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Ph. D. DISSERTATION

Süleyman Buğrahan BAYRAM



T.C.

ANKARA YILDIRIM BEYAZIT UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

MILITARY INTERVENTION AS STATUS-SEEKING IN RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY (2008-2015)

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DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Supervisor
Associate Professor Bayram SİNKAYA

Ankara, 2024

APPROVAL PAGE

This is to certify that this thesis entitled “Military Intervention as Status-Seeking in Russian Foreign Policy (2008-2015),” submitted by Süleyman Buğrahan BAYRAM, has been approved by unanimous vote of the examining committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in International Relations at Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Graduate School of Social Sciences.

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Thesis Defense Date: 16.07.2024

I certify that this thesis meets all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Ph. D. in International Relations at Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Graduate School of Social Sciences.

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Director of the Institute of Social Sciences

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that all the data utilized in this study is collected with adherence to academic ethical considerations, and all the sources consulted in producing this dissertation are duly acknowledged. I also declare that all published and unpublished works that are not original to this work are cited and referenced in accordance with the standards of the university (16.07.2024).

Signature

Süleyman Buğrahan BAYRAM

DEDICATION

To my family and Poe and Zima

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The process of obtaining a PhD degree is hardly compatible with the everyday routine of life. It requires compensating for the time and effort spent during the distractions, fatigue, occasional lack of motivation, indecisions, creative slowdown, work life, family life, hobbies and other usual and unusual aspects of life. Still, having invaluable mentors and supporting friends and family beside you smoothens the path. I am deeply grateful to Associate Professor Bayram Sinkaya for his supervision. His insights, constructive feedback, and academic guidance enabled me to gain a broader perspective and refine this thesis. His patient, understanding and supportive attitude have been immensely helpful. Working with him has been very instructive experience and a pleasure. I will always look up to his professionalism and character.

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ABSTRACT

Military Intervention as Status-Seeking in Russian Foreign Policy (2008-2015)

Many observers contend that Russian foreign policy has become more assertive since 2008. The increase in the level of Russian assertiveness manifested itself, especially in the military interventions in Georgia (2008), Ukraine (2014), and Syria (2015). This dissertation aims to contribute to the efforts to explain the Russian rationale for pursuing assertive policies in post-Soviet space and beyond. In this endeavor, it is committed to a framework that entails focusing on the interplay between Russia's great power identity and the Russian perception of repeated misrecognition of its great power status by the Euro-Atlantic bloc.

To trace Russian status considerations in the respective interventions, this dissertation utilized ninety-five transcripts of Vladimir Putin's addresses and interviews complemented with Russian foreign policy concepts, statements, and articles from other Russian officials. The foundational argument of this study is that great power identity and status considerations are the defining characteristics of Vladimir Putin's foreign policy. For Putin, Russia's inherent qualities necessitate an independent foreign policy materializing a multipolar world order, and this necessity is augmented by the very configuration of the post-Cold War order, in which the US asserts its interests at the expense of Russian interests in a triumphalist manner.

The case studies conducted in guidance with this argument provided three conjoining findings. First, Russian decision-makers are confident that their interests have been constantly disregarded by their Western counterparts before and during the developments leading up to each intervention, leaving them with no other choice than hard power. Second, for Russian decision-makers, intervention has become an end in itself because imitating US actions is one of the means to materialize multipolarity by signaling equal status between Russia and the US. Third, Russian decision-makers utilized Russia's developing military capabilities to demonstrate their determination to ensure recognition of Russia's great power status.

Keywords: Georgia, Great Power Identity, Military Intervention, Russian Foreign Policy, Status-Seeking, Syria, Ukraine.

ÖZET

Rus Dış Politikasında Statü-Arama Aracı Olarak Askeri Müdahale (2008-2015)

Birçok gözlemci, Rus dış politikasının 2008'den bu yana daha girişken bir hale geldiğini ileri sürmektedir. Rus girişkenliğindeki artış özellikle Gürcistan (2008), Ukrayna (2014) ve Suriye (2015) müdahaleleriyle kendini göstermiştir. Bu tez, Rusya'nın Sovyet-sonrası alan ve ötesinde girişken politikalar yürütme motivasyonunu anlama çabalarına katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu uğraşta, Rusya'nın büyük güç kimliği ile büyük güç statüsünün Avro-Atlantik blok tarafından defalarca reddedildiğine dair Rus algısının arasındaki etkileşime odaklanmayı gerektiren bir çerçeveyi takip etmektedir.

Bu tez, bahsekonu müdahalelerdeki Rus statü kaygılarının izini sürebilmek için Vladimir Putin'e ait doksan beş konuşma ve röportaj dökümünü Rus dış politika konseptleri ve diğer Rus yetkililerin açıklama ve makaleleri eşliğinde incelemiştir. Çalışmanın temel argümanı, Vladimir Putin'in dış politikasının tanımlayıcı özelliklerinin büyük güç kimliği ve statü kaygıları olduğudur. Putin'e göre Rusya'nın içkin nitelikleri, çok kutuplu bir dünya düzenini hayata geçiren bağımsız bir dış politikayı gerektirmektedir ve bu gereklilik, ABD'nin Rus çıkarlarının pahasına kendi çıkarlarını zafer kazanmış bir şekilde kabul ettirdiği Soğuk Savaş sonrası düzenin bizzat yapısı sebebiyle daha da artmaktadır.

Bu argümanın ışığında gerçekleştirilen vaka çalışmaları, vakaları üç bulguda kesiştirmektedir. İlk olarak, Rus karar vericiler, her bir müdahaleye doğru yol açan gelişmelerden önce ve gelişmeler sırasında, çıkarlarının Batılı mevkidaşları tarafından sürekli olarak göz ardı edildiğine ve onlara sert güçten başka seçenek bırakmadığına inanmışlardır. İkinci olarak, Rus karar vericiler için müdahale kendi başına bir amaç haline gelmiştir çünkü ABD'nin eylemlerini taklit etmek, Rusya ile ABD arasındaki statü eşitliğine işaret ederek çok kutupluluğu somutlaştırmanın yollarından biri olmuştur. Üçüncü olarak, Rus karar vericiler, Rusya'nın gelişen askeri yeteneklerini, Rusya'nın büyük güç statüsünün tanınmasını sağlama kararlılıklarını göstermek için kullanmışlardır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Askeri Müdahale, Büyük Güç Kimliği, Gürcistan, Rus Dış Politikası, Statü-Arama, Suriye, Ukrayna.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABM Treaty	Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
COW	Correlates of War
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EU	European Union
FSA	Free Syrian Army
FSB	Federal'naya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti (Federal Security Service)
G20	Group of Twenty
G8	Group of Eight
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GRU	Glavnoye Razvedyvatel'noye Upravleniye (Main Intelligence Directorate)
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IR	International Relations
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
KGB	Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (Committee for State Security)
MENA	Middle East and Africa
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OPCW	Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
ROC	Russian Orthodox Church
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SSR	Sovietskaya Sotsialicheskaya Respublika (Soviet Socialist Republic)
START	Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WTO	World Trade Organization

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1. INTRODUCTION

> Intervention in many ways an essential symbolic act, meant for a larger audience than the people of the country of intervention.[1]

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The use of military force has become a common practice in Russian foreign policy throughout the last three decades, considering Russian military involvement in the conflicts in Georgia (1991-93, 2008), Transnistria (1992), Tajikistan (1992-1997), Syria (2015-present day), Central African Republic (2018-present) and Russian offensives in Chechnya (1994-1996, 1999-2009) and Ukraine (2014, 2022). Although some of these cases are presented with different word choices, such as involvement, intervention, and aggression, it is not to differentiate between them but to specify their level of intervention. Thus, this study contends that all these cases fit into Vertzberger's definition of intervention:

> coercive, state-organized and controlled, convention-breaking, goal-oriented activities in another sovereign state that are directed at its political authority structure and are intended to affect either the political structure (preservation or change), the domestic political process in that state, or certain of its foreign policies by usurping its autonomous decisionmaking authority through the use of extensive military force.[2]

Of these interventions, earlier ones consisting of civil wars and independence movements immediately following the collapse of the USSR, such as Georgia (1991-93), Transnistria, Tajikistan, and Chechnya, may be grouped into somewhat more anticipated actions within Russian foreign policy. Most of the remaining cases were assertive foreign policy moves targeting many stakeholders and reaching partly beyond post-Soviet space and came as a surprise to the international audience. Thus, they were considered to point to an orientation shift in Russian foreign policy.

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[1] H. W. Brands, "Decisions on American Armed Intervention: Lebanon, Dominican Republic, and Grenada," *Political Science Quarterly* 102, no. 4 (1987), https://doi.org/10.2307/2151304.

[2] Yaacov Y.I. Vertzberger, "The International Milieu and Foreign Military Intervention: When and How Much Does the Milieu Matter?," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 17, no. 3 (1994), https://doi.org/10.1080/01402399408437558.

However, these cases do not present a coherent set due to some of their characteristics. Syrian case, for example, categorically departs from the cases of Georgia and Ukraine as it is the single Russian official military intervention that takes place outside post-Soviet space. Incidentally, since the Russian involvement in the civil war that continues in the Central African Republic is through private military companies (e.g., Wagner Group) and so-called military advisors rather than Russian official armed forces at the time of writing, it cannot be taken into consideration in the same category as the Syria intervention nor other ones. Similarly, Russian presence in Libya mainly consists of Wagner[3] and even in cases of direct military operations, Russia avoids official markers on fighter jets[4].

Furthermore, the Ukrainian case also has its own particularity. Unlike the intervention via invitation in Syria or unilateral intervention to an ongoing conflict in other cases, the Russian annexation of Crimea and the unsuccessful (at the time of writing) full-scale invasion attempt that failed to capture Kyiv and laid back on the Donbas front in 2022 are unprecedented actions on behalf of Russia. Indeed, one can argue that the 2008 intervention in Georgia tactically and strategically resembles the full-scale invasion attempt in 2022, if not the annexation of Crimea in 2014, in that Russian forces advanced towards Tbilisi in a similar manner under the façade of punitive measures. Russian military forces were utilized in both cases to reprimand certain policy choices of the respective countries. Despite such similarities, the Ukrainian case still diverges from the intervention in Georgia, considering the duration of the intervention, the proportion of troops and weapons allocated and finally ambiguous strategic objectives. While the intervention in Georgia appeared with limited military options and clearly designated goals and lasted only 12 days, Russian military presence and scale of activity in Ukraine are beyond comparison to this case and have been continuing for a long time. Notably, this thesis confines itself to analyze only the 2014 Russian intervention in Ukraine due to space and data constraints.

Yet, despite these unique characteristics and in addition to their common unexpected nature, Russian interventions in Georgia, Ukraine and Syria constitute more peculiar cases than the earlier Russian interventions as the Russian activity in these cases are (1) epitomes

[3] Jalel Harchaoui, "The Pendulum: How Russia Sways Its Way to More Influence in Libya," War on the Rocks, January 7, 2021, https://warontherocks.com/2021/01/the-pendulum-how-russia-sways-its-way-to-more-influence-in-libya/.

[4] Tim Lister, Sam Kiley, and Sebastian Shukla, "Russia Makes 'brazen' Military Intervention in Libyan Conflict," CNN, June 9, 2020, https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/09/world/russia-libya-military-intervention-intl/index.html.

of confrontation with the West, (2) has broader international involvement, and (3) engendered greater and more severe international reaction. These peculiarities potentially mark a breaking point in Russian foreign policy of the last two decades that has not only looked for cooperation possibilities with the West but also abstained from military involvements in other sovereign countries and, thus, begs for explanation. Even if one accepts that major powers such as Russia reserve *droit de regard*, an entitlement of major powers to have the right to interfere in their spheres of influence[5] and propose that the Georgia and Ukraine interventions must be regarded within this framework, the extremely assertive manner in which Russia has sought its interests in these countries, namely, creating new political entities in these target countries, the annexation of Crimea and full-scale invasion attempt of Ukraine are unprecedented since the end of the Cold War.

To further draw parallels between the three cases and amplify the need for understanding the shift in Russian foreign policy, the intervention via invitation to the Syrian conflict as the single case of Russian intervention outside post-Soviet space concretizes the breaking point in Russian foreign policy, which had prescribed standing clear of conflicts in the Middle East, and multilateral conflict resolution. One may indeed argue that the invitation attribute in the Syrian case does not refute the multilateralism Russia had adopted in conflict resolution. Still, the Russian military presence and active diplomatic efforts prior to the intervention and the close contact between Assad and Putin paved the way for an assumption that the invitation was most likely a technicality that the parties found as a solution to moderate the international reaction. President Assad's consent does not change the fact that Syrian intervention is an exceptional practice regarding overall Russian foreign policy in the Middle East, which had prescribed a cautious and neutral attitude[6]. Furthermore, the invitation aspect of the intervention in Syria does not prevent the case from falling into the intervention definition provided above. Although the invitation in the Syrian case refutes the coercive characteristic of intervention, it should be noted that the Russian military involvement corresponds to Vertzberger's most crucial items. After all, Russian military involvement in the Syrian civil war was geared towards coercively disqualifying the Syrian opposition, preserving the status quo, and impeded independent Syrian decision-

[5] T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth, "Status and World Order," in *Status in World Politics*, 2014, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107444409.002.
[6] Roland Dannreuther, "Understanding Russia's Return to the Middle East," *International Politics* 56, no. 6 (December 2019): 726–42, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-018-0165-x.

making and sovereignty. From this aspect, Russia indeed conducted an *intervention* in Syria rather than anything else.

Finally, no matter- as the current developments have shown- predicting and calculating the risks and repercussions involved in such assertive foreign policy moves are difficult, Russian willingness to face these challenges implicates another puzzling situation to uncover. Therefore, the shift in Russian foreign policy demonstrated via the three interventions can be summarized as the deliberate and audaciously conducted increase in the level of assertiveness in the post-Soviet space, particularly Georgia and Ukraine, and the unilateral widening in the scope of Russian military involvement, particularly in Syria. Thus, the question remains: what convinced the Russian administration of the necessity of pursuing assertive policies that go even as far as aggression in these cases? And how did they come to think that Russia is ready for every repercussion?

1.2. Literature Review

A large body of work has addressed different dimensions of current Russian foreign policy formulation to understand the motives behind the intervention decisions in these three countries. Admitting that each case represents unique and diverging developments, most explanations for Russian interference in Georgia, Syria and Ukraine assemble and rely on the necessities and incentives stemming from geopolitics and great power rivalry, national security calculations, and combined with or independent of such material interests, pursuit of identity-driven interests, namely, identity actualization.

To elaborate, inquiring on Russian motives for Syrian intervention, a group of researchers focus on the potential security risks of the Syrian conflict for Russia, such as Caucasian jihadists who would return to Russia after toppling Assad[7], while some others consider geo-economic interests Russia wishes to exploit from the region[8] and in a similar

[7] Roy Allison, "Russia and Syria: Explaining Alignment with a Regime in Crisis," *International Affairs* 89, no. 4 (2013), https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12046; Samuel Charap, Elina Treyger, and Edward Geist, Understanding Russia's Intervention in Syria, 2019, https://doi.org/10.7249/rr3180; Maria Raquel Freire and Regina Heller, "Russia's Power Politics in Ukraine and Syria: Status-Seeking between Identity, Opportunity and Costs," *Europe - Asia Studies* 70, no. 8 (2018), https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2018.1521914.
[8] Nada El Abdi, "Energy and Geo-Economics: Evidence Underpinning Russian Intervention in Syria," *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs* 6, no. 3 (2021): 38–51, https://doi.org/10.47305/JLIA2163038ea; M. K. Afridi & Jibran, A., "Russian Response to Syrian Crisis: A Neorealist Perspective.," *Strategic Studies* 38, no. 2 (2018): 15–15.

vein, balancing the US within the game of geopolitical rivalry[9]. Kozhanov, on the other hand, provides a more multilayered explanation and contends that, in addition to the aforementioned security risks of the Syrian conflict for Russia, financial compensation for the Western sanctions imposed after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 via securing economic gains from the resolution of the conflict as well as protecting the interests of Russian oil companies motivated Russia's intervention in Syria.[10] He also underlines a symbolic impetus for the intervention and proposes that Russia sought to make the West understand its willingness to be included in the resolution of international conflicts as opposed to the Libyan case and isolation it faced after the Crimean annexation. Dannreuther also proposes a combination of security concerns and ideational factors in Russian intervention in Syria.[11] Finally, in addition to the researchers who claim that Russian involvement in the region is part of a grand strategy for being a major power, others proposed that Russian intervention was an act of opportunism and Russia developed interest in the region due to external factors such as Western intervention in Libya[12]. Therefore, the literature portrays the intervention in Syria as guided by material interests somehow combined with symbolic motives.

