "Неизбежное Следствие Войны [Inevitable Consequence of War]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, February 26, 2014, No7 (525) edition.

⁷³⁸ Vladimir Ksenofontov, "Философы О Войне Все Же Имеют Представление [Philosophers Do Have An Understanding Of War]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, October 2, 2013, No38 (506) edition.

⁷³⁹ Here Gen. Gareyev cites the outdated notion of the Federal Law "On Defense" (Article 18) that states that war officially begins with the onset of hostilities and ends with the cessation of armed hostilities. He argues for an updated official position on war, but this seems neither practical nor prudent, given the Kremlin's international commitments and that it undoubtedly already has a classified understanding of how to wage war "to the left" of combat: Makhmut Gareyev, "Предчувствовать Изменения В Характере Войны [Feel the Changes in the Character of War]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, May 29, 2013, No20 (488) edition.

⁷⁴⁰ Oleg Falichev, "Победа Не Бывает Сиротой, Но За Поражение Придется Ответить Всем [Defeat is Never an Orphan, Everyone Is Accountable For It]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, June 22, 2011, No24 (390) edition.

⁷⁴¹ Konstantin Sivkov, "Казачество Как Новый Род Войск [Cossacks Like A New Breed Of Troops]," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, March 12, 2014, No9 (527) edition.

against landing parties, subversive and forward intelligence gathering parties, terrorist groups and other paramilitary formations. Locally appointed military commissioners with military experience as officers can help communities mobilize and self-organize in times of crisis.⁷⁴²

Another important task for territorial defense is to ensure the establishment and maintenance of special legal regimes, martial law or states of emergency within the whole country or individual regions. To this end, some argue for a genuine restoration of Cossacks as a military service class. Historically, Cossacks have been a reliable militia force willing to intervene in domestic turmoil in support of Russia's ruling elites.⁷⁴³ Harnessing a new Cossack warrior class would reduce the burden on the army for domestic patrolling in times of crisis arguably much cheaper than professional soldiers and far more reliably than conscripts. This is due in part to the Cossack community's deep historic roots as an armed pillar of society the highly patriotic environment in which their children are raised.

Beyond the Cossack community, Russia's MIC leaders desire a patriotic society writ large. Yet, many military experts consider neoliberals as a threat to Russia's sovereignty. For example, the Carnegie Endowment in Moscow sees state sovereignty as an absolute evil, and renunciation of sovereignty as a sign of democracy and modernity—these neoliberals are therefore ready to surrender their nation to somebody else's patronage at any moment.⁷⁴⁴ This is perhaps why Vladislav Surkov's "Sovereign Democracy" concept gained traction for some time in the Kremlin. However, under President Medvedevs' rule the Kremlin preferred not to place

⁷⁴² Vladimir Yatsenko, "Страна Без Территориальной Обороны [Country Without Territorial Defense]," *Voенно-промышлennyi kur'er (VPK)*, May 1, 2013, No17 (485) edition.

⁷⁴³ Sivkov, "Казачество Как Новый Род Войск [Cossacks Like A New Breed Of Troops]."

⁷⁴⁴ Avdeyevsky, "Противоракетная Оборона В Европе [Missile Defense in Europe]."

adjectives in front of democracy. Instead, the Kremlin promoted Russianness with additional concepts: “Novorossiia (New Russia),” the “Third Rome” and “The Russian World.”⁷⁴⁵

The term Novorossiia has been used in Russia since the 18th century.⁷⁴⁶ In general terms, Novorossiia demarcates an area of new expansion made by the Russian Empire under Empress Catherine. It lost its political significance with the formation of the Soviet Union, but recently emerged due to post-Soviet politics. Geographically speaking, Novorossiia sits right in between the hotspots of Pridnestrovia, Crimea and Donbass. Novorossiia’s eastern edge touches present-day Donbass and spans westward to Moldova. Crimea lies to the south of Novorossiia, while the region’s northern edge extends into the middle of modern Ukraine. Simply put, Novorossiia’s historical location has made the term, rightly or wrongly, relevant to explanations about Russia’s extended sovereignty and right to privileged interests in the near abroad.

Prior to Crimea’s return to Russia, *VPK* used the term Novorossiia in just a handful of articles. The term is used in five articles between 2007-2012 in historical frames not associated with contemporary issues. From 2004-2013, only three articles use Novorossiia in context of post-Soviet politics. The first instance came in 2004 in an article describing independent Ukraine as the product of an historical mistake.⁷⁴⁷ Here it is argued that Kiev serves as a Trojan Horse for NATO—a clever way to keep Russian power and influence fragmented until the inevitable placement of Western armed forces in Ukraine. Another article from 2008 used Novorossiia

⁷⁴⁵ Tatyana Gracheva, “Проектируя Российское Завтра [Designing Russia’s Tomorrow],” *Voенно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, October 14, 2015, No39 (605) edition; Mikhail Khodarenok, “Защита От Конца Света [Protection Against the End of the World],” *Voенно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, March 9, 2016, No9 (624) edition.

⁷⁴⁶ Aleksandr Kuznetsov, “В Стране Оставаться Нельзя [Cannot Remain On The Sideline],” *Voенно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, November 4, 2009, No43 (309) edition.

⁷⁴⁷ Igor Chirnov-Rezakin, “Украина: Ошибки Истории [Ukraine: A Mistake of History],” *Voенно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, December 1, 2004, No46 (63) edition.

following the five-day war with Georgia.⁷⁴⁸ *VPK* argues that Russia's successful armed intervention in Georgia made it impossible for Kiev to join NATO. As such, Russia saved itself from hostile encirclement.

In 2009, however, *VPK* warned that Ukraine's warming relations with NATO constitute a direct "threat to Russia's sovereignty (author's translation)."⁷⁴⁹ In response, Moscow should pursue a three-step process to reunify with Russia the former territories of Novorossiia now in Ukraine. The first step includes economic and political engagement—subsidized energy and formal parliamentary relations for Ukraine's southeastern regions. Second, these regions should be formally introduced in official documents as "Novorossiia" and provided autonomy under OSCE procedures. Third, independence referendums should be held so Novorossiia and Crimea can formally reunite with the rest of Russia. The article did not call for any kind of armed intervention or support to these regions.

After the return of Crimea to Russia in 2014, *VPK* saw a significant uptick in the usage of the term Novorossiia—more than 50 articles between 2014-2019. Predictably, these articles primarily make the case as to why Russia not only had to intervene in Crimea, but also why Russia continues to support the pro-Moscow rebels in Donbass. Using a term like Novorossiia, which carries longstanding historical references to pre-Soviet Russianness, undoubtedly coincides with the Kremlin's argument that Ukraine never was a real country and the eastern regions in Ukraine in fact have more in common with Russia than Kiev. Nevertheless, the term is limited to the context of turmoil in Ukraine. Therefore, the Kremlin has not tied the term to its

⁷⁴⁸ Chirnov-Rezakin, "Западное Закавказье: Цели И Методы Их Достижения [Western Transcaucasia: Goals and Methods of Their Achievement]."

⁷⁴⁹ Kuznetsov, "В Стороне Оставаться Нельзя [Cannot Remain On The Sideline]."

larger goal of reinvigorating Russian patriotism and national identity. Similarly, the historical concept of Russia as a “Third Rome” lacks mainstream contemporary appeal.

As such, the Russian MIC seems to mildly support the Kremlin’s appeal to patriotism in context of a “Russian World.” Although President Putin established the Russian World Foundation in 2007, *VPK* only began mentioning it in 2014, albeit infrequently. The Russian World concept holds that the territorial confines of the Russian Federation do not encapsulate all Russians or define what is Russian. Instead, the Russian state, much like Novorossiya, is just one entity within the Russian World. A vague, broad concept of this sort fits well with the Kremlin’s articulated rationale of Moscow’s right to areas of privileged interests based on social-historical identity. Perhaps, Vladislav Surkov’s latest concept of Russian national identity—Putin’s Long State—will have more staying power. Regardless of its moniker, the MIC continues to place a great emphasis on Moscow’s need to harness patriotism as a source of resilience and sovereignty. As final benefit of creating a shared national identity, Russia may also generate new sources of its own soft power—attractive to both its citizens and the world—based primarily on its great culture and the glorious history of its military victories.⁷⁵⁰ This would help Russia leverage its influence in areas not suited for military power. Indeed, it remains a conundrum why the nation of Pushkin, Gogol, Tchaikovsky, Tolstoy, Pasternak, Shostakovich, Solzhenitsyn has such a deficit of soft power.

High Clarity, Restrictive Strategic Environment

⁷⁵⁰ Karaganov, “Неочевидный Фактор - Сила Оружия [The Unobvious Factor - The Power of Weapons].”

Table 8 below illustrates with more detail the high clarity with which Russia viewed systemic stimuli and the restrictive strategic environment in which the Kremlin was forced to act. Several aspects from the table stand out when taken in context. First, the case of Crimea has a clear and present danger similar to the case of Moldova. Threat danger and threat impact in both cases is high. It is interesting that only in these two cases is there a domestic political dimension about protecting ethnic Russians. This helps us to calibrate nuance within Russia's near abroad and better understand the evolution in Moscow's self-narrative, that builds on the concept of sovereign democracy and now resonates with the idea of a "Russian world."

Table 8 – Russian Intervention in Crimea: High Clarity in a Restrictive Strategic Environment

| Systemic Stimuli | Stimuli Elements | Element Attributes | Case 3 | Case 2 | Case 1 |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|--------|---------|---------|
| | | | Crimea | Georgia | Moldova |
| Clarity | Discernability | Threat Intent | H | L | H |
| | | Threat Capability | H | L | L |
| | | Threat Imminence (Scope) | H | L | L |
| | | Advantage Opportunity | H | H | M |
| | | Adversarial Resolve | M | L | L |
| | | Opportunity Imminence (Scope) | H | M | M |
| | Time Horizon | Threat Signals | M | M | M |
| | | Opportunity for Advantage | H | H | L |
| | Optimal Options | Threat Policy Options | L | L | L |
| | | Opportunity Policy Options | L | L | L |
| Nature of Strategic Environment | Imminence (Content) | Threat Danger | H | L | H |
| | | Opportunity Attractiveness | H | H | H |
| | Magnitude | Threat Impact | H | L | H |
| | | Opportunity Impact | H | L | L |

The cases of Moldova and Crimea differ in terms of systemic clarity. Whereas in Moldova Russia was initially willing to work within international constructs, to include the CFE

for many years, Moscow chose to act decidedly in a unilateral manner in Crimea. What is interesting is that over time, Russia's support of Pridnestrovie escalated against growing Western displeasure, especially after Russia suspended its participation in CFE in part due to flank agreements. A key element that changed is the high clarity of a discernable threat that appears after the case of intervention in Georgia. In other words, Russia now sees the world and therefore threats in a Cold War era construct of "us" vs "them." Specifically, Russia feels threatened after NATO created a long list of victims: Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and so on.⁷⁵¹

The combination of high clarity and restrictive environment poses an exceptionally dangerous combination. Not unlike a dog in a corner, this scenario forces a threatened Russia to react in decisive manner on a very short time scale. As is almost always the case in international relations, few optimal policies were available to the Kremlin if we do not consider annexation optimal. Arguably, Russia would prefer to consider all of Ukraine as a friendly ally, not just Crimea and the Donbass. Russia's pursuit of military modernization after many technical failures in Georgia lends insight into the importance of relative power. Specifically, this case suggests that increases in Moscow's self-perception of its own power somehow helps solidify the clarity with which it defines "them." In other words, perhaps Moscow would have acted more forcefully in Pridnestrovie in 1992, even to the point of annexation, had its military power been more sustainable and credible. In that hypothetical case, we can consider that Russia may have even had the power to demand logistical access through Ukraine to ensure its foothold in Moldova

⁷⁵¹ Konstantin Sivkov, "Грядущее Проецирование Силы [Force Projection]," *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, March 20, 2013, No11 (479) edition.

could be supplied by a land corridor, much like its geographically separated enclave of Kaliningrad receives supplies through Lithuania and Belarus.