Similarly, some studies explain Russian assertiveness in the post-Soviet space with great power competition. Notably, the *realpolitik* dimension is highlighted in the Georgian intervention[13]. The geopolitical rivalry argument framing Ukraine as a site of contention between the US and Russia is also present.[14] There are multilayered explanations in these cases as well, though. Karagiannis, for example, proposes that Russia intervened in Georgia and Ukraine as a result of the confrontation with NATO and to increase its influence as well as saving face from the Western involvement in post-Soviet space.[15] Tsygankov and Tarver-

[9] Blessing Simura, "USA and Russia in Syria and Ukraine: The Irony of Geo-Political Interventions," *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations* 14, no. 1 (December 2015): 67–67, https://doi.org/10.21599/atjir.66684; Erel Tellal, "Kronik: Rusya Suriye'de Ne Arıyor?," *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi* 70, no. 4 (2015), https://doi.org/10.1501/sbfder_0000002382.

[10] Nikolay Kozhanov, *Russia and the Syrian Conflict*, Russia and the Syrian Conflict, 2017, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1hj9wjf.

[11] Dannreuther, "Understanding Russia's Return to the Middle East."

[12] Eleonora Tafuro Ambrosetti, Chiara Lovotti, and Youssef Cherif, "Setting the Stage for Analyzing Russia's MENA 'Return,'" in *Russia in the Middle East and North Africa*, 2020, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429286230-1.

[13] Alexander Rondeli, "The Return of Realpolitik: A View from Georgia | openDemocracy," 2010, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/return-of-realpolitik-view-from-georgia/.

[14] Miron Lakomy, "The Game of Ukraine: Conflict in Donbass as an Outcome of the Multilayered Rivalry," *Politeja* 13, no. 45 (June 2021): 279–315, https://doi.org/10.12797/politeja.13.2016.45.13; Dmitri Trenin and Kuzman Novak, "The Ukraine Crisis and the Resumption of Great Power Rivalry," *Politicka Misao* 52, no. 2 (2015).

[15] Emmanuel Karagiannis, "The Russian Interventions in South Ossetia and Crimea Compared: Military Performance, Legitimacy and Goals," *Contemporary Security Policy* 35, no. 3 (September 2014): 400–420, https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2014.963965.

Wahlquist also highlight the emotional dimension and propose that Russia's decision for Georgia was based on honour and symbolic gains from the intervention.[16] There are also studies that combine geopolitical and ideational factors such as identity or ideology. Eriksen, for example, asserts that Realpolitik wedded with Eurasianist ideology paved the way for the annexation of Crimea.

Likewise, Biersack and O'Lear argue that Russian reasoning for annexing Crimea was as much influenced by geopolitical necessities as identity.[17] Particularly, control of the Black Sea Fleet and potential energy supplies from the new maritime territory contributed to the historical attachment Russia has for Crimea. Another identity-based explanation is provided by Aridici, who argues that Russian civilizational nationalism that attributes Russia to a superior identity vis-à-vis other culturally akin nations paved the way for intervention in Ukraine as Ukrainians were not seen as equals but 'little brothers'.[18] On the other hand, Allison argues that intervention in Ukraine took place due to a convergence of geopolitical competition, ideational factors and the need for domestic political consolidation.[19]

At this point, Götz's study focusing on the causes of Russian near-abroad assertion deserves broader space as it is the most comprehensive one accounting for the interplay among the geopolitics, regime type, state capacity, identity, and leadership career and personality.[20] Rather than singling out one or two of these factors, Götz draws attention to Russian geopolitical perceptions shaped by great power identity and assertive policies in line with these perceptions made possible via increased state capacity as Putin's choice of an authoritarian turn provided the state with ample resources. Therefore, literature on the cases of Ukraine and Georgia portrays these conflicts guided by both material and symbolic interests and differentiates them from the Syrian case in terms of the level of symbolic interests.

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[16] Andrei P. Tsygankov and Matthew Tarver-Wahlquist, "Duelling Honors: Power, Identity and the Russia-Georgia Divide," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 5, no. 4 (2009), https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-8594.2009.00095.x.
[17] John Biersack and Shannon O'Lear, "The Geopolitics of Russia's Annexation of Crimea: Narratives, Identity, Silences, and Energy," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 55, no. 3 (2014), https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2014.985241.
[18] Nuray Aridici, "The Power of Civilizational Nationalism in Russian Foreign Policy Making," *International Politics* 56, no. 5 (October 2019): 605–21, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-018-0159-8.
[19] Roy Allison, "Russian 'deniable' Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules," *International Affairs* 90, no. 6 (November 2014): 1255–97, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12170.
[20] Elias Götz, "Putin, the State, and War: The Causes of Russia's near Abroad Assertion Revisited," *International Studies Review* 19, no. 2 (2017), https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viw009.

For example, Rezvani contends that the Syria intervention is not "totally irrelevant" to other interventions that took place in post-Soviet countries, but it diverges from them in that it is motivated by power politics and security as opposed to being in guidance of 'historical responsibility' in post-Soviet space.[21] However, while Reshetnikov exemplifies this parallel historical responsibility rhetoric in the cases of the annexation of Crimea and intervention in Georgia (2008)[22], Freire and Heller highlight that Russian interventions in Ukraine and Syria share the same motivation of status-seeking[23], which is, according to Forsberg also a dimension of the Georgia intervention.[24]

The problem with this large body of work on the three cases is that they treat Russia's great power identity and status-seeking behavior in relation to that either as a contributing factor to the other ones or as only one of the many. Considering that while material explanations (e.g. geopolitical and economic interests) provided for the three cases vary contextually, the explanations accounting for the symbolic gains that Russia pursues through these interventions do not differ from each other. In other words, harvesting recognition of its great power identity and the rights and privileges coming together with this recognition links all three cases together, makes up a pattern and hints itself as the overarching or embedded factor with better explanatory power.

While this is the case, it makes more sense to me to consider great power identity and impulse for status-seeking in Russian foreign policy as a prism through which geopolitical and national security-related realities are perceived and processed. Eventually, interests need to be defined to exist, and they emerge only after obtaining an understanding and definition of the self.[25] As Murray aptly summarizes:

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[21] Babak Rezvani, "Russian Foreign Policy and Geopolitics in the Post-Soviet Space and the Middle East: Tajikistan, Georgia, Ukraine and Syria," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 2020, 895, https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2020.1775590.

[22] Anatoly Reshetnikov, "Intervention as Virtue, Obligation and Moral Duty: The Meaning of Russia's Rhetoric on Responsibility during the Georgian and the Crimean Crises," *Russian Politics* 2, no. 2 (2017), https://doi.org/10.1163/2451-8921-00202003.

[23] Freire and Heller, "Russia's Power Politics in Ukraine and Syria: Status-Seeking between Identity, Opportunity and Costs."

[24] Tuomas Forsberg, "Status Conflicts between Russia and the West: Perceptions and Emotional Biases," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47, no. 3–4 (2014), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2014.09.006.

[25] Erik Ringmar, "The Recognition Game: Soviet Russia Against the West," *Cooperation and Conflict* 37, no. 2 (2002), https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836702037002973.

> A state's self-understanding positions it in the world and provides the reservoir of meanings that the state draws upon to represent itself and others in its interactions with different states. As a consequence, self- understandings are of paramount importance in shaping the representations a state makes when interacting with other states, and in understanding how these representations position the state vis- à- vis other actors in the system.[26]

Based on this proposition, we can conclude that states act in relation to their self-understandings and expect from others recognition of these self-understandings. Because identities as self-understandings accord a certain position to a state in the international order, status becomes a recognized identity[27], a righteous place among other peers. And states allocate much of their time and resources to ensure or maintain this place[28].

Accordingly, status-seeking in Russian policy should be treated not as a consequence of geopolitical rivalry with the US but as an identity issue in itself. However, this does not mean that the US or the Western world is not in interaction with Russian self-understandings and policies related to them. On the contrary, taking Russian status-seeking behavior as an identity issue requires us to approach the problem from a social perspective. After all, "recognition is a social desire,"[29] and what makes their status problematic in the eyes of Russian decision-makers is the disparity between their self-asserted position in the international order and the lack of recognition of this self-understanding from other actors.

In fact, the importance of great power identity, thus great power status, and symbolic gains motives in the shape of recognition in overall Russian foreign policy are underlined by another large body of work. To start with, Narozhna proposes that since the 18th century, the only consistent trope in the Russian biographical narrative has been that Russia is destined to be a great power.[30] So, this self-description is utilized by the elite frequently, especially in times of crisis, in order to justify foreign policy choices. Such manipulations do not, however, refute the dimension of great power identity that induces status-seeking as

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[26] Michelle Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations*, Oxford University Press, 2018, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190878900.001.0001.
[27] Murray.
[28] Erik Ringmar, "Inroduction: The International Politics of Recognition," in *International Politics of Recognition*, ed. Thomas Lindemann and Erik Ringmar (Routledge, 2015).
[29] Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations*, 2018.
[30] Tanya Narozhna, "Revisiting the Causes of Russian Foreign Policy Changes: Incoherent Biographical Narrative, Recognition and Russia's Ontological Security-Seeking," *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies* 15, no. 2 (2021), https://doi.org/10.51870/CEJISS.A150203.

it became more explicit after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. As an unprecedented case of status loss, the dissolution of the Soviet Union left a legacy of humiliation and a feeling of status inconsistency[31]. Thus, status inconsistency is not only an academic concept denoting the disparity between self-attributed status and status accorded by others but also a perception shared by Russian decision-makers.[32]

To cite a few examples, both former foreign ministers Andrei Kozyrev and Yevgeny Primakov reiterated that Russia "is doomed to be a great power" or will perish.[33] Similarly, Vladimir Putin attributes Russia great powerness due to its potential, history, and culture[34] and continuously protests Western non-recognition of Russia's status as an equal. He also argues that it is somewhat of a moral duty for others to give Russia its deserved respect as they defeated the Nazis in the Second World War[35]. Again, for his foreign minister, it is unimaginable that Russia plays a subordinate role in the international arena.[36] Thus, Russian foreign policy behavior is designed by decision-makers in line with this perception, and when necessary, in other words, when they feel lack of recognition, they choose, among other options, moves that they expect to work for making other actors accord more status to Russia.

It is intriguing at this point that status inconsistency theory describes Russia as an overachiever great power. In their study diverging from the Correlates of War (COW) project by subjecting great powers to an ordering among themselves as opposed to COW's fixed major power definition, Volgy et al. empirically demonstrate that some great powers are 'greater' than others, and there can be cases where the level of great power status might change during time.[37] Volgy et al. also divide great powers into two: underachievers, who are accorded less status than their actual capabilities, and overachievers, who are accorded more status than their actual capabilities. In their empirical analysis, Russia corresponds to having more status than its capabilities as a major power. Therefore, it is expected that Russia will opt to preserve the status quo and refrain from revisionist and risk-prone foreign policy

[31] Hanna Smith, "Russia as a Great Power: Status Inconsistency and the Two Chechen Wars," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47, no. 3–4 (2014), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2014.09.005.
[32] Smith.
[33] Loretta C. Salajan, "Russia as a Great Power and the Quest for International Recognition," *Revista de Științe Politice. Revue Des Sciences Politiques* 64 (2019): 76–86.
[34] Salajan.
[35] Götz, "Putin, the State, and War: The Causes of Russia's near Abroad Assertion Revisited," 2017.
[36] Sergey Lavrov, "Russia's Foreign Policy Philosophy," *International Affairs* 8, no. 3 (2013).
[37] Thomas J. Volgy et al., "Major Power Status in International Politics," in *Major Powers and the Quest for Status in International Politics*, 2011, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230119314_1.

moves as these would diminish the excess status vis-à-vis its capabilities. The authors also argue that the loss of capabilities by the demise of the Soviet Union did not result in status loss for Russia as status markers such as G8 seat was offered, and UNSC membership was not questioned.

This theory, however, disregards how Russian decisionmakers perceive their status. Such status markers are less important to them than 'thick recognition', a recognition of the essential components of their identity, abiding by the related red lines, and granting the associated roles to play in international society.[38] Engaging in status-seeking behavior actively clearly tells us that Russian decisionmakers consider Russia as an underachiever major power whose capabilities and unique characteristics deserve more respect and kinds of manner, which they consider as more equal terms. Larson and Shevchenko, for instance, underline this perception and assert that Russia keeps the US responsible for its status loss and engages in crises with the US in an emotional manner, in particular anger, such as in cases of Kosovo, Georgia, Ukraine, Magnitsky Act and Snowden Affair.[39] Therefore, in line with the other aspect of status inconsistency theory that deals with underachiever major powers, lack of thick recognition, at least perception of this lack in Russian decision-makers pushes them in the direction of assertive foreign policy actions, such as military intervention. If the Russian decisionmakers were not so sure of their deserved status and considered themselves an overachiever, they would not be willing to take high risks and expose their weaknesses, thus jeopardizing their status. Thus, Volgy et al.'s anticipation based on data demonstrating Russia as an overachiever falls short in considering the elite perceptions.

Yet, this cognitive dimension of status-seeking does not designate such foreign policy moves as impulsive risk-taking. Putting these moves solely in emotional terms would rub Russian decisionmakers of rationality and question their calculation skills. The point is that status insecurity interacts with the judgement of Russian decisionmakers and motivates them to push the boundaries of normal diplomatic conduct. Still, among other assertive and softer options, why Russian decisionmakers prefer military intervention within its status-seeking

[38] Pierre Allan and Alexis Keller, "Is a Just Peace Possible without Thin and Thick Recognition?," in *International Politics of Recognition*, 2015, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315633916.
[39] Deborah Welch Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, "Russia Says No: Power, Status, and Emotions in Foreign Policy," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47, no. 3–4 (2014), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2014.09.003.

strategy is unclear and understudied. Therefore, this dissertation searches for an answer to the question:

Why do Russian decision-makers opt for military intervention instead of non-violent status-seeking to ensure recognition of its great power status?

1.3. Research Argument

This thesis contends that to understand the recent Russian interventionism, one should not take for granted that post-Soviet space presents a peculiar case in Russian military interventions. It is also possible to examine the Russian interventionism of the 2000s by refraining from this, grounding the analysis on the assumed categorical and analytical similarities between the cases of Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria defined above. Accordingly, aiming to contribute to the explanations that focus on Russian status-seeking and politics of recognition among great powers in Russian interventions, this thesis examines the motivational similarities and relative weight of divergences in decision-making in Russian interventions of Georgia, Syria and Ukraine and makes two propositions:

(1) Russian identification as a great power and status-seeking in consequence of this identification puts military intervention inside the horizon of possible actions when faced with repeated misrecognition. Status-seeking also provides intervention as an end in itself as part of a mimetic politics envisaging the ability to conduct an intervention as a status-signal to transmit to those who do not treat Russia in accordance with its self-attributed status.

To elaborate, faced with misrecognition of its great power identity, and denied of rights and privileges demanded with this identity by the West and mainly the US, Russian decision-makers engage in what Murray calls recognitive practices, such as intervention.[40] Contrary to the Clausewitzian proposition that military force should be restrained as much as possible because it is costly and unpredictable[41], intervention becomes an option because the perceived net recognition benefits of military force outweigh the perceived net recognition benefits of non-intervention[42]. As misrecognition persists, these recognitive practices tend

[40] Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations*, 2018.
[41] Barry Posen, *Restraint A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Cornell University Press, 2014).
[42] Thomas Lindemann, *Causes of War*, 1st ed. (ECPR Press, 2010).

to get assertive and finally become a meta-practice that demands recognition itself.[43] Thus, intervention in Russian foreign policy is a recognitive practice that indicates a demand for great power status, and as Russia fails to get the desired outcome, each subsequent intervention has the potential to reiterate this demand and obtain a function of status symbol that signals great powerness, thus, becomes an end rather than a means. Since status is a subjective phenomenon, status symbols function as means to shape others' perceptions[44] , such as exemplary military technologies and major diplomatic initiatives. In the Russian case, it is the intervention itself.