Conclusion: Big Exception, Another Small Nudge

Carl Schmitt argued that a state has an underlying community of people that is not necessarily universal. As such, this community of “we” can be defined by what (or who) it is not, and therefore it retains an inherent conflict with anyone considered “them.”⁷⁵² In modern Russia’s case, sizeable portions of its underlying community reside outside its territorial boundaries. As a consequence, the president of Russia, as tasked by the constitution, guarantees the community’s security no matter where it resides. According to this world view, Russia extends its claim of sovereignty into neighboring states within the near abroad.⁷⁵³ At times, such as the case of Crimea, a sovereign power can decide when normal rules become insufficient to regulate disputes or suppress threats. Moreover, the sovereign decides how to resolve such exceptions.

The fact that Russia was able to carry out actions aimed at protecting its sovereign national interest beyond its borders, and, in response, it was not possible and probably will not be possible for the West to oppose Russia in any substantial way, probably shocked Moscow’s Western partners.⁷⁵⁴ All the West can do at this point is cough up the noise of disinformation and levy strange-looking sanctions against individual people. Obviously, the logic of their actions in Ukraine was based not on well-thought-out strategy, but on emotions. And this is much more dangerous and requires increased attention regarding the current situation in Ukraine but also in

⁷⁵² Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, XV.

⁷⁵³ Anton Dozhdikov, “Первая Украинская Должна Стать и Последней [The First Ukraine Should Also Be The Last Ukraine],” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK)*, April 8, 2015, No13 (579) edition.

⁷⁵⁴ Satanovsky, “Украина Как Четвертый Рейх [Ukraine As The Fourth Reich].”

regions beyond it.⁷⁵⁵ Furthermore, Russia's logic of sustained victory rests on two pillars of a philosophical question about the nature of future security and global power: "physical matter and consciousness (author's translation)."⁷⁵⁶ In other words, Russian grand strategy in application consists of tools (current and planned) and the population's imagination or willpower needed to achieve victory—sustained, uninterrupted Russian sovereignty—with these tools. In current geopolitical conditions, national willpower is becoming exceedingly important to state security because the evolution of modern democracy and the contradictory processes of globalization increasingly polarize and bifurcate state societies. And an army with only divided support will have a hard time executing national interests that require sustained armed operations beyond its borders.

Despite global trends, there are signs of optimism for the Kremlin regarding its ability to close the gap in terms of relative power vis-à-vis the West. Russia, for example, began to perceive that the American military under President Obama declined in combat readiness due to budget cuts, such as the \$37 billion reduction in 2013 that severely impeded the U.S. army's command and staff exercises and eliminated a significant portion of USAF flight training.⁷⁵⁷ More significantly, the Pentagon expected another \$500 billion in cuts through 2023.⁷⁵⁸ Regarding the EU, some Russians argue that Europe is at a watershed moment after slowly recovering from the 2008 global financial crisis. Specifically, the EU's role as an independent center of power on the international arena will depend on the restoration of its economic power,

⁷⁵⁵ Satanovsky.

⁷⁵⁶ Konstantin Sivkov, "Философский Взгляд На Войны Будущего [A Philosophical Perspective on Future Wars]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, February 20, 2013, No7 (475) edition.

⁷⁵⁷ "Боеготовность ВС США Снижается [US Armed Forces Readiness Drops]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, June 12, 2013, No22 (490) edition.

⁷⁵⁸ "Вынужденные Каникулы Пентагона [The Pentagon's Forced Holidays]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, August 7, 2013, No30 (498) edition.

soft power and the overall attractiveness of the European state model.⁷⁵⁹ Negative international fallout as a result of Europe's desire to intervene in Libya now places EU goodwill under a new level of scrutiny. Perhaps more important to Russia, NATO's divided geopolitical approach to Libya suggests that Moscow can find useful leverage within the alliance's cracks. For example, Secretary Gates publicly questioned how long America could consider NATO as a military partner unless the European members closed their financial gaps in military spending.⁷⁶⁰

Just before the armed intervention in Crimea, General Gerasimov called on the military to reconstitute its military science complex and reinvigorate its understanding of the art of war.⁷⁶¹ Citing strategists like Komdiv and Svechin, Gerasimov argued that previous generations better understood the art of war, and that no conflict can be fought according to a template. He also observed that no matter how strong the enemy is, no matter how perfect its forces are equipped for war, the enemy will always have vulnerabilities, and thus there remains a possibility for adequate counteraction.⁷⁶² Similarly, a 2013 roundtable on Russian security advocated for the development of "thought factories" where new ways of thinking can foster innovative solutions to the nation's many problems and growing threats.⁷⁶³ This concept built on the idea that Russia must find ways to counter U.S. and NATO with asymmetric applications of its armed forces.⁷⁶⁴ Simply put, Russia needed the confidence for military creativity.

⁷⁵⁹ Nadezhda Arbatova, "Европа На Пике Резкого Перелома [Europe On Verge of Breaking]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, April 3, 2013, No13 (481) edition.

⁷⁶⁰ Arbatova.

⁷⁶¹ Valery Gerasimov, "Ценность Науки В Предвидении [The Value of Foresite In Science]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, February 27, 2013, No8 (476) edition.

⁷⁶² Gerasimov.

⁷⁶³ Oleg Falichev, "Стране Нужны "Фабрики Мысли" [The Country Needs Thought Factories]," *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er (VPK)*, April 24, 2013, No16 (484) edition.

⁷⁶⁴ Sivkov, "Грядущее Проецирование Силы [Force Projection]."

The extraordinary execution of Crimea's reunification with Russia is arguably the primary source of Russia's heightened self-perception about its relative power. After all, the only way for a state to know for sure the actual power of its military is to use it in real operations. Herein lies the beauty of Crimea. After the flawless fait accompli, Gerasimov's doubts seemed to some extent misplaced. Indeed, General Ostankov emphatically penned a letter reminding the Russian military and MIC that "Russia knows the art of war (author's translation)."⁷⁶⁵ A creative mix of new equipment, old equipment, patriotic narratives and centuries-old deception allowed Russia to properly tool for war in Crimea under unique social circumstances. Here we can see Russia's geopolitical power take a leap from 2008 in Georgia to 2014 in Ukraine. More broadly, I argue this evolution started in 1992: you don't get to the five-day war without the precedent of Moldova, and you don't get to Crimea without Russia's politically successful intervention in Georgia. Each advance in Russia's state power can also be explained in changing terms of international stimuli.

Russia therefore has made its choice: it will not sit quietly on the sidelines of international affairs, content with a post-Soviet demotion to middling status. In Russia, they might explain this in terms of a typical family gathering—Russia will not be the fringe uncle that we all have who is offered a seat at the kitchen table, allowed a few shots of vodka, but then quickly ushered off to bed.⁷⁶⁶ Stretching this metaphor further, Russia wants to remain in the family, just it desires a more respected role within it—an acknowledged seat of privilege at the table of states. The Kremlin did not necessarily plan to annex Crimea exactly when or how it did,

⁷⁶⁵ Vladimir Ostankov, "Военная Наука У Нас Есть (We Have Military Science)," *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er (VPK)*, April 9, 2014, No13 (531) edition.

⁷⁶⁶ Aleksandr Minakov, "Панорама с А.Минаковым [Panorama with A. Minakov]" (Russia: TRO, 2015), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A101EHnz-Zs>.

rather threatening circumstances initiated by the West forced the Kremlin's hand. This is not to say it would not have also happened under other circumstances.

Yet, as it actually took place, most Russians feel their country's transgressions against Ukraine's newfound borders was a justified exception. Moreover, it will remain an exception so as long as other states recognize that Russian sovereignty—a deep connection between its people and history, the expectation of common security and safeguarding of livelihoods, an enduring social-political bond that trumps even so-called national interests—extends beyond its territorial borders in some exceptional cases and Russia will fight for it. Importantly, Moscow asserts the sole right to decide what constitutes an exception in areas of shared sovereignty. From a perspective of *longue durée*, Moscow's enforcement of these new “rules” within its sphere of influence can be seen as a minor tweak or soft nudge to the international system—not an attack against it.

Chapter 7 – Syria 2015: High Clarity in a Permissive Strategic Environment

“When you chop wood, chips fly”

Russian Proverb⁷⁶⁷

“When a reacting enemy is present, the straightest and broadest and best-paved highway is the worst road upon which to attack an enemy, because it is the best road, while a bad road could be good.”

Edward N. Luttwak⁷⁶⁸

“Great powers don’t commit suicide for their allies.”

Henry Kissinger⁷⁶⁹

If the annexation of Crimea was an exception to Russia’s desire to uphold international law and support global norms of territorial integrity, then Syria proves the rule. A lawfully elected Syrian government is under attack by multiple factions of insurgents and international terrorists. Moreover, Syria’s territorial integrity has been forcibly violated and occupied by the U.S. and its allies. Seeking a remedy, President Bashar al-Assad—a lawfully elected state leader—invited Russia to help defend Syria’s sovereign right to exist without external interference on its territory. The principles of non-interference and territorial integrity stem from the post-Yalta world system created after WWII. This is the international system that the Soviet Union benefitted from and that Russia desires to save.

In this way, the return of Crimea to Russia at minimum broke the letter of the law. According to Moscow, it upheld the spirit of international law, because Russia was forced to

⁷⁶⁷ “Лес рубят — щепки летят.” English equivalent: You can’t make an omelet without breaking an egg.

⁷⁶⁸ Edward Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 413.

⁷⁶⁹ Mark Almond, *Plucky Little Georgia? No, the Cold War Reading Won’t Wash*, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/aug/09/georgia.russia1>.

intervene in Crimea because Russia's own sovereignty was placed in jeopardy by NATO's aggressive interference. Therefore, Crimea was an exception. Syria, however, is no exception. Rather, in the Russian MIC view, Damascus is just the latest victim of a hegemonic American way of war that rapidly exerts a full spectrum of attack to force regime change and impose a government favorable to Western liberal inclinations.

In its long history, Russia has fought many wars and found its expansive borders under constant threat from external enemies. Defending against so many geographic avenues of possible attack is highly taxing and nearly impossible. In this way, the Soviet Union greatly benefitted from the post-Yalta system that placed a premium on and enforced the norm against military conquest. The U.N. and international law did not eliminate military threats, but these institutions established a system in which Moscow could maintain an external sphere of privileged interests that satisfied its security needs. As such, the Kremlin tends to favor the preservation of an international system that covets territorial integrity and maintains a state-dominated world order.

At the same time, not all states interact on equal terms in this kind of international system. Specifically, weak states are not treated the same as great powers. Indeed, the U.S. enjoys wide-ranging privileges as an economic and military power, especially in terms of making rules and taking exception to international law when in its national interest to do so—think Iraq, Yugoslavia, Somalia, Afghanistan and so on. Seeing himself in competition with the U.S., Putin's Russia desires a return to such a system so long as Moscow can be a joint-leader. Moreover, the Kremlin seeks great power status under a new form of governance designed to avoid the inefficient pitfalls of Soviet-style communism while still retaining a strong centralized

government. This is sometimes described as democratic authoritarianism, and it is Russia's way of finding competitive advantages in security vis-à-vis the U.S.⁷⁷⁰

From this perspective, Moscow's armed intervention in Syria appears to be just a small nudge in a much larger effort to uphold the post-WWII order that the Kremlin sees as under attack by an unbridled hegemonic America. From the vantage of the Kremlin walls, the world now approaches the end of an almost 500-year period of dominance by Western civilization.⁷⁷¹ For most of this time, the European model was imposed by force. Indeed, Crimea was contested militarily many times in the past and the port of Sevastopol was eventually founded there purely for purposes of Russian imperial force projection.

With the advent of nuclear weapons, especially American and Soviet arsenals, the world changed in a most consequential way: states could no longer reduce their diplomatic affairs to "might makes right." Mutually assured destruction guided the superpowers towards a highly disciplined application of armed restraint. Great power wars were thus eliminated, and the Soviet Union played a decisive role in upholding this new era of world stability. Russians accept that the ills of communism and their pursuit of forced Marxist ideology failed.⁷⁷² What they do not accept, however, is an American-led liberal order that fails to recognize Russia as the rightful heir of the Soviet nuclear contribution to global geopolitical stability.