At this point, it is also important to note that the presence or perceived level of misrecognition of Russia's great power status might differ in the eyes of Russian and American decisionmakers. While American decision-makers think that they are engaging in highly normal diplomatic conduct, Russians decision-makers might think the opposite, or vice versa. Such an intersubjective nature of the problem requires us to account for both sides of the story. Therefore, this study does not disregard the actions of other actors that might have objectively amplified the Russian perception of misrecognition, but it mainly focuses on how those actions are actually processed through Russian self-understandings.

(2) Russian leadership seeks great power status through interventions because interventions demonstrate their risk-proneness and establish a reputation for resolve.

It is this study's assumption that risk-proneness and reputation for resolve are implicit in interventions. Certainly, interventions involve risks beyond calculation. As risk-taking is "a nonverbal message as much as a goal-oriented strategy"[45] and reputation for resolve has a deterring effect[46], financial and political costs that can be potentially catastrophic for Russia, as exemplified especially by the Ukraine case are compensated by the expected symbolic benefit of intervention, and thus, Russia's determination of demanding its right place in international order becomes proved. It is, therefore, likely that Russian decision-makers are convinced by the necessity of engaging in intervention often due to its resoluteness and commitment signalling function.

[43] Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations*, 2018.
[44] Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth, "Status and World Order."
[45] Yaacov Y. I. Vertzberger, "Rethinking and Reconceptualizing Risk in Foreign Policy Decision-Making: A Sociocognitive Approach," *Political Psychology* 16, no. 2 (1995), https://doi.org/10.2307/3791835.
[46] Danielle L. Lupton, *Reputation for Resolve*, 2020, https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501747731.

Lupton's study on leaders and their reputation for resolve, for example, makes reputation relevant in international politics again, as she demonstrates in detail that the reputations of individual leaders rather than countries themselves matter in dealings of conflictual issues. Leaders, especially in their early careers, tend to set an example of how their response to certain matters will be shaped. They might even follow purposefully unpredictable actions in order to build a hesitant approach from other actors. Thus, this study contends that Vladimir Putin's preference to build a reputation for resolve is very much related to Russia's military efforts to ensure great power status.

1.4. Thesis Outline

Chapter 1 introduces the foundations of the research question and the rationale for this study. Pointing to the shift in Russian foreign policy in terms of the increase in number and intensity of military intervention to other countries in the last two decades, this chapter sets out the explanations given for this shift, argues for the superiority of explanatory power of great power identity and status-seeking in Russian foreign policy, and finally presents the gap in the literature as the lack of explanations for Russian decision-makers' motivation for choosing military instruments in status-seeking. Chapter 1 concludes with a summary of the propositions.

Chapter 2 provides in detail the theoretical and conceptual foundations of this study. It first argues for a social understanding of international politics, focusing on how identities, ideas and perceptions shape the decision-making process. In understanding international politics as a social reality, it does not simply personify states as having social cognition and aspirations independently but takes them into consideration as state-society complexes, in which historical, structural, and societal factors interact with decisionmakers' personality traits. Avoiding overwhelming the text with immense detail, the concepts of status, recognition and great power are explained in a manner that ties them with the research question and the prospective findings. This chapter also discusses the methodological underpinnings of this study, arguing for a social understanding of international politics through interpretive methods setting out the rationale for the particular choice of research model and sources.

Chapter 3 examines Vladimir Putin's interpretation of Russian great power identity, and provides the foreign policy implications of this interpretation. Putin's understanding that Russia has been constantly treated with misrecognition is also presented here.

Chapter 4 delves into Russian intervention in Georgia in 2008 and argues that Russia's unproportionate response to the Georgian offensive in South Ossetia was geared towards punishing President Saakashvili's Western orientation, countering Western involvement in post-Soviet space and NATO enlargement, and replicating the Kosovo precedent. The chapter underlines that both Western dealings in post-Soviet space in the shape of NATO enlargement and color revolutions and the independence of Kosovo meant for Russian decision-makers a blatant misrecognition of Russia's status and disregard for Russian 'privileged interests.' The intervention reversed this attitude.

Chapter 5 delineates the Russian annexation of Crimea and the instigation of separatist movements in eastern Ukraine. Establishing Ukraine's significance for Russian great power identity shaped by the idea of Russkiy Mir and quasi-irredentist perspective about Ukraine, the chapter argues that Russia intervened in Ukraine to counter its misrecognition in the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement negotiations and the Western complicity in the Maidan revolution. For Russia, the intervention provided territorial gain and preservation of the Black Sea Fleet in Crimea but resulted in Western sanctions and isolation.

Chapter 6 establishes that Russia intervened in Syria to demonstrate that it could correct the Western errors in the region and propose an alternative leadership. It also asserts that the intervention imposed on the US cooperation with Russia in dealing with the threat of ISIS, and Russia made use of its cutting-edge military equipment in the intervention to signal its great power status. The isolation Russia faced after annexing Crimea was softened with Russia's intervention in Syria as it proved itself an indispensable actor in great power management and increased its influence in the Middle East.

The concluding chapter presents a summary of the case-by-case findings and makes three conjoining arguments derived from the cases. First, in all cases, Russia decision-makers perceived that their non-military status-seeking efforts were exhausted in the face of repeated misrecognition. Second, intervention has become a part of Russia's mimetic politics with the West. In other words, Russia appealed to unilateral military actions at certain moments to replicate US unilateralism and demonstrate that they have equal status both

within the norms and outside. Third, Russia made use of interventions to signal its determination to ensure its great power status. Finally, the concluding chapter provides implications for further research.

2. RECOGNITION, STATUS-SEEKING, AND GREAT POWER IDENTITY IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

2.1. Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to developing an analytical framework for studying the recognitive dynamics of military intervention. This framework is anchored in the relationship between recognition, status-seeking, and great power identity and built upon a constructivist backdrop that underlines identities as an impetus for foreign policy behavior. Thus, the principal assumption of this study is that inter-state relations have a social nature whereby states bearing specific identities interact with each other based on and in pursuit of recognition. ***Recognition*** can be defined as a "social act through which another actor is 'constituted as a subject with legitimate social standing,' and as a result, is able to maintain a certain social status (or recognized identity) within a political community."[47] Provided that recognition is about complying with an actor's status, misrecognition or denial of status gains relevance as a possible variable causing conflict.

Status, on the other hand, denotes "collective beliefs about a given state's ranking on valued attributes (wealth, coercive capabilities, culture, demographic position, sociopolitical organization, and diplomatic clout)[48]." Some of these attributes may be measured empirically, yielding an objective assessment of an actor's status and preventing disputes over the statuses of the actors in international politics. However, measurable attributes of actors are rarely conclusive in the decision to grant recognition of status. North Korea's incontestable nuclear capabilities, for instance, are not sufficient for most of the other powers having similar capabilities to grant North Korea the status of a major power. Similarly, Russia has recurrently voiced its discontent about the mistreatment it faced from its 'equals' in international affairs. On the other hand, we mostly do not observe that actors without the capabilities of major powers claim a major power status. They do so only after reaching those capabilities. Russia's claim for great power status is often questioned on the basis that Russian capabilities do not go well beyond its nuclear arsenal. On the other hand, China's thriving capabilities and economic influence provide a firmer ground than a few decades ago

[47] Michelle Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations*, 2018, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190878900.001.0001.
[48] Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth, "Status and World Order."

for China to claim the same status as the US. Status, therefore, can only be studied by accounting for the combination of certain material capabilities and endowment from other actors, and it is the latter and the social and intersubjective aspect of status that conceivably causes conflict.

Disputes over status as a cause of conflict may emerge in three circumstances. First, status can be relative; a state's status can indicate its relative position vis-à-vis an interlocutor. In this case, an actor may demand more recognition of its status vis-à-vis a certain actor (i.e., Russia from the US) and seek this objective through military means. Second, status can as much be definitive of one's place among all other actors; so, an actor may try to establish formal recognition of its independence through war (Turkish War of Independence and many post-colonial independence movements). Third, status can create a rift in international politics, distinguishing a group of states with higher status from the rest. Termed as ***great power*** or major power, these states bear exceptional capabilities and aim to influence the course of international politics with these capabilities independently.[49] Their higher status is recognized by other states, which brings along a de facto privilege for them, endowing them with power, prestige, and responsibility in matters of world politics. Regarding itself worthy of such privilege, an actor may violently seek to ensure that it is treated and has the right to operate the same as major powers.

As one can see, recognition, status, and great powerness are so interrelated that it is hard to talk about one without the others. Let alone the purpose of this study and the convenience of examining these concepts relationally, I believe it would be analytically problematic to study them separately in other settings as well. Therefore, this chapter will delineate the nature of the relations among these concepts in a holistic way.

In doing so, I think the initial attention should be paid to the unit of analysis problem surrounding state identity so that variability of great power identity is justified and the merit of studying status-seeking with these lenses is demonstrated. Therefore, I will first elaborate on how we can utilize state identity in analysis and what should be our unit of analysis thereof. Second, I will discuss how great power status is tied to recognition from others and self-attribution. Third, I will focus on how an imbalance between a state's self-evaluation of

[49] Volgy et al., "Major Power Status in International Politics."

status and recognition of this status by other states leads to conflict. Fourth, I will discuss the implications of this theoretical groundwork for this study and lay out the research design.

2.2. Persons, States, and Identities

Contending with Wendt's proposition that states have agency and intentionality as persons, this section undertakes the unit of analysis problem overshading the relationship between state identity and foreign policy behavior. For Alexander Wendt, the debate on the ontological status of states is related to the very heart of "IR's epistemic authority as a science of world politics" because rejecting the concept of state personhood would mean refuting the existing scientific knowledge about world politics.[50] The sceptics of the relationship between state identity and foreign policy behavior, for example, question the assumption that states bear identities similar to individuals. Since states are not living and thinking organisms, they are not expected to engage in identity processes like individuals. Furthermore, there is more complexity and less interaction at the international level than at individual and social levels, which is why states and actors of global governance do not behave in the same manner as individuals, nor do they have feelings or emotions.[51]

This objection not only undermines the conceptual relationships I wish to establish among the identity-related concepts of status and recognition but also makes it impossible to apply certain methods to uncover the nature of these relations. Therefore, it is essential to establish that analyzing foreign policy with regard to identities requires diligence to avoid over-personifying states and instead consider them as a product of more complex processes and relations. This awareness will prevent the researcher from expecting states to behave like individuals and draw automatic conclusions, such as designating them with certain ideologies or characters. It will also encourage the researcher to look more into the processes in which state behavior sprung in a particular moment of history.

Ringmar similarly points out that states do not possess a single memory, consciousness, or subjective will.[52] He, however, underlines that personifying states has been

[50] Alexander Wendt, "The State as Person in International Theory," *Review of International Studies* 30, no. 2 (2004): 316, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210504006084.
[51] Reinhard Wolf, "Respect and Disrespect in International Politics: The Significance of Status Recognition," *International Theory* 3, no. 1 (2011): 117, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971910000308.
[52] Erik Ringmar, "Inroduction: The International Politics of Recognition," *International Politics of Recognition*, 2015, 4, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315633916.

very useful for rulers of the *ancien régime* and nation-states. Both monarchic rulers and later republicans made up stories about their states and depicted them as persons in their accounts in order to justify their positions and actions.[53] In other words, they had to develop modern mythologies about their state (how they are formed, who they are, etc.) so that their constituencies would 'buy' their arguments. This habit has also been helpful for the citizens as they need to identify with their state, relating their hopes, future, and well-being to it.[54] Ringmar's historical perspective reveals that states have always been regarded as persons, with many apparatuses that make up their organs. Although it seems that the personification of the state functioned throughout history as a metaphorical tool that would help leaders rule and citizens get attached to their states, its enduring influence on how we think about states should not be discarded. International law, for example, attributes states subjectivity and considers them as *persona*.[55] They are responsible for their actions under the law regardless of the changes in government or territory.[56] Ringmar acknowledges that apart from this persona, we have no proof of the state's subjectivity, but he argues that the same goes for our subjectivity as well. Thus, he concludes that identity is formed in social interaction, and what is valid for the identities of individuals must be true for the state's identities as well. [57]

It should be noted here that Ringmar does not reduce the formation of state identity to that of individuals. Rather, he argues that the dynamics of state identity are inclusive of the dynamics of individual identity. Still, I believe this conclusion should be taken with a pinch of salt because, as Yurdusev argues, "a subject can still be viewed within a perspective of the whole without discarding the 'parts' or the 'whole' in favor of the other."[58] In fact, one must not put "overwhelming emphasis" on the whole, overlooking the individuality of the parts.[59] Therefore, this study does not focus on state identity as a self-occurring phenomenon but aims to consider both the historical process as a structure and the state actors' interaction with this structure, thus accounting for the parts' relation to the whole. In other words, this study finds ontological worth in scrutinizing decision-makers' position within the collective

[53] Ringmar, 4.
[54] Ringmar, 4.
[55] Ringmar, 5.
[56] Ringmar, 5.
[57] Ringmar, 6.
[58] A. Nuri Yurdusev, "'Level of Analysis' and 'Unit of Analysis': A Case for Distinction," *Millennium - Journal of International Studies* 22, no. 1 (1993): 87, https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298930220010601.
[59] Yurdusev, 87.

experience of their society and explains state identity as a result of the conclusions they derive from this experience.

Perhaps the most adept solution to the state-as-person problem has been proposed by Narozhna, who argues that the personification of the state can be resolved by thinking of the state as a state-society complex.[60] Rather than a mere "legal-institutional structure that acts as a sovereign over its citizens," the state is a component of a larger complex.[61] Even though states lack faculties for consciousness and purposeful action, they enable individuals to gain agency by operating through state power embedded in institutions.[62] Thus, only through the individuals' practices and interactions are states rendered palpable.[63] States do not exist outside of these practices. Furthermore, a society's collective existence finds its meaning via the state, and the state functions as a society's ontological security referent.[64] When a state's ontological security is threatened, its society's collective identity is also unsettled.[65] Non-recognition of a state's identity, therefore, necessarily involves a disregard for its society, and the society becomes a part of this dynamics of recognition.[66] Therefore, studying foreign policy behavior stemming from state identity requires taking into consideration the historical-sociological context out of which identity is formed and perceived by decision-makers.

In this understanding, agents are conscious beings capable of purposeful action, while structures are "enduring social relations and resources, both material and discursive, that enable or constrain agential actions."[67] Narozhna, however, gives a crucial caveat: although this conclusion makes individuals (decision-makers, leaders, or political elites) a legitimate unit of analysis, one should retain that they are not isolated beings. They are social and historical agents located within and influenced by the structural dynamics.[68] They are also

[60] Tanya Narozhna, "Revisiting the Causes of Russian Foreign Policy Changes: Incoherent Biographical Narrative, Recognition and Russia's Ontological Security-Seeking," *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies* 15, no. 2 (2021), https://doi.org/10.51870/CEJISS.A150203.
[61] Tanya Narozhna, "Misrecognition, Ontological Security and State Foreign Policy: The Case of Post-Soviet Russia," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 76, no. 1 (2022): 81, https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2021.1985963.
[62] Tanya Narozhna, "State–Society Complexes in Ontological Security-Seeking in IR," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 23, no. 3 (2020): 568, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-018-0164-y.
[63] Narozhna, 568.
[64] Narozhna, "Misrecognition, Ontological Security and State Foreign Policy: The Case of Post-Soviet Russia," 81.
[65] Narozhna, 81.
[66] Bahar Rumelili, "Breaking with Europe's Pasts: Memory, Reconciliation, and Ontological (In)Security," *European Security* 27, no. 3 (2018). cited in Narozhna.
[67] Narozhna, "State–Society Complexes in Ontological Security-Seeking in IR," 568.
[68] Narozhna, 568.

capable of influencing political outcomes through norm entrepreneurship and organizational platforms.[69]

That being said, it is the state actors or decision makers who determine what kind of an identity their states have and what policies, priorities, or red lines this identity prescribes. Founding fathers, charismatic leaders, and their legacies especially bear a particular weight in this judgment. Decision-makers attempt to actualize the national identity that they perceive along these lines. Obviously, this perception cannot be in line with reality in absolute terms. Honneth, for example, underlines that national collectives are too amorphous to extract what kind of recognition they seek, but it must suffice for the purposes of IR that they wish respect for their culture and history.[70] Therefore, for Honneth, "the 'we' of the population," or a unified national collective, is not an empirical quantity but a hypothetical one. It should also be noted here that, especially for the political systems where accountability is not cherished, the decision-makers consider themselves the embodiment of the people's will, and what drives them to take certain actions is their perception of the role they play in the course of history.