In this Russian perspective, liberal democratic views did not safeguard the world. America was just half of the equation of restraint. Soviets under communism also showed equal

⁷⁷⁰ Dawn Brancati, "Democratic Authoritarianism: Origins and Effects," *Annual Review of Political Science* 17, no. 1 (2014): 314.

⁷⁷¹ Aleksei Peskov, "Уцененный Эталон [Lowered Benchmark]," *Voенно-промышлennyi kur'er (VPK)*, September 28, 2016, No37 (652) edition.

⁷⁷² Peskov.

restraint. Put differently, some Russians posit that an unchecked America proves that absolute power corrupts absolutely. At the same time, however, Russia does not seek to depose the U.S. as a joint-world leader or overturn the current international system. Rather, Moscow seeks to slightly modify the system such that it returns to a multipolar world with Russia as a joint leader. The underlying logic is that restraint remains the core value in a peaceful world, not liberal democracy. Any ideology—even Western liberal values—become twisted when applied by unilateral force. In this Russian understanding, restraint results from a credible and sufficiently powerful counterforce between the leading states as was demonstrated during the Cold War.⁷⁷³ This logic runs in direct contrast to democratic peace theory.

Wars were not eliminated in the wake of WWII, and for sure both the U.S. and the Soviet Union prepared to fight each other across a wide range of military scenarios including nuclear exchanges. Nevertheless, these great powers found the restraint to disagree on many geopolitical issues without provoking another world war. Unfortunately, this period of superpower checks and balances evaporated in the post-Soviet power vacuum. The current world order, punctuated by what the Kremlin views as an American hegemon that abandoned much of its sensible restraint, appears to have been just a tiny blip on the timeline of world history. Indeed, China is rising and Russia's demonstration of power in Crimea slowed America's expansion of liberal democracy and Western social values.

Ultimately, the Soviet Union collapsed because it could not compete in the non-military aspects of the Cold War, particularly economic and technological development. Due to security uncertainty, both Washington and Moscow continually invested large portions of their national

⁷⁷³ Peskov.

means into an expensive Cold War arms race. Russians now tend to express a congratulatory attitude towards America—well done, fortress America is now safe with an impressive military complex.⁷⁷⁴ Yet for Russian MIC experts, the American leviathan has proven to be an illiberal menace, imposing its vision of market and military dominance over the entire globe.

Post-Soviet Russia is often described as a state in transition. While many world elites had hoped that Russia, like other former communist states, would embrace a transition to a European-style democracy, it appears Russia instead chose a path towards its own autocratic version of democracy. Whatever name we apply to the Kremlin's style of government, the Russian state covets two values that it will never give up: security and sovereignty.⁷⁷⁵ For this reason, Russian geopolitical experts like Sergei Karaganov argue that it was a bad idea for Moscow to pursue a subordinate role within a U.S.-European order during the 1990s. Simply put, it was a “dangerous delusion (author's translation)” that anyone in the world's capitals considered it possible for Russia to integrate into any system without becoming a bonafide co-organizer.⁷⁷⁶ Russia's nuclear arsenal, its WWII legacy and historical sense of justice demand that the new Russia Federation retains the Soviet Union's influential role as one of the “big five.”

Once Putin ascended into the presidency, the exchange between Russia and the West gradually turned from an effort of integration into a collision of opposing views about Moscow's proper role within the international system. In this sense, Russian grand strategy has been an interactive process with the West, with the actions of one influencing the other in a continual feedback process of push and pull. Hal Brands reminds us that grand strategy is elusive, an

⁷⁷⁴ Tatyana Shevtsova, “Деньги - Нерв Войны [Money - The Nerve of War],” *Voенно-промышленный кур'ер (VPK)*, October 28, 2015, No41 (607) edition.

⁷⁷⁵ Peskov, “Уцененный Эталон [Lowered Benchmark].”

⁷⁷⁶ Peskov.

endeavor fraught with difficulty. One such trouble is putting our finger on it and actually describing it in real time. When we string together Russia's post-Soviet military interventions, the Kremlin's unexpected military intervention in Syria becomes a moment of clarity in this regard. A Russian grand strategy becomes visible the moment Russian troops initiate a decisive armed defense of Bashar al-Assad's crumbling government in 2015.

Henry Kissinger's dictum that "Great powers don't commit suicide for their allies" makes a good theme for its Syrian intervention. Here's how: Russian MIC elites understand that despite president Obama's dire warnings about getting stuck in a quagmire, it is the U.S. and its allies that risk political suicide at home with a winless war in Syria. This Syrian showcase showdown can be likened to Moscow's capstone moment to recertify as a great power that deserves co-leader status in the international community. The Russian government's defense of Damascus can be likened to a student who has learned the tricks of the trade in "contactless war" from the U.S. as demonstrated in Operation Desert Storm (See Case 1 Moldova) and now must prove its own mastery of modern military force projection.

Moscow's Syrian campaign demonstrates that Russia can successfully conduct sustained, high-tempo military operations outside its near abroad. Moreover, Russian strategists employ high-tech weapons systems and munitions when required, but often rely on inexpensive methods of blunt force to keep costs down and preserve capacity. In short, "when you chop wood, chips fly." Russia's capstone moment in Syria also underscores a masterclass in creative pragmatism. Put another way, Russia exhibits a high level of actionable power relative to Washington. This means Moscow can achieve better results and suffer lesser consequences when things go poorly, which tends to happen in most military conflicts.

For Russia's Syrian case of intervention, as shown in Table 9 below, systemic clarity remains high. Russians understand they have been at war for two decades with the U.S.—under a continuous siege of Western soft power designed to weaken Russia and ensure its conversion to a liberal democracy. This is why Moscow, given its permissive environment, can now carefully choose when and where to counter American aggression. Inside Syria, Russia's operations are both kinetic and diplomatic; meanwhile, Moscow's information warfare now targets the American public directly with social agitation, election “meddling” and other interference. In this sense, Russia wants to develop patriotism and national solidarity at home, while denying the same to Washington. A disgruntled, confused or misled American public reduces Washington's actionable power despite its latent military potential. In other words, by attacking the perception in peoples' minds, Russia can achieve more on the battlefield with a smaller army.

Table 9 – Post-Soviet Russian Interventions: Systemic Clarity and the Nature of the Strategic Environment

| | | Nature of Strategic Environment (Permissive to Restrictive) | |
|---|--------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| | | Permissive Strategic Environment | Restrictive Strategic Environment |
| Degree of Systemic Clarity (High to Low) | High Clarity | Syria (2015) | Crimea (2014) |
| | Low Clarity | Georgia (2008) | Moldova (1992) |

Table 10 illustrates that Russia now operates in Syria with a low threat to its homeland or domestic assets. For sure, the Kremlin's foray into the Middle East illustrates Russia's shift to a permissive strategic environment in which it can tackle the time to develop innovative and unexpected ways to identify and seize upon opportunities to gain in power and international prestige.

Table 10 – Russian Intervention in Crimea: High Clarity in a Permissive Strategic Environment

| Systemic Stimuli | Stimuli Elements | Element Attributes | Case 4 | Case 3 | Case 2 | Case 1 |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|--------|--------|---------|---------|
| | | | Syria | Crimea | Georgia | Moldova |
| Clarity | Discernability | Threat Intent | M | H | L | H |
| | | Threat Capability | M | H | L | L |
| | | Threat Imminence (Scope) | H | H | L | L |
| | | Advantage Opportunity | H | H | H | M |
| | | Adversarial Resolve | H | M | L | L |
| | | Opportunity Imminence (Scope) | H | H | M | M |
| | Time Horizon | Threat Signals | H | M | M | M |
| | | Opportunity for Advantage | H | H | H | L |
| | Optimal Options | Threat Policy Options | L | L | L | L |
| | | Opportunity Policy Options | L | L | L | L |
| Nature of Strategic Environment | Imminence (Content) | Threat Danger | L | H | L | H |
| | | Opportunity Attractiveness | M | H | H | H |
| | Magnitude | Threat Impact | L | H | L | H |
| | | Opportunity Impact | M | H | L | L |

Chapter 8 – Making Sense of Russia’s Post-Soviet Grand Strategy & Transition

“Russia will undoubtedly trade, attract investment, exchange knowledge, fight (war is also a way of communication), participate in collaborations, be part of organizations, compete and cooperate, cause fear and hatred, curiosity, sympathy, admiration. Just [we will do all this] without false goals and self-denial. It will be difficult, and more than once we will remember the classics of our national poetry: ‘There are only thorns, thorns, thorns... fuck, when will we see stars already?!’ It’s going to be interesting. And there will be stars.”

Vladislav Surkov⁷⁷⁷

“According to one influential commentator (Vladislav Surkov), Russia faces ‘one hundred years of solitude’. This is not to suggest that it will be isolated, but to note that once again Russia will have to find its own path to the future and will have to rely on itself to develop. For Russian nativists this is only to be welcomed, putting an end to the illusion that a country of Russia’s size, civilisation and history could simply join the ranks of the medium-sized powers such as the UK and France as a subordinate element in the existing world order.”

Richard Sakwa, University of Kent⁷⁷⁸

After Russia’s military intervention in Syria, Russia is once again a powerful state whose interests and opinions count in the Middle East.⁷⁷⁹ Russia’s post-Soviet transition from its 1992 armed intervention in Moldova to its sustained air and ground operations in Syria has been characterized by multiple changes in systemic clarity and the strategic environment (See Table 11). Along the way, Russia has vacillated between cooperation and noncooperation with the West, especially regarding security issues. Whereas Moscow has supported the U.S. and NATO during the global war on terrorism, the Kremlin vehemently opposed the alliance’s expansion overtures in Tbilisi and Kiev. In both cases, Russia demonstrated a willingness to defend its

⁷⁷⁷ Author’s translation of quote in: Surkov, “Одиночество Полукровки [The Solitude of the Half-Breed].” The “national poetry” alluded to is actually a lyrical refrain in the 2012 song “Неваляшка” (Tumbler Toy) by Russian-born contemporary UK rapper, Oxxxymiron. See: <http://text-zona.ru/news/2018-01-19-29472>;

<https://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/32690/1/oxxyymiron-russian-rap-interview>;

⁷⁷⁸ Richard Sakawa, “23 June 2018 Russia: One Hundred Years of Fortitude and Solitude,” Blog, Russian Days, June 23, 2018, <https://russiandays.co.uk/23-june-2018-russia-one-hundred-years-of-fortitude-and-solitude/>.

⁷⁷⁹ Philip Hanson, “Russia’s Global Strategy: Is It Economically Sustainable?,” in *Putin’s Russia: Really Back?*, ed. Aldo Ferrari (Milan: LediPublishing, 2016), 13.

national interests through the use of armed force. Moreover, these military adventures successfully thwarted plans for NATO expansion in Georgia and Ukraine.

Table 11 – Using Systemic Stimuli to Characterize Russian Military Interventions

Examples of Post-Soviet Russian Interventions and the Nature of the Strategic Environment

| | | Nature of Strategic Environment (Permissive to Restrictive) | |
|---|--------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| | | Permissive Strategic Environment | Restrictive Strategic Environment |
| Degree of Systemic Clarity (High to Low) | High Clarity | Syria (2015) | Crimea (2014) |
| | Low Clarity | Georgia (2008) | Moldova (1992) |

Russia has now developed a unity of purpose caged in Schmittean terms of “us” vs “them.” In the first post-Soviet decade, Russia tried to integrate into the Western order. For a time, the U.S. was considered a trustworthy partner and potential future ally. During the “wild 90s,” Russians endured significant social and economic upheaval, but with only meager progress towards integration into the Western-led global order. Under Putin’s presidency, Russia came to see the U.S. at first as unreliable and then later as a hostile threat. Even after the five-day war in 2008, Moscow cooperated with NATO in Afghanistan and generally supported American-led efforts in the war on terrorism, which Moscow saw a vital and mutual interest. After Russia recalibrated its relationship with NATO with its geopolitical victory in Georgia, Presidents Medvedev and Putin began to lead a security establishment with high systemic clarity. Threats were now clearly caged by “us” vs “them.” Russia’s understanding about the dangers of color revolutions and American hegemony stimulated an improved enterprise tasked with developing grand strategy.