While this is the case, the perception of decision-makers about their national identity cannot too much diverge from that of this presupposed national collective. After all, foreign policymakers are also a part of their community, and they share this community's "historical expectations, doctrines, and identities" as well as their traumas, victories, and other collective experiences.[71] Their national identity certainly shapes the foreign policy objectives and comes into the picture "when disordered and presumed expectations and moods are formed into a collective narrative that makes a certain type of international stance appear justified in light of past humiliations or desired recognition."[72]

In conclusion, for the purposes of this study, it is indispensable to consider state identities as historical phenomena resonating with their community and state leadership. This perspective also warrants delving into how great power identity is perceived by foreign policy decision-makers: as a historical mission to realize or a pragmatic tool through which

[69] Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998), https://doi.org/10.1162/002081898550789. cited in Narozhna.
[70] Axel Honneth, "Recognition between States: On the Moral Substrate of International Relations," in *International Politics of Recognition*, 2015, 33, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315633916.
[71] Paul Saurette, "You Dissin Me? Humiliation and Post 9/11 Global Politics," *Review of International Studies* 32, no. 3 (2006): 513, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210506007133.
[72] Honneth, "Recognition between States: On the Moral Substrate of International Relations," 33.

they fortify power. It may not be possible to account for the entire cognitive process of decision-makers to make this distinction, at least within the scope of this study, but paying attention to domestic political developments and their relation to certain actors becomes significant. Thus, when this study operationalizes great power identity in Russian politics, it will address how decision-makers make sense of Russian great powerness and socio-historical development and the context in which decision-makers are driven to act upon Russia's great power status.

2.3. Great Power Problematique

Conceptualizing being a great power as a matter of identity requires delving more into the subjective aspect of great powerness. All great powers are traditionally considered indisputable and have exceptional capabilities to direct the course of world politics. Especially structural approaches have treated great powers as a unified category. Volgy et al. point out, for example, that Correlates of War (COW) literature, spearheaded by the Waltzian dictum "we know a major power when we see one," has a fixed understanding of a great power, disregarding the changes in their status through time.[73] When we talk about great powers, we should be attentive to the differences among them, as great powers by no means constitute a uniform category. Some of them have more capabilities than others, while some attain a higher degree of recognition from others, and finally, some of the great powers might be more (or less) willing to bear the responsibilities coming with the privileges of being a great power.[74]

When we acknowledge that there is a disparity among great powers, and capacity, recognition, and willingness play a crucial role in being a great power, we are required to pay attention to how a state perceives its status and the level of recognition endorsed to this status by others, i.e., status attribution. This is where we enter subjective and inter-subjective realms. After all, an actor may indeed misevaluate its capacity, misperceive how others treat it, be misperceived by others, or possess aspirations for more capacity and recognition. All these are related to how an actor sees itself as much as how others see it.

Volgy et al. adeptly elaborate on the issue of status attribution. For them, a great power "has (1) unusual capabilities to pursue their interests, (2) use these capabilities for unusually

[73] Volgy et al., "Major Power Status in International Politics," 6.
[74] Volgy et al., "Major Power Status in International Politics."

broad and expansive foreign policies in and beyond their immediate neighborhood, (3) aims to influence the course of international politics independently than other major powers."[75] However, they also underline that for a state to become a great power, it must demonstrate *a willingness to use these unusual capabilities in a moment of opportunity, and other actors must endorse its* great power status.[76] Although Volgy et al. accept that this endorsement can be replaced by a state's self-appointment of great power status, they mainly focus on status attributed by other states.

Attribution by other actors plays a crucial role in making some actors who do not fit these criteria a great power. By recognizing an actor who actually does not qualify as such, other actors might attribute a great power status to it, or they might also deny recognizing an actor's status despite its adequate capabilities and willingness to take responsibility.[77] For some analysts, for instance, Russia, having only nuclear weapons as extraordinary political tools, did not qualify for being a major power after the collapse of the USSR. However, its extended membership in the UNSC following the collapse of the USSR is an example of great power status attribution by other actors. Similarly, the exclusion of the People's Republic of China, established after the Chinese Civil War from the UNSC, illustrates that a state with major power capabilities can, in fact, be misrecognized as such. The nuclear stockpile of North Korea, Pakistan, and India does not ensure them great power status either.

Here, we can conclude that recognitive dynamics are inherent to great power status, and recognition of status is a performative act in that it produces an actor as a great power. When being a great power is part of an actor's identity, recognizing its status implicates what Wendt terms thick recognition. Claiming that recognition has two modes, Wendt distinguishes between thin and thick recognition. While 'thin recognition' is about getting acknowledged as a sovereign state, thick recognition is about differentiating itself from states with a particular quality or distinctiveness.[78] Such self-understanding with a particular self-defined identity provides states with particular roles in international society.[79] Thick

[75] Volgy et al., 6.
[76] Thomas J. Volgy et al., "Status Considerations in International Politics and the Rise of Regional Powers," in *Status in World Politics*, vol. 9781107059276, 2014, 62, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107444409.005. Emphasis belongs to the author of this thesis.
[77] Volgy et al., "Major Power Status in International Politics," 7.
[78] Alexander Wendt, "Why a World State Is Inevitable," *European Journal of International Relations* 9, no. 4 (2003): 511, https://doi.org/10.1177/135406610394001. cited in Murray.
[79] Wendt, "Why a World State Is Inevitable." cited in Murray.

recognition can be demanded by role conceptions such as human rights promoters or rising powers seeking recognition for major power identity during power transitions.[80]

When a state demands thick recognition, it requires the other party to understand the "essential elements composing its identity" and signals that it also complies with this principle.[81] These essential elements make up the core of the existence of a state as well as they indicate a certain threshold, i.e., red lines that cannot be crossed when establishing relations.[82] But, of course, parties might have different ideas about which actions are within the scope of this principle. In other words, it is very possible and, in fact, quite frequent, that a state perceives an act of the other as being too out of line while the one who conducts the act considers their action within the limits of acceptable diplomatic conduct. In other words, while an actor believes to be recognizing another through a certain set of behaviors, the other might find this behavior unsatisfactory, even humiliating.

Thus, focusing on the subjective aspect of status and great powerness via attribution by other actors when studying foreign policy behavior pertaining to recognitive dynamics makes more sense than analyzing merely how material capabilities render states as major powers. While this is the case, whether status attribution by others or self-attribution has more explanatory value remains a question. It should be noted that, as Volgy et al. acknowledge, status attribution can also be a very subjective matter. In other words, just as other actors may recognize an unqualified actor as a great power, an actor can evaluate itself as a great power as well.[83] I believe it should be noted here that self-attributions like this already involve a perception of the extent to which others endorse the actor. Therefore, studying self-attribution to explain behavior provides a shortcut for the sake of analysis.

But why would great power status be appealing for many states to attribute themselves? In other words, why do states seek status? There are both material and symbolic reasons for this. When an actor is recognized as a great power, it is agreed upon that it will have an influence on the direction of certain matters of international politics. Kratochwil aptly summarizes that the role of a great power designates the actors "with system-wide interests- those that were to have a say in matters pertaining to the management of the

[80] Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations*, 2018, 13.
[81] Pierre Allan and Alexis Keller, "Is a Just Peace Possible without Thin and Thick Recognition?," in *International Politics of Recognition*, 2015, 77, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315633916.
[82] Allan and Keller, 77.
[83] Volgy et al., "Major Power Status in International Politics," 7. Consider, for example, Turkish and Iranian decisionmakers' statements about the status of their countries.

system."[84] Indeed, this recognition also induces this actor to become a privileged one whose such initiatives are considered legitimate by the international community. Actors aspiring to be recognized as great powers strive to harvest this privilege. In addition to the symbolic satisfaction of legitimacy, Volgy et al. argue, that states with high status spend less material resources on certain aspects of management of international politics and global governance.[85] This proposition, however, is controversial, especially considering the immense cost of 'policing' the world. One of the main tenets of President Trump's foreign policy was actually tightening the belt in the US expenditure on global governance and security. Still, it is possible to assume that aspiring powers hope to 'get things done' financially more easily or compensate their costs by being a great power, and the very status of great power has a grandiose outlook for them.

Furthermore, great powers consider themselves having *droit de regard*, that they have special interests in their proclaimed sphere of influence, and they must be respected to follow them without any interference from other great powers.[86] That is actually why many states aspiring to be great power try initially to be dominant regionally. An upward movement in status takes place first regionally and then globally.[87] So, there are absolutely material benefits to pursuing great power status.

Still, we cannot confine ourselves to explaining status-seeking behavior only by an aspiration to access these material benefits. Murray claims, for example, that recognition is not a material but a social desire[88], and for Volgy et al., status is a "matter of positively distinctive identity, identity verification and positive social attribution."[89] When an actor demands recognition of its great power status, it not only declares a right to its share in material sources that other major powers have access to. Even if this is the case, this endeavor might not only be about them because "accumulation of material capabilities is an act of self-realization …. that secures identity."[90] Thus, identity, rather than physical existence, can

[84] Friedrich Kratochwil, "Of Systems, Boundaries, and Territoriality: An Inquiry Into the Formation of the State System," World Politics 39, no. 1 (October 1, 1986): 27–52, https://doi.org/10.2307/2010297.
[85] Volgy et al., "Status Considerations in International Politics and the Rise of Regional Powers," 61.
[86] Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth, "Status and World Order," 14.
[87] William R. Thompson, "Status Conflict, Hierarchies, and Interpretation Dilemmas," in *Status in World Politics*, 2014, 221, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107444409.014.
[88] Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations*, 2018.
[89] Volgy et al., "Major Power Status in International Politics," 6. cited in Tuomas Forsberg, Regina Heller, and Reinhard Wolf, "Status and Emotions in Russian Foreign Policy," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47, no. 3–4 (2014), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2014.09.007.
[90] Richard K. Ashley, "Poverty of Neorealism," in *Neorealism and Its Critics*, ed. Robert O. Keohane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 294.

be the referent-object of security, especially considering that a challenging power's status-seeking practices might be very costly and threatening to its physical security[91] as the status quo powers respond.

It is very important at this point to take notice of how an actor perceives its historical role and identity. The extent to which it perceives itself as worthy of more status will determine what kind of actions it will take to realize its identity. Strongly motivated by the subjective judgment of its status, it might overestimate its capabilities or underestimate the international reaction to its certain activities.

2.4. Recognitive Dynamics of Conflict

This is actually where status and recognition get entangled with conflict. When we acknowledge that recognition and status-seeking are social practices, we step into the uncertain terrain of mutual trust. Although many scholars have elaborated on the relationship between conflict and recognition, Murray perhaps provides the most novel approach to the issue, proposing that misrecognition may cause war because of the nature of the international system. She considers social uncertainty to be at the center of the "tragedy of great power politics."[92] Therefore, alongside security dilemma, social uncertainty is an enduring feature of anarchy and prevents cooperation. For her, states do not only seek material interests, but they also struggle to ensure that their identities are recognized. International politics, however, do not easily accommodate this effort as states are unpredictable about whether they recognize the other's identity formation.[93] This is where the uncertain nature of the international system derives from. In other words, since states are in a social environment, there is always a possibility that identity-claims will not be recognized, and other states will respond unpredictably to the identity of another.[94] Thus, international politics is embedded with social uncertainty, and misrecognition is inherent in state interaction.

In addition to the fog of recognition making international politics more conflictual, Murray also proposes that it directs states to behave in a certain way. She describes social uncertainty as a structural condition stemming from anarchy, putting actors in a state of necessity to harvest recognition of their identities. Ringmar also contends that states put a

[91] Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations*, 2018, 9–10.
[92] Murray, 8.
[93] Murray, 14.
[94] Murray, 14.

considerable amount of effort (time and resources) in striving for recognition, and they, therefore, act and interact with each other in specific ways due to this strive.[95] Under anarchy, states engage in material practices that symbolically reinforce self-ascribed identities. This material feedback makes them feel more secure in terms of their identity. Certain privileges in international politics, offering new seats in global governance mechanisms, avoiding confrontation, and even allowing a land grab can be part of this material feedback. We can, therefore, expect more assertive material practices when states feel less secure about their identity or, in their perspective, when others make them less secure by ***not recognizing their identity***. Material practices are relevant to ensure identity-claims because they have 'convincing' consequences. Also, feeling ontological insecurity has a bearing on the perception of physical security and territorial integrity. Hence, the question remains: when do states tend to get assertive in the face of misrecognition?

2.4.1. Non-Aggressive Recognitive Practices

The direct answer to this question is when they think they have exhausted non-aggressive ways to ensure their identity-claims. States make use of the signaling function of practices to indicate their status. Certain activities might become status symbols, as well as certain positions, such as membership or leadership in certain international organizations (take, G8 or UNSC), or taking significant roles in certain international events and informal mechanisms might materialize recognition.[96] Status symbols such as developing space programs or high-tech weapons might also provide states with the aspired status attribution.[97]

Murray identifies three recognitive practices which powers challenging the status quo engage. The two of these, accumulating extraordinary military capacities and establishing a sphere of influence where they will be held less accountable, can be categorized as aggressive recognitive practices. The third one, what Murray terms as great power voice, however, explains in great detail how actors non-violently seek status. Great power voice denotes the great powers' privilege to manage world affairs and the particular respectful way they engage with each other in managing international crises.[98] A great power is to organize and take part in the solution of a problem or at least to be consulted. Therefore, international

[95] Ringmar, "Inroduction: The International Politics of Recognition," 2015, 3.
[96] Joshua Freedman, "Status Insecurity and Temporality in World Politics," *European Journal of International Relations* 22, no. 4 (2016), https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066115603781.
[97] Freedman.
[98] Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations*, 2018, 57–59.

crises are opportunities for aspiring powers to exercise great power voice and participate in great power management.[99] They try to take initiative in the solution and may even create these crises themselves[100] to open rooms for their games. No matter that great power voice is nonviolent, acting as if they already have the status of great power to harvest recognition, aspiring powers may actually create insecurity when they intentionally create crises.[101]

So, misrecognition does not directly result in conflict between the misrecognizing party and the misrecognized one. Murray detects that power transitions whereby an established power is replaced by a rising one can, in fact, occur without conflict. Surely, power transition might develop conflicts and induce an arms race when a rising power attempts to increase its potential and challenge the status quo, and the established power strives to hinder a transition.[102] However, Murray's historical examinations of German and American challenges to the status quo present that not all power transitions have to proceed this way. She cites, for example, that Britain complied with American aspiration to replace it as a hegemonic power rather than trying to stop it, while German attempts in the same line induced major war as the established powers did not wish to recognize Imperial Germany's great power status.[103]

2.4.2. Misrecognition as the Cause of Conflict

When a state is reacted to differently than its self-claimed status, it might perceive that its self-ascriptions are not acknowledged by others and experience insecurity about its identity. Rising powers, especially, when they encounter misrecognition, further insist on their position and try to get rid of social interdependence and become the only determining agent of their own identity.[104] As a result, states behave in two particular ways: (1) they present their identities as a fait accompli, demanding that other states recognize their self-asserted identity.[105] In other words, they present their stance as the reality itself and make a normative claim for recognition.[106] (2) They appeal to concrete material practices to assert their aspirant identities as "*material practices are an effective expression of identity because*