In parallel, Russia's eventual progress in spheres of modernization and diplomacy created moments of permissiveness within its strategic environment. These permissive environments, as exemplified by the armed interventions in Georgia (2008) and Syria (2015), afforded the Russian government the time to wait patiently and seize opportunities to favorably resolve geopolitical problems by force. Systemic clarity also seems to affect Russia's formulation and execution of grand strategy. Russia faced low threat clarity in the first two cases. In both cases of Moldova and Georgia, Moscow remained hesitant to label Western states or security organizations as an outright threat. Indeed, during the 1990s Russia had high hopes of integration. For much of the 2000s, the Kremlin lowered its expectations but nonetheless pursued integration into NATO security frameworks.

When faced by a restrictive strategic environment, Moscow was instead forced to respond to highly consequential and imminent threats. The armed interventions in Moldova (1992) and Crimea (2014) exemplify Russia's solutions in cases where its sovereignty and security faced imminent threats inside Russia's near abroad. In Moldova ethnic Russians and pro-Russian Moldovans were threatened with possible genocide. Later in Crimea, Russia faced a clear and present danger with possible NATO expansion into Ukraine. Analysis of the strategic environment therefore provides a general indication of how Moscow might prioritize criteria when considering armed response—threats or opportunities. Although each intervention was a relatively big event when it occurred, their aggregate outcomes can be seen as small nudges to the international system in a broader sense of *longue durée*.

Key Points On Russian Grand Strategy

Russian grand strategy has evolved over time. At first it was absent in the 1990s, but later developed into a robust interagency enterprise during the 2010s. The Russian leadership's agenda is to modernize its military and cultivate a patriotic national will that is both resilient to adversarial information warfare and supportive of Russian foreign policy operations. The latter is a key component of the modern Russian understanding of mobilization (мобилизация).⁷⁸⁰ Here the sense of patriotic mobilization implies passivity—the Kremlin does not desire a society that can be rapidly put onto the streets. Instead, Moscow wants a populace that stays at home but remains fully supportive of national war efforts. In short, in Russia mobilization is conducted by the military and security apparatus while the general citizenry keeps out of the way.

“Moscow’s priority is security through modernization.”

1999, Putin, then Prime Minister of Russia, outlined a way forward for the nation. He asserted that this included developing a “long-term strategy.” We can infer he meant grand strategy or something close to it.

Out of the many competing definitions of grand strategy, the one that best captures the essence of Russian grand strategy is Hal Brands’:

“the intellectual architecture that gives form and structure to foreign policy...a purposeful and coherent set of ideas about what a nation seeks to accomplish in the world, and how it should go about doing so...it is the conceptual framework that helps nations determine where they want to go and how they ought to get there; it is the *theory, or logic, that guides leaders seeking security in a complex and insecure world.*”⁷⁸¹

⁷⁸⁰ Andrew Monaghan, *Power in Modern Russia: Strategy and Mobilisation*, Pocket Politics (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 9–10.

⁷⁸¹ Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry Truman to George W. Bush*, 3.

The eight core assumptions that support the above definition are instructive to explaining what the pages of *VPK* tell us about Russian grand strategy.

First, grand strategy is not the same things as foreign policy. Russia maintains a coherent set of ideas and a consistent set of assumptions.⁷⁸² At the same time, Russian grand strategy is not found in its stated goals or strategy documents. Grand strategy becomes visible during its execution. This is a similar thought to Colin Gray's notion of strategy as a bridge that links plans with outcomes.⁷⁸³ Moreover, the growing list of Russia's strategy documents and the overlapping agencies involved in their production create many contradictions. As such, these frameworks remain helpful but do not spell out what the Kremlin will choose to pursue with policy or what the implementation will look like.

The Russian MIC identifies numerous assumptions tied to grand strategy execution. The primary or core assumption is that Russia can safeguard its security and sovereignty through modernization (economic and military) and the cultivation of a patriotic national will. Secondary assumptions that shape execution include: great power restraint is essential to a peaceful world; unipolarity is dangerous; Russia gained more from the post-WWII international system than it gave up; defending international laws and norms is in Russia's national interest; Russia maintains a sphere of privileged interests; Russian sovereignty in some cases extended beyond its territorial borders due to unique historical and social circumstances; Russia must fight for its national interests; strategic weapons are an essential element of national security; the U.S. equips

⁷⁸² For a similar argument based on the power vertical in Russia, see Monaghan, *Power in Modern Russia: Strategy and Mobilisation*, 85.

⁷⁸³ Colin S Gray, *The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

and trains for war against a fellow nuclear state; and Russia is and has been for a long time under siege by American soft power.

But the Kremlin's "vertical" of power—the tightly controlled centralization of power—is dysfunctional and not entirely under the Kremlin's control.

Second, grand strategy occurs within the context of multiple time horizons, yet the underlying focus ought to remain on fixed national interests. Russian national interests remain relatively fixed. These are spelled out in strategy documents. Here, Russia expresses a desire to integrate into the world economy. Because Russia is too weak to remake the international system in its own image, Russian national interest include upholding a free market in which it can export military and nuclear technologies as well as energy resources. In the long-term, Russian grand strategy nudges the international system in small but favorable ways. In this context, Russia is pro-system, not anti-system. Russia is a norms enforcer. Short-term exceptions should not be misunderstood as signaling deviation to Russia's national interests. Of chief concern here is the annexation of Crimea. When properly understood, Russian motives in Ukraine were a preventive measure to safeguard national security under highly exceptional and dangerous circumstances.

Third, grand strategy requires trade-offs, "ruthless" prioritization, and should focus on reconciling long-term interests against limited resources from which a state derives its power. So far, contemporary Russian grand strategy appears to balance aspirations and means. The national will is an extremely valuable resource, especially in terms of actionable power. With a robust and common purpose in society, the state can conserve valuable resources otherwise required for national defense or lost through opportunity costs. At the same time, a national will is never uniform but always hard to define and measure. Real military operations offer the most accurate

way for the state to assess the national will and recalibrate its sense of relative power within the international system.

Fourth, grand strategy is a process. As indicated in Table 11, Russia conducted each case of armed intervention under a different set of systemic stimuli. Russia's military interventions build one on top of another. Without the cognitive and emotional anchor of Moldova, we do not get Georgia. Without Georgia, we don't see the modernization that enabled Russia to pull off its *fait accompli* in Crimea. Without the success and subsequent recalibration of relative power perceptions, Russia probably would not have risked an intervention in Syria. Arguably, the latter three interventions define Russia how other states interpret Russian foreign policy. They allow us an opportunity to view important snapshots of Russian grand strategy and also to see how grand strategy evolves with each ratchet turn of armed intervention. This process aligns with Gilpin's observation that, "the most prestigious members of the international system are those states that have most recently used military force or economic power successfully and have thereby imposed their will on others."⁷⁸⁴

Fifth, grand strategy is "an inherently interactive endeavor." The enemy always gets a vote. A key takeaway from this is that grand strategy remains an active exchange with other states. The case of Syria illustrates that ruthless prioritization is an interactive process with friend and foe alike. High risk aversion for visible Russian losses combined with a limited arsenal of high-precision weapons mandate the use of equipment and fighting styles that are prone to a lot of collateral damage and casualties. When fighting on somebody else's territory this can good, but in Syria it requires substantial buy-in from Damascus. Grand strategy in action forces others

⁷⁸⁴ Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 32.

to act in new and unexpected ways. For example, Turkey's largescale intervention in Syria quickly changed the dynamics of fighting on the ground. This modified Russia's strategic environment with new geopolitical threats and opportunities.

Sixth, the process and application of grand strategy is constant. Strategists must operate with equal conviction during both peace and war. The Russian MIC discourse in *VPK* contains many examples of inquiry about peacetime competition. For example, the U.S.-backed color revolutions demonstrate that grand strategy may even see more application in peacetime than I war. General Gerasimov observed that American hybrid warfare decidedly exploits the “peace” time prior to hostilities.⁷⁸⁵ In this way, the peace-war binary is cognitively an impediment to grand strategy execution. According to General Gareyev, “if the use of any non-military means in an international confrontation is war, then the whole of human history is war (author's translation).”⁷⁸⁶

Seventh, a grand strategy need not be “formally enunciated and defined to qualify as such.” Having a bad grand strategy and not having one at all are two different situations. Ideally, states aspire to formulate good grand strategy. Nevertheless, in each case above there may be little to no sign of an existing strategy. Again, this is okay because the heart of grand strategy lies in execution. A leader like President Putin is not beholden to his regime's strategy documents. In fact, it would be highly problematic if he was given their varying publication timelines and many

⁷⁸⁵ Gerasimov, “Ценность Науки В Предвидении [The Value of Foresite In Science].”

⁷⁸⁶ “Стратегические Цели Национальной Безопасности.”

contradictions. This is why Many Russia watchers focus more on execution and less on documentation—this paper included.⁷⁸⁷

Eighth, grand strategy remains an essential component of statecraft. Kotkin observes that “For Russia, the highest value is the state; for the United States, it is individual liberty, private property, and human rights, usually set out in opposition to the state.”⁷⁸⁸ In either case, the government’s leadership must engage in grand strategy if it hopes to maximize its domestic and geopolitical outcomes. In Russia’s case, the Kremlin leads a large and complex state, both geographically and administratively. Under Yeltsin, the Russian Federation became precariously close to splintering into further collapse. His two terms in office demonstrated that Russian federalism did not work. The modern Russian state, like its many historical predecessors, seems to operate best under a strong state with highly centralized control. In the Putin-Medvedev era, the Kremlin engages in purposeful grand strategy as a tool to maximize its chances for survival by way of modernization and inculcating social resilience into the populace.

Overall, the mainsprings of contemporary Russian grand strategy—military modernization and the formation of subjective narratives that empower the Kremlin to at times contradict international laws and norms, particularly in armed interventions, with the goal of securing long-term national sovereignty by orienting the international system towards multipolarity. Informed by Braudel’s “longue durée” understanding of historical change, I call Moscow’s “long nudge” grand strategy slowly shapes Russia through military modernization and the cultivation of enduring domestic support—a national will—for (inevitable) state actions that

⁷⁸⁷ Lyudmila Telen, “Reform of Russia’s Military-Industrial Complex Runs up against Fierce Resistance.(Interview with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Ilya Klebanov),” *Moscow News* 3987, no. 33 (2001).

⁷⁸⁸ Stephen Kotkin, “Russia’s Perpetual Geopolitics,” *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 3 (May-June 2016): 8.

require the use of force. The Kremlin also pursues international outcomes that nudge other states into accepting changes to rules and norms within the international system, but this nudging is not intended to overturn the system itself. This suggests that strategic patience—not aggressive revanchism or blind opportunism—underpins contemporary Russian grand strategy.

In this context, the evolution of Russian interventions demonstrates a resurgent power that can threaten America's exclusive position of hegemony in the world. This does not necessarily mean the Kremlin is set on destroying the U.S. or reducing it to something less than a joint-super power. The rise of China, however, may in fact directly threaten America's long-term security and wealth. When Kissinger and Nixon opened up China, the idea was to befriend China by just a more than the Soviets could in order to drive a wedge between a possible communist alliance. Now, perhaps, China is winning the same strategy but in reverse, playing Russia and the U.S. in order to split up a potential Western alliance from Washington to Vladivostok. If so, the U.S. might do well to ignore Russia's many hollow provocations and instead focus on pragmatic NATO-Russia relations—such as those that built the Northern Distribution Network to Afghanistan. This might be the only way to stop China from stealing the world's wealth and eroding the entire international system that the U.S. has so carefully built up since WWII.

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