[99] Murray, 57–59.
[100] Murray, 57–59.
[101] Murray, 57–59.
[102] Murray, 4.
[103] Murray, 141–67.
[104] Murray, 15.
[105] Murray, 15.
[106] Take, for example, the fact that US had to embrace One China Policy due to Chinese insistence.

the material world gives substance to the recognition-seeking state's aspiring social identity and allows the state to experience its social status as a brute fact, rather than as the uncertain effect of an ongoing political practice of social construction."[107]

As part of these material practices, rising or socially insecure states may try to show off their military power in provocative ways in order to realize their identity, draw the attention of established major powers, and thus acquire recognition because extraordinary military capabilities are considered only belonging to great powers.[108] In this way, they question the exclusiveness of the major powers club and the security of the established power's identity and affirm that they are indeed part of the club.[109] Thus, international order, as well as other states' physical securities, may be jeopardized when rising power engages in status-seeking. This is especially true when an aspiring power is securitized by the established power and its cohort, and the aspiring power becomes more risk-accepting and tries to voice its concerns in the material world.[110]

For Lindemann, identity insecurity might reveal itself in search of prestige and dignity as well. Some actors might identify themselves with certain overestimations, acquiring a hubristic identity. It is more likely for actors with hubristic identities to feel unrecognized in their relationships with other states as recognition becomes a matter of identity and prestige.[111] When discussing how a state constructs a hubristic identity, we again enter the domain of culture and history because a self-perception of the exaggerated importance of an actor's place in the world must derive from its collective experience in the past. Therefore, a historical-sociological perspective is inevitable when studying status and recognition as culture and history "provide a reservoir of social and verbal practices out of which states' goals, purposes, and self-understandings are constructed."[112]

Another impetus for conflictual behavior is the perception of misrecognition in the form of disrespect and humiliation. "Disrespect … is always seen as an unjustifiable denial of social rank, as a symbolic attack on an actor's self-perceived place in and meaning for

[107] Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations*, 2018, 16.
[108] Murray, 16, 60.
[109] Murray, 16.
[110] Murray, 76.
[111] Thomas Lindemann, "Concluding Remarks on the Empirical Study of International Recognition," in *International Politics of Recognition*, 2015, 212, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315633916.
[112] Elias Götz, "Putin, the State, and War: The Causes of Russia's near Abroad Assertion Revisited," *International Studies Review* 19, no. 2 (2017): 9, https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viw009.

society".[113] It signals misrecognition of one's status, but this does not necessarily result in conflictive behavior by the disrespected party. Misrecognition may cause conflict when the disrespected party is already insecure about its status and seeks recognition.[114] Thus, culture and hubristic identity again come into the picture.

Furthermore, repeated disrespect may bring about collective identities that are tied together with grievance.[115] Therefore, disrespect becomes a frequently used discursive tool for leaders to complain about the misrecognition they face. In studying recognition and status, it becomes essential to track the continuous attention drawn by an actor about their repeated exposure to disrespectful behavior regardless of the reality of the narrative or the intention of the other party.

Humiliation, on the other hand, is a more intense feeling than disrespect and, therefore, has more severe consequences when misrecognition is conducted in this form. Saurette suggests that humiliation is distinct from interest and has its own dynamics as it is "a complex and intensely emotional experience in which historically specific and culturally defined (though often naturalised) perceptions and definitions of self-worth, self-respect and dignity are stripped away and revealed as false and illegitimate affectations."[116] When an actor, already unsatisfied with treatment seen fit for them, is attacked to its very foundational values, it should be expected to be more conflict-prone as they would calculate that they will have more recognition of their identity in the case of war than peace. Contrary to the realist perspective that conflict is about material interests, the leaders of such actors will calculate what Lindemann calls symbolic benefits of war higher than symbolic costs.[117]

One objection to focusing on emotions such as humiliation, revenge, or aspirations for justice when studying war is proposed by Venneson, who points out that recognition literature is at fault for establishing such logic as it ignores the instrumental explanations that better account for especially small-scale interventions, conducted for practical reasons such as land grab.[118] Even when this is the case, there must be a motivation behind instrumental

[113] Wolf, "Respect and Disrespect in International Politics: The Significance of Status Recognition," 116.
[114] Wolf, "Respect and Disrespect in International Politics: The Significance of Status Recognition."
[115] Wolf.
[116] Saurette, "You Dissin Me? Humiliation and Post 9/11 Global Politics," 509.
[117] Lindemann, "Concluding Remarks on the Empirical Study of International Recognition."
[118] Pascal Vennesson, "Bombarder Pour Convaincre ? Puissance Aérienne, Rationalité Limitée et Diplomatie Coercitive Au Kosovo," *Cultures & Conflits*, no. 37 (2000), https://doi.org/10.4000/conflits.395. cited in Thomas Lindemann, "Interest, Passion, (Non)Recognition, and Wars: A Conceptual Essay," *Global Discourse* 4, no. 4 (2014), 484 https://doi.org/10.1080/23269995.2014.926734.

objectives for states. In other words, the practical need for a land grab might still be based on recognitive dynamics. An actor might calculate that the land grab will provide more recognition. Material gains from a small-scale intervention do not necessarily refute recognitive dynamics operating in decision-making. We can even argue that limited interventions might be more related to recognition as the material gains extracted from it will probably be overshadowed by the international reaction and sanctions towards such actions.

2.4.3. Temporal Status Inconsistency as the Cause of Conflict

An interesting work by Freedman[119] draws attention to how historical juxtapositions of an actor's status might engender status anxiety. I have mentioned earlier that status denotes a comparison among peers, but Freedman points out that it is also about an actor's past and present. Having a lower status than in the past, an actor might seek to correct the historical mistakes resulting in status loss. In situations where there is a mismatch between an actor's former and present status, "status incentives" such as membership in international organizations will not make a difference for them[120] because the gap to be closed through certain status-seeking acts is not vis-à-vis other peers, but it is a matter of self-evaluation through time. They might, of course, hold others responsible for their decline and incorporate antagonism towards others into their narrative.

Elias argues that societies with such temporal disparity in self-evaluation might spend centuries adjusting to the new reality and strengthening their self-esteem.[121] Until then, they struggle with what he calls the problem of the we-ideal: "a group's idealized image of itself from the days of its greatness treated as a model that members "feel they ought to live up to, without [ever] being able to do so."[122] Clunan also contends that historical memories of past international grandeur are extremely crucial in a state's aspirations, identity, and interests.[123] Similarly, Jervis demonstrated that past experiences of elites and their generation have an influence on their understanding of contemporary politics. It is through this influence that

[119] Freedman, "Status Insecurity and Temporality in World Politics."
[120] Freedman.
[121] Norbert Elias, *The Germans: Power Struggle and the Development of Habitus in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). cited in Freedman.
[122] Elias, 4. cited in Freedman.
[123] Anne Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*, *Johns Hopkins University Press*, 2009, 4, https://doi.org/10.1353/book.3410. cited in Freedman.

they might overlook some more rational options, end up with cognitive errors, and inaccurately interpret history.[124] This focus on temporal comparisons demonstrates that the way ideas and history shape interests cannot be overlooked. For instance, Vladimir Putin's national address on "conducting a special military operation" on 24 February 2022 very well illustrates how leaders refer to 'historical injustices,' the past greatness of their state, and their role in correcting these injustices, bringing this greatness back. After invading Kuwait, Saddam Hussain similarly expressed in an address to the American people how Iraq had been treated unfairly.[125] Thus, no matter that an actor loses status due to a combination of its internal and external dynamics, temporal status inconsistency gazes outside for the responsibility and seeks former recognition from outside. Thus, the experienced status loss becomes a catalyst in the emergence of conflict due to misrecognition.

2.5. The Implication

This chapter so far has established that (1) when studying state identity, it is possible to take decision-makers as a unit of analysis while accounting for the historical-sociological background within which they use their agency. (2) Great power identity and status are surrounded by subjective judgment and self-evaluations. (3) Recognition can be considered divided into thin (sovereignty) and thick (identity) recognition. While the former establishes an actor as a legitimate and formal member of international society, the latter confirms an actor's self-appointed position in the world, and that is actually why it becomes more problematic as this position is often disregarded. (4) States seek both material and symbolic interests when striving to become a great power and potentially jeopardize international peace on the way. (5) States may also seek recognition of their self-ascribed status through peaceful foreign policy. Acting like and taking up the responsibilities of a great power, they might follow enterprising moves, take the initiative, and sometimes create a crisis to be a part of its solution. (6) Especially actors with (over)confident or exaggerated self-narratives and those who grieve over their past grandeur are more prone to initiate conflict due to recognition matters. (7) Not only agents but also structure are accountable for this conflictual

[124] Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in World Politics*, *Princeton University Press*, 1976. cited in Freedman.
[125] *Saddam's Address to the American People*, 1990, https://www.c-span.org/video/?14229-1/saddams-address-american-people.

outcome as the international system is a socially uncertain environment in which states seek recognition of their identity but often face misrecognition.

Considering these implications, for a military intervention to be a part of the status-seeking strategy, these criteria may be put forward:

1) The actor should have a socio-historical background whereby it assumes a great power role.

2) The actor should be experiencing status inconsistency and, thus, seeks status.

3) The status-seeker should appeal to great power voice or non-violent methods to acquire a thick recognition of its assumed role.

4) The status-seeker should have the perception that its non-violent approach does not respond to its expectations.

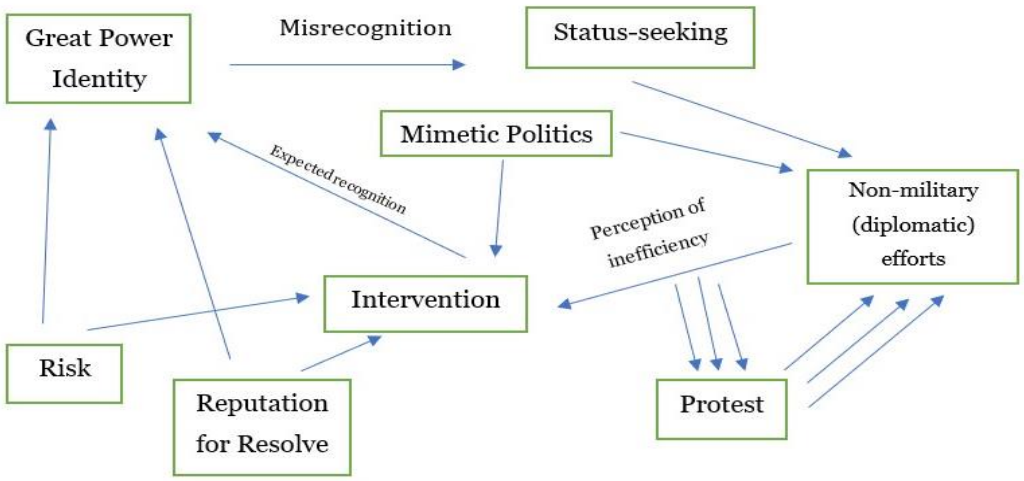


Figure 1. A Framework for Studying Russian Interventions (2008-2015)

5) The status-seeker should appeal to aggression to ensure its assumed role.

6) The respective intervention venue should be a part of the recognition dynamics between the status-seeker and the actors from whom thick recognition is demanded.

7) Possible material gains from the intervention must be defined through the prism of great power identity.

This study is designed to consider these implications and follow the six-step analysis pattern summarized in Figure 2 to study Russian interventions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria. *The first step* of each case analysis will address the background of the intervention, accounting for the Russian grievances over the respective case prior to the intervention and how the case and the events led up to the intervention. *The second step* will establish why the cases make up an intervention. *The third step* will delineate how the intervention venue is significant for Russian great power identity.

1. Background of the case
2. Why is the case an intervention?
3. Significance of the Intervention Venue for Russian Great Power Identity
4. Russian Justifications for the Intervention
5. Russian Status-Seeking *via* Intervention
6. Russian Status after the Intervention

Figure 2. The Analysis Pattern

The fourth step will be the examination of Russian justifications expressed by Russian decision-makers to juxtapose them with facts and other possible factors. Whether these justifications refer to historical injustices or humiliation towards Russia will imply that Russian perception of misrecognition became a catalyst in the intervention decision. *The fifth step* will reveal how Russia sought status in respective cases by looking into the wider implications of the statements made by Russian decision-makers. The final step will assess Russian status after the intervention to conclude on its success.

The analysis pattern of this study aims to draw parallels from each case and demonstrate how great power identity in Russian foreign policy makes military intervention a recognitive practice signaling its deserved status. It also provides Russian decision-makers' own understandings of the necessity and the status-signaling attribute of military intervention, and indicates the course of events leading up to intervention. In other words, the research model is geared towards presenting the imbalance between the situational perceptions of Russian decision-makers and the Western ones with regard to Russia's status in order to demonstrate the intersubjective nature of the problem. For instance, the red lines, perceived/showed (dis)respect and the perceived recognition of interests differ for both parties in the cases examined in this study. Thus, the analysis pattern proposes an inquiry

about how these differences are tied to status games and how the perception of continuous misrecognition convinced Russian officials of military intervention.

Prior to Intervention	Russian Demands and Great Power Voice	Western Responses	Russian Perception that Non-Violence Methods Exhausted
During Intervention	The Intervention Attributes	Russian Justification	The Position of the Intervened Actor
After Intervention	Russian Status-Self Assurance		Western Status Attribution to Russia

Figure 3. Analysis Pattern Expanded

The analysis pattern also attributes variability to Vladimir Putin and his cohort's determination to make a reputation for resolve, enabling them to undertake enormously risk-laden interventions. Such moves are regarded as signaling Russian great power status and its resilience to act unilaterally when necessary, a privilege of great powers. Accordingly, this study uses a variety of primary sources, such as

- Transcripts of statements by the Russian Presidency (http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts)
- Statements by the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation
- Speeches by the Russian President on various platforms, mainly at the Valdai Club, the Munich Security Conference and the Federal Assembly of Russia
- Televised addresses by Vladimir Putin
- Inauguration speeches by Vladimir Putin
- Foreign Policy Concepts of Russia

3. GREAT POWER IDENTITY AND RECOGNITIVE DYNAMICS IN PUTIN'S FOREIGN POLICY

This chapter is dedicated to setting out (1) President Vladimir Putin's understanding of Russian great power identity and its implications in Russian foreign policy and (2) how the misrecognition of this status/identity by the West plays out in Putin's foreign policy formulation. In order to unfold Putin's respective understanding, ninety-five documents involving his interviews, articles, and addresses, as well as the Russian foreign policy concepts and documents released by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, were examined. These sources spanned from when Putin assumed the role of acting president in 1999 to the end of his fourth presidential term, 2024. It is significant to note here that all of these sources were accessible on the Russian governmental websites in their English-translated versions, hinting at the Russian administration's expressiveness and willingness to communicate to its partners- something that Vladimir Putin reiterates in several interviews and addresses.[126] A similar observation is also made by Roberts[127], pointing to the abundance of Putin's views in English-language sources and arguing that we do not need better translations but new ways of interpreting Putin. Russian administration's ensuring such accessibility is certainly about conveying certain expectations to significant parties. Considering that the need to manage expectations is one of the premises of foreign policy decision-making[128], the sources examined become essentially relevant to the aim of this study.

I have underlined in the previous chapter that it is imperative for this study to consider decision-makers' formulation of state identity based on their interpretation of the collective experience of their society and certain historical-sociological contexts from which they

[126] He claims, for instance, he always tries to openly convey what he has in mind and to those who find this surprising, he replies that Russia can afford such openness. Vladimir Putin, "Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club," President of Russia, October 29, 2014, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46860. He also declares elsewhere: "We make no secret of our foreign policy priorities." Vladimir Putin, "Presidential Address to Federal Assembly," President of Russia, February 21, 2019, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59863.
[127] Kari Roberts, "Understanding Putin: The Politics of Identity and Geopolitics in Russian Foreign Policy Discourse" 72, no. 1 (2017): 32, https://doi.org/10.1177/0020702017692609.
[128] Paul A. Anderson, "Justifications and Precedents as Constraints in Foreign Policy Decision- Making," *American Journal of Political Science* 25, no. 4 (1981), https://doi.org/10.2307/2110761.

select to draw lessons to act. Saunders also argues that leaders are particularly important when studying interventions:

> Theories relying on relatively stable or slow-changing factors such as the structure of the international system or regime type cannot fully account for changes in a state's intervention choice over time. Moving the level of analysis to individual leaders can help to address this variation.[129]

While this proposition is not without merit and could be helpful to apply in certain research designs, interventions may also appear as persistently preferred instruments in certain foreign policies considering many interventions of the USSR and the US. Therefore, "stable" factors, in fact, may become a matter of review as this study proposes that the Russian great power identity is the unchanging factor in respective Russian interventions. The rationale for this study to locate the level of analysis to the leader is not to disregard slow-changing factors but to account for the specific interpretations of them by leaders. Furthermore, a slow-changing factor such as regime type becomes essential when studying Russian policy, and it is the regime type itself that directs us to focus on individual leaders. Focusing on the leader to understand Russian foreign policy is crucial as the Russian political system enables the president to have a major executive role so deep-seated that Roberts prefers to use the phrases "Putin's foreign policy" and "Russia's foreign policy" interchangeably. She succinctly points out:

> Putin's presidency is characterized by a well-documented domination of Russian law and politics and a personal popularity that undergirds this ''super-presidential'' system in which the institutional influences of other political actors are dwarfed.[130]

The role of other Russian institutions, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Security Council, and the Duma, in foreign policy decision-making is "derivative," depending on the president's willingness to integrate them into certain decisions.[131] Putin is considered the epicenter and the supreme authority of Russian foreign policy decision-making.[132] His assertive influence on foreign policy indeed increased as he gained more grip

[129] Elizabeth N. Saunders, "Transformative Choices: Leaders and the Origins of Intervention Strategy," *International Security* 34, no. 2 (2009).
[130] Roberts, "Understanding Putin: The Politics of Identity and Geopolitics in Russian Foreign Policy Discourse," 31.
[131] Roberts, 31.
[132] Nazir Hussain and Fatima Shakoor, "The Role of Leadership in Foreign Policy: A Case Study of Russia under Vladimir Putin," *IPRI Journal* XVII, no. 1 (2017): 9.

on power, but even in the earlier years of his presidency, he was able to overrule significant decisions. For example, Myers accounts for an incident following the 9/11 attacks, when Putin paid a visit to the Defense Ministry to order the reluctant Russian commanders to work with the Americans on their operations in Central Asia.[133] This does not mean that Putin is free of influence. The oft-quoted influence of the *siloviki* and other advisors is significant to consider but they are not in a capacity to overrule the president. Moreover, they share the same KGB background as Putin and do not, in perspective, differ much from him.[134] Overall, Putin's statements are highly representative of the 'resultant' stance that occurs at the end of the negotiations between different actors, if there is any negotiation at all.

As important as Putin's statements are the foreign policy concepts published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since 2000, the Ministry has updated its concepts four times, in 2008, 2013, 2016 and 2023. They are "strategic planning documents" that include the "systemic vision of the national interests of the Russian Federation in the domain of foreign policy, basic principles, strategic goals, major objectives and priority areas of the Russian foreign policy."[135] The concepts draw the contours of Russian foreign policy, and because they include Russia's reactions to several international political developments as well, they represent the Russian diplomatic and security elite's perception of the current Russian foreign policy and its prospects. From this perspective, they are indispensable in analysis and complementary to other sources.

Based on these sources, this chapter first draws a parallel in the understanding of Russia as a great power during Putin's rule and before, followed by a delineation of Putin's Russian exceptionalism, its resonation with Russian society, and prescribing an independent foreign policy. Further, the chapter examines Putin's perception of misrecognition of Russia's great power status in the form of US triumphalism and unilateralism, and NATO expansion.

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[133] Steven Lee Myers, *The New Tsar: The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2015).
[134] Andrew Roth, "Putin's Security Men: The Elite Group Who 'Fuel His Anxieties,'" *The Guardian*, February 4, 2022, sec. World news, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/04/putin-security-elite-siloviki-russia.
[135] "The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation," The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2023, https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1860586/.

3.1. Russian Great Power Identity Before the Putin Era

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the newly established Russian Federation formulated a foreign policy that would seek Russia's integration with Western institutions. Accession to IMF and G7 (turning into G8) was achieved until the new millennium, and the application result to join GATT was pending (only in 2011 was Russia accepted to the World Trade Organization that replaced GATT in 1995). Meanwhile, the US stated in 1994 through the Partnership for Peace program that they would support NATO expansion by the addition of former members of the Warsaw Pact. In 1995, NATO struck the Bosnian Serb Army to impair their military capabilities. Three months later, Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev would be replaced by Yevgeniy Primakov in the face of growing discontent with his "passive" attitude towards the West. Kozyrev's cooperative approach to the West, particularly towards the US, annoyed so many in Russia that he was called "Mister Da" (Mr Yes), in stark contrast to what the Western pundits would call the former Soviet diplomat and Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko "Mr. Nyet" (Mr. No) because of his consistent veto use in UN Security Council.

The replacement of Kozyrev by Primakov might be better understood by considering the schools of thought in Russian foreign policymaking. Tsyganov detects four schools of thought regarding Russia's relations with the West: Neo-Imperialists, Integrationists, Balancers, and Great-Power Normalizers. Evident from the term, Neo-Imperialists opted for an expansionist foreign policy and considered the nature of Russian identity as inherently anti-Western. For the Integrationists, however, the West and Russia are not very different cultural entities, and the West represents the most progressive civilization, which Russia should accommodate its values to be a part of.[136] Both the last Soviet leader Gorbachev, and Russia's first foreign minister, Kozyrev, for example, thought they needed to change their system of values to turn their country into having the same status as countries like the US or France. This is why they were also labeled as Atlanticists. It should be noted that neither Kozyrev nor his president Yeltsin had an underestimating view of their country. Yeltsin stated back in 1992 that Russia is rightfully a great power by virtue of its history, of its place in the world, and of its material and spiritual potential.[137] Similarly, Kozyrev warned about the growing Western perspective on Russia that would prefer its isolation, stating that

[136] Andrei P. Tsygankov, "Vladimir Putin's Vision of Russia as a Normal Great Power," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 21, no. 2 (2005): 136, https://doi.org/10.2747/1060-586X.21.2.132.
[137] Boris Yeltsin, "Speech to the Sixth Congress of People's Deputies," *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, April 8, 1992.

demoting a power that was "historically doomed to be a great power is not only unrealistic but dangerous since it fuels aggressive nationalism and confrontational feelings in the world."[138] Unlike those insisting on Russia's urgent need to become self-sufficient to re-emerge as a great power, Kozyrev found the solution in becoming a part of the world community, leaving aside Soviet ways of thinking in foreign policy and not aspiring to become a military superpower.[139]

Balancers, on the other hand, argued that Russia represents a distinct geopolitical and cultural entity and should not try to be a part of the West. It should rather pursue becoming an independent great power in a multipolar world by aligning with non-Western powers and economically strengthening the country. Balancers like Primakov prescribed limited cooperation with the US, and they foresaw absolute equality between Russia and the US in case of potential cooperation over an issue.[140] The demand for a shift from an integrationist to a balancer in pivoting foreign policy was a result of Russia's lesser status, which was disclosed in its interaction with the West in developments like the Bosnian War and NATO enlargement.

As soon as Yevgeniy Primakov assumed the office of the foreign minister, he stated that his role as the foreign minister was to have a policy in line with Russia's great power status but calmed the worrisome thoughts, saying that this would not mean a confrontation with the US.[141] A multipolar world managed by a concert of great powers, Russia being one of them, was the central pillar of the Primakov doctrine. In this line, Russia was destined to behave and be treated like a great power. This would mean an independent foreign policy, continuing influence in post-Soviet space, opposition to NATO enlargement, and cooperation with other major powers (China, for example) to balance the American aspiration to dominate global politics.[142] The insistence on Russia's major role in international politics and the multipolar world order stems from a particular reading of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Unlike his Western counterparts, who considered themselves to be victors of the Cold War and arguably undertook a sort of triumphalism, Primakov

[138] Iver B. Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2016), 184.
[139] Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations*.
[140] Tsygankov, "Vladimir Putin's Vision of Russia as a Normal Great Power," 136.
[141] Helen Womack, "Primakov Soothes West but Looks East | The Independent," *The Independent*, January 13, 1996, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/primakov-soothes-west-but-looks-east-1323737.html.
[142] Eugene Rumer, "The Primakov (Not Gerasimov) Doctrine in Action," The Return of Global Russia: A Reassessment of the Kremlin's International Agenda (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 2019), 5, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Rumer_PrimakovDoctrine_final1.pdf.

argued in his 1996 article in *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn'* that the end of the Cold War was a result of common efforts by both sides of the iron curtain to disburden themselves from "the policy of confrontation."[143] This is why the new world order following the collapse of the Soviet Union was not to be composed of "leaders," or the victors, and the "followers," or the rest.[144]

Positioning such a status for Russia in the emerging world order, Primakov also expressed his concerns over NATO enlargement. He acknowledged that Russia cannot veto any country's entry to NATO and Russia did not expect an attack as a result of NATO expansion, but underlined that moving forward NATO infrastructure towards the Russian border would "complicate our geopolitical situation, not least in the military sphere."[145] He also reminded of the "explicit assurances" given to the Soviet Union that NATO would not extend to the east as long as German reunification was granted by the Soviets. He cites US Secretary of State J. Baker and UK Foreign Secretary D. Hurd in giving these assurances.[146] As such grievances over the assurances about NATO expansion have been frequently voiced and used as a justification for interventions in Georgia and Ukraine by Putin, James Baker felt compelled to respond that this was not the case. He claimed that in his negotiations with Gorbachev, the matter was not whether NATO would enlarge by accepting Eastern European countries. Rather, he stated, the discussion was about the NATO jurisdiction within the united-to-be Germany- the NATO jurisdiction would not extend to the east of West Germany, and he emphasized that he reiterated this matter three times to Gorbachev.[147] However, a detailed analysis of the declassified documents involving the diplomatic correspondences during the German unification process suggests that Gorbachev might indeed have been "led to believe" that NATO would not expand.[148] Since the aim of this chapter is not to propose a judgment on this, it suffices to highlight that NATO expansion

[143] Yevgeny Primakov, "International Relations on the Eve of the 21st Century: Problems and Prospects," in *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition: Concepts and Realities*, ed. Andrei Melville and Tatiana Shakleina (Central European University Press, 2005), 209.
[144] Primakov, 209.
[145] Primakov, 209.
[146] Primakov, 208.
[147] Peter Baker, "In Ukraine Conflict, Putin Relies on a Promise That Ultimately Wasn't," *The New York Times*, January 9, 2022, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/09/us/politics/russia-ukraine-james-baker.html.
[148] Svetlana Savranskaya and Tom Blanton, "NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard," National Security Archive, 12 2017, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2017-12-12/nato-expansion-what-gorbachev-heard-western-leaders-early.

was a matter of unfair treatment even before Putin and will come up more than several times as the following chapters unfold.

Primakov was indeed less accommodating than Kozyrev towards the West, but he did not immediately put aside his hope of reaching "rules of conduct" acceptable for all parties and governing NATO-Russia relations.[149] NATO started bombing Serbia on March 24, 1999, when Primakov was airborne over the Atlantic Ocean on his way to Washington. He had already been appointed prime minister by Yeltsin in 1998 when Duma blocked the reappointment of Viktor Chernomyrdin. Hearing about the NATO operation in Serbia, Primakov ordered the plane to return to Moscow. Although Yeltsin removed him from the prime minister's office after less than three months, Primakov's decision not to visit Washington under such circumstances symbolized the level of disagreements between the US and Russia, and his removal from the office paved the way for Vladimir Putin to become prime minister. His ascendence initially marked the prominence of Great Power Normalizers, who agreed on Russia's rightful great power status but differed on the method, especially that of Primakov. Normalizers argued for a less confrontational approach towards the West and an indispensable focus on economic development, prioritizing the weakening economy as a more significant threat than the West. In this line, they refrained from supporting CIS integration at all costs to balance Western influence in the region. As discussed below, Putin's tenure would be swung between the Normalizer, Balancer, and Neo-Imperialist schools.

3.2. Great Power Identity and Misrecognition in the Putin Era

The previous chapter underscored how an actor's collective identity can render certain self-understandings that assign for itself a particular status in the world. An actor defines its historical role from the relationship between identity and status. When an actor's self-narrative defines itself as a great power, it will try to match its status with this vision. In doing so, it will have to rely on what it constructed as the significant Other because only recognition from the significant Other will eliminate the unmatch between the desired status and the perceived one. The analysis in this section demonstrates that Russian collective identity definitely prescribes Russia a great power status with an exceptionalist self-narrative about Russia's qualities and history. Moreover, the collapse of the USSR and the loss of the

[149] Primakov, "International Relations on the Eve of the 21st Century: Problems and Prospects," 217.

former grandeur as a shared traumatic experience indicates temporal status inconsistency in the formulation of Russian foreign policy. Both the exceptional self-narrative and temporal status inconsistency traits of Russian great power identity resonate with the main actor- Vladimir Putin- shaping crucial foreign policy directions for Russia.

Many analysts divide Vladimir Putin's foreign policy into phases based on the level of the disputes with the West and coercive diplomacy. His three presidential terms are also distinguished based on his focus on different policy areas. In his first term, he consolidated his political grip; in the second, he paid more attention to the economy; in the last, his primary focus was ideological. Analyzing Putin's foreign policy in these ways is not without merit. However, when it comes to whether recognitive dynamics and the idea that Russia is a great power influence Putin's foreign policymaking, it is possible to take a more monolithic perspective: Of the ninety-five documents examined for this study, seventy-seven (see Appendices 1 and 2) include what was explained as recognitive dynamics in the earlier chapter, pointing to the overwhelming relevance of great power identity and status considerations in Putin's foreign policy. The documents presented in Appendix 1 were selected based on whether they referred to (1) Russia's great powerness or exceptional qualities, (2) a comparison of Russia's status between the past and now, (3) any actions perceived as disrespectful or unjust towards Russia, and included (4) any statement demanding recognition of Russia's interests. Within my analysis, I made use of most of these documents, including recognitive dynamics, and excluded those which repeated the propositions and details that are already referred to with other documents.

When presenting Putin's perspective of Russia as a great power, I made use of the documents scattered around Putin's 25-year-old rule. However, I confined my analysis of Putin's perception of Russia as misrecognized in this chapter to the documents spanned until 2008, as I will already utilize the documents belonging to the years onward in the case studies under Putin's perception of repetitive misrecognition.

The findings of this examination suggest that Putin's convictions on Russian great power identity and international status hardly changed over terms. Although there is a general sense that Putin's foreign policy in the early years did not pay much attention to Russian identity and interests derived from it, a careful look at Putin's statements during these years may disagree with this contention. Putin indeed reiterated during his early tenure that Russia was not an ideologically motivated state, unlike the Soviet Union, and urged

Russia's partners to leave behind the Cold War mentality and treat Russia based on the current realities. Yet, his ideas about Russian identity and status have remained unchanged, if not intensified further. Therefore, we can talk about the practical inability of Russian foreign policy-making based on identity these years rather than a preference not to put identity and status claims at the center of foreign policy-making. Putin himself acknowledges Russia's limited capabilities, especially in his first two terms but he never renounces Russia's rightful status.

Furthermore, Putin's disapproval of ideology and focus on the economy has been more about how he makes sense of the Soviet experience and the fragile domestic conditions that Russia found itself in after the collapse of the USSR. He lashes the Soviet-era decision-makers for their ideologically motivated economic preferences that put the USSR in a fragile position and people in poverty and justifies his state-sponsored capitalism with a determination to correct this mistake. He also does not endorse any sort of nationalism within Russia, underlining that Russia has always been a multi-national state united under a single Russian state. However, this can be seen as the true or alternative ideology that he wishes to reinstate: Russia as a unique civilization and one of the cultural, economic, and political centers of the world.

3.2.1. Russian Exceptionalism and Great Power Status

It was only on December 30, 1999- a day before Prime Minister Putin would become the acting president upon Yeltsin's resignation on New Year's Eve- when Putin declared in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* article "Russia at the Turn of the Millenium" that "Russia has been and will be a great power."[150] He attributed this "status" to the "inherent qualities of Russia's geopolitical, economic, and cultural essence" and claimed that these qualities have always determined the course of Russian history.[151] He defined the economic problems that the country was facing as a threatening factor to Russia's great power status and warned:

[150] Vladimir Putin, "Russia at the Turn of the Millenium," in *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition: Concepts and Realities*, ed. Andrei Melville and Tatiana Shakleina (Central European University Press, 2005), 227.
[151] Putin, 227–28.

> Russia is in the middle of one of the most difficult periods in its history. It appears to be the first time in the past 200–300 years when the nation is faced with the real threat of becoming a second-, and possibly even third-rate nation.[152]

No matter what the situation was challenging, he was confident that "it is too early … to write Russia off as a great power" and pointed out that Russia has long lacked a long-term strategy to become "a highly developed, prosperous and great world power," hinting that the immediate focus of this strategy should be on the economy.[153] Tsygankov argues that these years marked when Putin's foreign policy understanding focused on Russia's immediate need to strengthen its economy and viewed the real threats to Russia as not stemming from the US but the drag in economic development.[154] This is why Russia's incorporation into Western financial mechanisms like G7 and WTO, enhancing bilateral trade relations with other actors, and carving itself a monopolizing role in the global energy market were prioritized in foreign policy. It should be noted that this developmental strategy did not only consist of Russia's material need to become prosperous. It had an ideational aspect- Russia's resurgence as a great power- that motivated its implementation. Thus, Putin's pragmatism about Russia's economic realities and prospects was consistent with his formulation of Russian identity and status.

The foreign policy concept released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2000 reiterated the same economic objective and foresaw preserving Russia's strong and respected position in the world community as the principal aim and fitting to Russia's great power status.[155] Similarly, in the same year, Putin would announce at the UN Millennium Summit that Russia is a very ancient country that returned to the scene as a democratic state and intends to become stronger and earn more prestige.[156] The World Bank data in Figure 1 provides the substantial increase in Russian GDP per capita since 2000 in the name of this objective.

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[152] Putin, 234.
[153] Putin, 230–31.
[154] Tsygankov, "Vladimir Putin's Vision of Russia as a Normal Great Power," 138.
[155] "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation" (International Affairs: A Russian Journal, 2000), https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/iarj/iarj_00_05a.html.
[156] Vladimir Putin, "Address to the Millenium Summit," President of Russia, September 25, 2000, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22231.

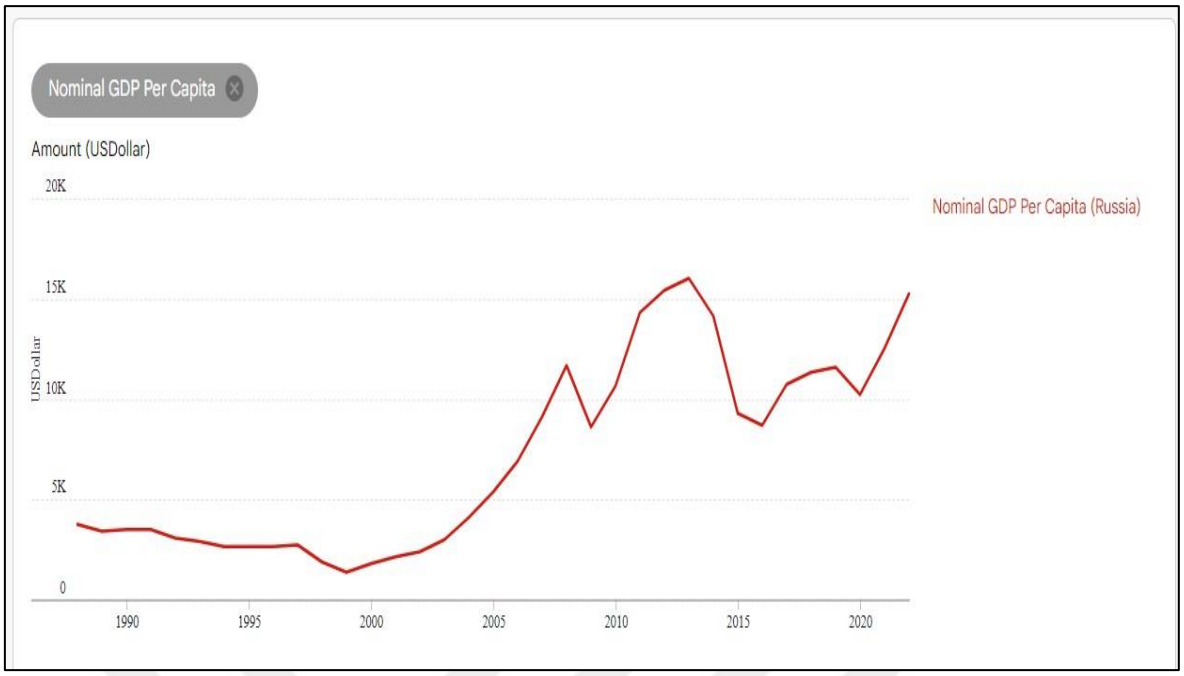


Figure 4. Russian GDP per capita change[157]

Putin's understanding of Russia when he assumed power was that it *inherently* deserved a particular position in the world. Russia's economic development path was the correction of the divergence from this inherent status. The claim that Russia has unique qualities that this status derived from repeatedly appears in Putin's statements and evolves into a broader scheme as he combines this rhetoric with international politics and Russia's status in the international system. In an interview with the Wall Street Journal in 2002[158], he drew attention to the fact that Russia had a longer history than the US, and "America will never be Russia and Russia will never be America," implying the distinct qualities of both civilizations. He proposed that the US and Russia could complement each other by cooperating for world stability. Pointing out that Russia admired how the US managed to become a thriving country in a short period, he reminded the audience that Russia also significantly contributed to world civilization. Therefore, he concluded, it was only natural for these countries to cooperate in global management.

[157] "Nominal GDP per Capita (Russia)," Data Commons, accessed July 24, 2024, https://datacommons.org/tools/timeline#&place=country/RUS&statsVar=Amount_EconomicActivity_GrossDomesticProduction_Nominal_PerCapita.

[158] Vladimir Putin, "Interview with the Wall Street Journal," President of Russia, April 7, 2002, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21498.

This emphasis on the multiplicity of significant contributions to world civilization is important because it would be mistaken to portray Putin's foreign policy as deriving from an outright superiority of Russia in the world, at least in his early terms. Putin himself claims and reiterates on several occasions that Russia does not seek world leadership or exceptionalism but simply advocates mutual respect for interests. In an interview in 2005[159], he stated that Russia does not seek the status of superpower because such a position brings certain disadvantages. However, Russia aims to be prosperous and secure, and achieving this will grant Russia its natural status. Pointing out that Russia is the largest country by size, he states that what Russia owns is enough for it and does not seek to project policies beyond its territory.

He would later, in 2014, reject again that Russia wishes to be a superpower but describe that the only leadership Russia seeks is to ensure that the norms of international law are in order:[160]

> Does Russia aim for any leading role? We don't need to be a superpower; this would only be an extra load for us. I have already mentioned the taiga: it is immense, illimitable, and just to develop our territories we need plenty of time, energy and resources.
>
> We have no need of getting involved in things, of ordering others around, but we want others to stay out of our affairs as well and to stop pretending they rule the world. That is all. If there is an area where Russia could be a leader –it is in asserting the norms of international law.

Putin formulates Russia's insistence on international law and norms and multilateralism as part of Russia's greatness and as an instrument, perhaps a rhetorical one, to demand recognition. In an interview with Le Figaro in 2000,[161] he stated that Russia advocated a multilateral solution to the situation in the Middle East and pointed out that not only Russia but also the EU and Arab countries should be a part of the process. When asked whether Russia's involvement and multilateral approach in the region is a sign of Russia's

[159] Vladimir Putin, "Interview with Israeli Television Channel One," President of Russia, October 31, 2005, http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/interviews/22928.
[160] Putin, "Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club," October 29, 2014.
[161] Vladimir Putin, "Interview with the French Newspaper Le Figaro," President of Russia, October 30, 2000, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21634.

great powerness, he replied that it is not only Russia's great powerness but also the fact that Russia no longer intends to impose its will on others, as the Soviet Union did.

Putin attributes to Russia exceptional characteristics and, Russia's deserved status for him is not about Russia getting the most special and unique treatment in international politics. Rather, his insistent call on all actors, especially the US, to adhere to international law and grievances over how Russia is treated against the international norms targets getting recognition of Russia as one of the selected few powers- the great power club. In fact, he reprimands US unilateralism on many occasions on the grounds that Americans do not have the moral legitimacy to behave in this way and disrespect others' interests. At this point, Putin's international law emphasis always points to the UN Security Council, of which Russia is an integral part and has the privilege to voice its perspective on important matters of world politics.

Similarly, in 2013, Putin described Russia as one of the main guarantors of global and regional stability but claimed that Russia does not seek global or regional hegemony to impose its views. Instead, for Putin, Russia follows a value-based approach safeguarding international law and striving for respect for nations' independence and identities. He contends that such a historical mission is "absolutely objective and understandable for a state like Russia with its great history and culture, with many centuries of experience, not so-called tolerance, neutered and barren, but the actual common, natural life of different peoples within the framework of a single state."[162] In other words, Putin infers his advocacy of multilateralism and 'polyphony' in international politics from what he considers the nature of the Russian state and society. In this way, Russian legalism in international politics, similar to Russian economic pragmatism in its foreign policy, serves its great power identity.

Evident it is from the last full quote that Putin links Russia's 'value-based approach' emphasizing international law and multilateralism to the 'pluralist' nature of the Russian state that he calls a civilization-state. In 2012, he declared that Russia must be a strong country to preserve the national and spiritual identity of this civilization-state:

[162] Vladimir Putin, "Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly," President of Russia, 2013, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/15221.

> We must value the unique experience passed on to us by our forefathers. For centuries, Russia developed as a multi-ethnic nation (from the very beginning), a civilisation-state bonded by the Russian people, Russian language and Russian culture native for all of us, uniting us and preventing us from dissolving in this diverse world.[163]

Putin's conclusion from Russian history is that Russia has survived as a civilization-state in which multi-ethnic entities coexisted and unified around the Russian language and culture.[164] In his address to the Federal Assembly in 2023, Putin reiterated the distinctness of Russian civilization and noted that this does not imply superiority. He quoted Pyotr Stolypin: "In the cause of defending Russia, all of us must unite and coordinate our efforts, our commitments, and our rights for supporting one historical supreme right – the right of Russia to be strong."[165] The rhetoric depicting Russia as distinctive culminates in the foreign policy concept released in 2023, clearly describing Russia as a unique country:

> More than a thousand years of independent statehood, the cultural heritage of the preceding era, deep historical ties with the traditional European culture and other Eurasian cultures, and the ability to ensure harmonious coexistence of different peoples, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups on one common territory, which has been developed over many centuries, determine Russia's special position as a unique country-civilization and a vast Eurasian and Euro-Pacific power that brings together the Russian people and other peoples belonging to the cultural and civilizational community of the Russian world.[166]

Indeed, the overwhelming majority of modern states, as well as former empires, were composed of multiple ethnicities, and Russia is no exception. One should acknowledge the Soviet experience was peculiar in promoting a Soviet umbrella identity and ethnopluralism. However, both the Russian Imperial and the Soviet period were marked by the linguistic and cultural Russification of other nations and ethnicities[167] as well, thus, Putin is able to speak about a multi-ethnic nation united under *the Russian language and culture*. Therefore, the

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[163] Vladimir Putin, "Address to the Federal Assembly," President of Russia, 2012, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/15221.

[164] Fabian Linde, "State Civilisation: The Statist Core of Vladimir Putin's Civilisational Discourse and Its Implications for Russian Foreign Policy," *Politics in Central Europe* 12, no. 1 (2016): 23, https://doi.org/10.1515/pce-2016-0002.

[165] Vladimir Putin, "Presidential Address to Federal Assembly," President of Russia, March 2, 2023, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70565.

[166] "The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation."

[167] It should be noted that not every ethnic group was subjected to the same level of cultural and linguistic Russification during these periods.

formulation of a unique Russian civilization-state that is free of imposition and Russian nationalism and its juxtaposition to the traditional nation-state is not convincing. Moreover, Russian foreign policy choices, especially in the post-Soviet era, have been very much counter-productive to the idea that Russia is the beacon of multilateralism and equality in international politics.

In fact, Putin's view of Russia as a "civilization state" derives from the conservative pre-revolutionary Russian thinkers like Ilyin and Danilevsky, and it justifies the "peculiarity" and "special path" of Russia.[168] It is also a part of the narrative that Russia and the West bear no resemblance in values.[169] Putin views both foreign policy choices of the West and moral developments (abandonment of "all traditional identities: national, cultural, religious and even sexual") taking place in Western societies as a challenge to Russian identity.[170] He allocates considerable time to express that Russia observes "in amazement" to the "social and cultural shocks" developing in Western societies, such as the 'progressive' gender policies and degeneration of family[171]. He underlines that Russia has nothing to do with such philosophies and equates the morality loss -decadence- and identity corruption of Western societies to their geopolitical impositions of a unilateral order and deviation from international law.[172]

Thus, Putin's formulations of a distinctive Russian identity encapsulate the conviction that Russia's uniqueness ought to have repercussions on international politics. In other words, Putin attributes greatness to Russia on some occasions due to the Russian people's inherent characteristics and in others, due to his reading of Russia's socio-political organization over history. This reading provides Russia with international legalism to insist on being recognized as equal to other major powers, and it reinforces its claim to be one of

[168] Oleg Barabanov, "'Civilisation State': Theory and Practice," Valdai Club, 2023, https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/civilisation-state-theory-and-practice/.
[169] Barabanov.
[170] Vladimir Putin, "Vladimir Putin Meets with Members the Valdai International Discussion Club. Transcript of the Speech and the Meeting," Valdai Club, 2013, https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/vladimir_putin_meets_with_members_the_valdai_international_discussion_club_transcript_of_the_speech_/.
[171] Vladimir Putin, "Transcript of the Plenary Session of the 18th Annual Meeting," Valdai Club, 2021, https://valdaiclub.com/events/posts/articles/vladimir-putin-meets-with-members-of-the-valdai-discussion-club-transcript-of-the-18th-plenary-session/.
[172] Interestingly, Ted Hopf detects that in 1999, a similar view of degenerated or superficial spirituality of the US was widespread in Russian identity discourses. Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999* (Cornell University Press, 2002), 174.

the centers of gravity in international politics, which commits itself to promote degenerated values and eroding principles of equality and multilateralism.

3.2.2. Socio-Historical Context of Russia's Temporal Status Inconsistency

One of the prominent historians studying the Soviet Union, Stephen Kotkin, asserts that many great powers have considered themselves exceptional throughout their histories, and Russian exceptionalism is not peculiar to Putin's rule but more about the internal dynamics of Russian political culture.[173] Russians, Kotkin points out, have not come to terms with their imperial decline. Kotkin does not caricature the Russian resentment for their status loss; he actually acknowledges that this is something that all fallen empires, Japan, France, and Germany, for example, experienced. Kotkin's propositions are not easy to reject and are confirmed by other studies (see Murray). However, not all societies of fallen empires have engaged in aggressive status-seeking to bring their past and present in an equilibrium. This is why the preferences of decision-makers in coming to terms with the loss of grandeur become crucial to focus on. For example, former US Ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul maintains that it was Putin's understanding of international politics and ideology that drove Russia towards a confrontational relationship with the US and provided Russia with a particular foreign policy behavior.[174] The fact that Russia has increased its capabilities did not make Russian interventions imperative. Instead, a different leader with different ideas ruling in a different system of government might have chosen differently.[175]

The previous chapter specified that it is crucial to consider how leaders perceive the socio-historical context out of the state identity is formed and to look at how the collective experience of their society resonates with their beliefs. It becomes significant, at this point, to consider the temporal status inconsistency that Russian society has experienced since the collapse of the Soviet Union as an impetus for their leaders to insert great power identity inside certain foreign policy decisions.

While in his first inauguration as the president, Putin underlined that Russia needs to take lessons from history and cherish the memory of those who "created the Russian state,

[173] Stephen Kotkin, "Russia's Perpetual Geopolitics: Putin Returns to the Historical Pattern," *Foreign Affairs*, 2016.
[174] Michael McFaul, "Putin, Putinism, and the Domestic Determinants of Russian Foreign Policy," *International Security* 45, no. 2 (2020): 99, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00390.
[175] McFaul, 100.

defined its honor and made it a great, powerful and mighty state,"[176] in his third inauguration speech in 2012[177], reminded to the audience that they **"regained the dignity of a great nation, the world saw the revival of Russia".** Considering that it was still 2012 when Putin declared the revival of great Russia, we can conclude that he viewed economic development as the precondition to Russia's great power status but thought that Russia could not be confined to this. He further announced that future generations and the future of the nation depended on Russia's leadership and central position in Eurasia, and they still have a lot to achieve. By 2018, Putin considered that much of "the wounds of the past" had healed so far, but there was still a road for Russia to take:

> …we remember all too well that throughout its history, which reaches back centuries, Russia faced a number of dark periods and challenges, and rose like a phoenix from the ashes every time, achieving heights that seemed unattainable to others.[178]

But what were these wounds of the past? Putin's coining of the collapse of the Soviet Union as one of the greatest tragedies of the 20th century is now oft-quoted. In one interview, Putin stated that Russia does not seek to restore the Empire, and when he labeled the collapse of the Soviet Union as one of the largest disasters of the 20th century, he meant that 25 million Russians living in other countries of the Soviet Union and Soviet citizens suddenly became foreign citizens, and this was a humanitarian disaster: "Families were divided; people lost their jobs and means of subsistence, and had no means to communicate with each other normally. This was the problem."[179] This interview was conducted only a couple of months after the annexation of Crimea, and it is possible to assume that Putin confined his interpretation of Soviet demise only to humanitarian grounds, refraining from implying further Russian assertion and getting more frowned looks because back in 2005, he had described the nature of this disaster as one of geopolitical as well.[180] He would reaffirm this in 2021, claiming that the Soviet collapse resulted in the disintegration of "historical Russia"

[176] Vladimir Putin, "Speech at the Inauguration Ceremony," President of Russia, May 22, 2000, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21399.
[177] Vladimir Putin, "Vladimir Putin Inaugurated as President of Russia," President of Russia, May 15, 2012, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/15224.
[178] Vladimir Putin, "Vladimir Putin Has Been Sworn in as President of Russia," President of Russia, May 8, 2018, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57416.
[179] Vladimir Putin, "Vladimir Putin's Interview with Radio Europe 1 and TF1 TV Channel," President of Russia, June 5, 2014, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/45832.
[180] Vladimir Putin, "Putin: Soviet Collapse a 'Genuine Tragedy,'" NBC News, April 25, 2005, https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna7632057.

and "what had been built up over 1,000 years was largely lost".[181] He also lamented that "newly independent countries suddenly found themselves cut off from Russia." Thus, the disaster of Soviet demise for Putin has been more about having humanitarian aspect. It was also about the loss of a great statehood and its implications for Russian culture, society, and individuals.

This 'disintegration syndrome'[182] and the experience of loss resonated with the Russian collective experience. No matter that Soviet people had lost faith in communism in the final years of the USSR, the uniqueness and superiority of their country was a widely shared sense.[183] From a very young age, Soviet citizens were subject to official propaganda that included historical Russian contributions to science, literature, the arts, and music, as well as the superiority of the Soviet way of development, thinking, and governing.[184] In his seminal work examining identities in the Soviet Union in 1955 and Russia in 1999, Ted Hopf finds that a similar appreciation of Soviet great power status was also extant in Russian textbooks of 1999.[185] Sharafutdinova proposes that Soviet collective identity matters today because, for many Soviet citizens, Soviet collective identity was a source of self-esteem.

> "From kindergarten to high school, college, and continually throughout their life span, people were taught that they lived in the most progressive, socially advanced, industrially developed, and peace-building country in the world. In the last years of the Soviet system, the society was confronted with the message that this was not true, and that the system was immoral, corrupt, and even criminal. The end of the Soviet Union signified the collapse of this system and the broad-based consensus about building democratic political institutions and a market economy in Russia. If given a chance, many Russians would have likely preferred a more gradual reform of the Soviet Union."[186]

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[181] Andrew Osborn and Andrey Ostroukh, "Putin Rues Soviet Collapse as Demise of 'Historical Russia,'" *Reuters*, December 12, 2021, sec. Europe, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-rues-soviet-collapse-demise-historical-russia-2021-12-12/.
[182] Fırat Purtaş, "Rusya'nın Dağılma Sendromu ve Batıyla Olan Kavgası," in *Türkiye'nin Jeopolitiği ve Karadeniz'in Güvenliği Ekseninde Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı*, ed. Mustafa Sıtkı Bilgin (Akçağ, 2023), 21–40.
[183] Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, *The Red Mirror: Putin's Leadership and Russia's Insecure Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 64.
[184] Sharafutdinova, 65.
[185] Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999*, 160.
[186] Sharafutdinova, *The Red Mirror: Putin's Leadership and Russia's Insecure Identity*, 80.

Arguing that recognizing this will help us understand why the collapse of the USSR marks a disaster for many individuals as well as why Putin's leadership is configured in a way to resonate with this trauma,[187] Sharafutdinova asserts that Putin utilized the emotions of shame and humiliation experienced by the Russian people in the transition process in the 1990s, and converted them to pride and patriotism by prompting two central pillars of Soviet collective identity: Soviet exceptionalism that Soviet rulers employed to consolidate a Soviet nation, and "a sense of a foreign threat to the state and its people[188], reminiscent of Putin's 'besieged fortress' rhetoric. [189]

Sharafutdinova skillfully summarizes the atmosphere in 1999 when Putin took the stage with a persona to restore the "symbolic loss" and "normative breakdown" experienced by Russians after the collapse of the USSR:[190]

> "The structures of meaning making up Soviet citizens' worldview— about who they were, about the nature of the community they were part of, about the social goals and purposes of this community— were shattered in the 1990s. Sense of belonging to a community characterized by positive distinction, special meaning, purpose, and efficacy had vanished, replaced by a sense of belonging to a community that had collapsed, fragmenting along the imperial lines drawn by force and manipulation dragged into social and economic chaos and hardship by incompetent politicians and greedy entrepreneurs; marginalized by territorial neighbors and snubbed by former competitors."[191]

Thus, when Russian society experienced a breakthrough in its ontological awareness, Vladimir Putin emerged as having the role of what Moulioukova and Kanet call "the custodian of the collective memory of a polity" that controlled the prospects of ontological practices.[192] The status loss was to be corrected by certain directed actions. Through his routinization of these practices, some of them being the respective interventions analyzed in

[187] Sharafutdinova, 77.
[188] Sharafutdinova, 18.
[189] The "simple Soviet man" project by Yuri Levada- founder of the infamous Levada Center, which provides substantial Russian public opinion data and was classified as a 'foreign agent' in 2016 by the Russian administration, revealed the prevalence of "us versus them" mentality as a component of Soviet identity. Soviet existence was experienced in opposition to the rest of the world. Sharafutdinova argues that this mental model shaped how Soviet citizens perceived their past and present. Sharafutdinova, 74.
[190] Sharafutdinova, *The Red Mirror: Putin's Leadership and Russia's Insecure Identity*, 100.
[191] Sharafutdinova, 100–101.
[192] Dina Moulioukova and Roger E. Kanet, "Russia's Self-Image as a Great Power," in *Russia and the World in the Putin Era: From Theory to Reality in Russian Global Strategy*, ed. Roger E. Kanet and Dina Moulioukova (Routledge, 2022), 11–12.

the next chapters, the custodian Putin realized the aspirations of a society that desired to value itself.[193] Restoring Russia as one of the poles of the international system has been one of the practical implications of great power identity and an essential ontological practice.

3.2.3. Independent Foreign Policy as Part of Russian Great Power Identity

It has been vital for Putin to have a foreign policy with its own definitions and objectives and does not necessarily follow the footsteps of the US for this aim. Putin declared in the Munich Speech of 2007 that Russia has a thousand years of tradition of following an independent foreign policy, and this will not change. This emphasis on an independent foreign policy was written down in the foreign policy concept released in the following year. Although in the 2000 Concept, Russian foreign policy was only stated as an independent one, the 2008 concept placed an independent foreign policy among its chief objectives. Furthermore, the 2008 concept underlined Russia's "full-fledged role in global affairs":

> Russia, being a permanent member of the UN Security Council, participant in the G8 and other authoritative international and regional organizations, intergovernmental dialogue and cooperation mechanisms, and as a country possessing a major potential and significant resources in all spheres of human activities, vigorously developing relations with leading States and associations throughout the world and integrating consistently into the world economy and politics, exerts a substantial influence upon the development of a new architecture of international relations.[194]

Thus, 2008 was the year Russia declared itself as one of the leading powers of the international system and also implied that it would seek "a new architecture of international relations." Having lacked recognition, Russia decided to put efforts into establishing a new order where its great power status would be undisputed. Just one year before committing one of the most unpredictable aggressions in Crimea, the 2013 foreign policy concept already defined Russia as one of the "influential and competitive poles of the modern world" and claimed that "*Russia's foreign policy is transparent, predictable and pragmatic. It is consistent and continuous and reflects the unique role our country has been playing over centuries as a counterbalance in international affairs and the development of global*

[193] Sharafutdinova, *The Red Mirror: Putin's Leadership and Russia's Insecure Identity*, 10.
[194] "The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation" (Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the European Union, 2008), https://russiaeu.ru/userfiles/file/foreign_policy_concept_english.pdf.

civilization."[195] The emphasis on Russia's unique role has already become oft-noted in this chapter, but framing Russia's historical role in international affairs as a "counterbalance" is a vivid representation of Russian foreign policy's turn to the Balancer school that prescribes direct opposition to the US hegemony.

Putin was mainly understood as belonging to another Russian foreign policy school, Great Power Normalizers, which prescribes "selective engagement" and a less confrontational attitude towards the West to focus on economic development. Back in 2005, Tsygankov[196] would argue that Russia indeed aspired for its former great power status but had no intention of violating other independent states' sovereignty for this cause. He claimed that Russia wanted to be a "normal great power" that did not have imperial ambitions and was fully integrated into the international community. This was long over by 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea and got involved in the war in Donbas, if not by 2008, when Russia intervened in Georgia and recognized two Georgian breakaway regions as independent countries.

The emphasis on balancing and independence in Russian foreign policy has later turned into depicting Russia as one of the gravitational centers of the world. In the opening sentences of the foreign policy section of his address to the Federal Assembly in 2019, Putin would declare that Russia could not exist without independence and sovereignty. He added: "Some countries can do this, but not Russia."[197] The peculiar Russia rhetoric once again culminated in the 2023 foreign policy concept, attributing Russia a "special responsibility for maintaining peace and security at the global and regional levels," entitling it with the objective to strengthen Russia's status as one of the independent centers of the world, and "to ensure Russia's interests in the world's oceans, space and airspace." Interestingly, the concept also defined contributing to "the preservation abroad of historical truth and the memory of Russia's role in world history" among the foreign policy objectives.[198]

This particular clause about ensuring the historical truth and memory of Russia's role in world history attunes very much to what Murray calls states' taking control of the meaning

[195] "Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation," Russian Embassy in China, 2013, https://beijing.mid.ru/en/countries/rossiya/kontseptsiya_vneshney_politiki_rossii/.
[196] Tsygankov, "Vladimir Putin's Vision of Russia as a Normal Great Power."
[197] Putin, "Presidential Address to Federal Assembly," February 21, 2019.
[198] "The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation."

of their identities and social fate to avoid social uncertainty and misrecognition.[199] It is astonishing to compare the 2023 foreign policy concept with Putin's address at the UN Millenium Summit in 2000[200], where he would hint that Russia expects reciprocity and demand thick recognition, stating that democracy in international relations requires a "conscious understanding of the diversity of the world civilization."

The year 2000, when the signal for this expectation was given marked a period of difference between the West and the Russians on their interpretation of the end of the Cold War. For the West, it was a mere victory whose consequences Russia must suffer. For Russians, it was a result of constant Western efforts to keep Russia down.[201] At least Russian perception has not changed during Putin's rule, resulting in Russia's independent foreign policy perspective that would later transform into assuming a unique role in international politics. Surely, this unique role also prescribed an independent foreign policy but Russia's new designated role deepened the level of its independent actions and changed the nature of engagement with the West from balancing to confrontation.

3.2.4. Misrecognition in Putin's Foreign Policy until 2008

When an actor attributes itself to a status that is part of its identity and prescribes certain roles, it expects other actors to comply with this role and engage in relations accordingly. Not complying with this role- i.e., misrecognition- denotes a disregard not only for the former's self-understanding but also for the red lines it wishes to preserve when establishing relations. Misrecognition of Russia's great power identity- Russia's particular place in the world and its right to exist as one of the centers of the international system- has been a constant issue in Russian foreign policy. Putin drew attention to the unjust treatment of Russia and the audacity of US unilateral actions as early as 2000, and his grievances only increased in tune with time. When confronted with the question that he had a softer approach towards the West before and what changed his attitude, Putin replied in one interview "I have never changed. I still feel young." jokingly[202], and in another interview, he reiterated

[199] Michelle Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations*, 2018, 48, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190878900.001.0001.
[200] Putin, "Address to the Millenium Summit."
[201] Fyodor Lukyanov, "Putin's Foreign Policy: The Quest to Restore Russia's Rightful Place," *Foreign Affairs*, 2016.
[202] Vladimir Putin, "Interview to German Newspaper Bild. Part 1," President of Russia, January 15, 2016, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/51154.

that he has not changed, he simply had to react to what happened around Russia, counting the incidents of Serbia bombing, NATO expansion, sanctions after Crimea and overthrowing of Yanukovich, asked back: What happened to you?[203]

Until 2008, Putin's perception of Western misrecognition of Russia's identity and interests revolved around the arrangements in the international system after the collapse of the Soviet Union, US unilateralism, the need for a multipolar world, and NATO expansion. These matters had their peculiarities, but the underlying motif in Putin's complaints has been the Western disregard of Russia's role. Putin hinted, for example, that Russia could view NATO expansion differently as long as a new mechanism that will include Russia inside the European security structure is established. Similarly, he repeatedly emphasized that the world has changed since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and Russia does not aim to continue its hostile role toward the West, so he expressed his disappointment on several occasions that others still regarded Russia just the opposite. Integral to this disappointment has been the perception that the West and Russia interpreted the end of the Cold War differently. For Putin and other Russian decision-makers like Yeltsin and Primakov, the Soviet demise did not necessarily mean that Russia became insignificant, the world became unipolar, and the US could go on and act in a unilateral fashion.

3.2.4.1. New (Multipolar) Order and US Unilateralism

Putin claimed in 2000[204] that the Western partners had not yet abandoned the old notions of the Cold War and perceived Russia as a potential aggressor, while Russia managed to do otherwise to a large extent. When asked whether the Cold War is over, he contended positively:

> I think it has long been over. The problem is, that everything that was created during the Cold War to cater to the interests of the Cold War, many of these instruments still survive, live a life of their own and seek to preserve themselves. It is our task to

[203] Vladimir Putin, "Interview to Fox News Channel," President of Russia, July 18, 2018, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58019.
[204] Vladimir Putin, "Interview to 'BBC Breakfast with Frost,'" President of Russia, March 10, 2000, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24194.

> understand the profound changes that have taken place in the world, eliminate every obstacle that stands in the way of cooperation and work together.[205]

It is possible to argue that Russia's enthusiastic cooperation with the US following the 9/11 attacks was seen as an opportunity to prove Russia's changing attitude towards the West in this direction. Russia declared at this time that it would give an unconditional priority to its partnership with the US based on trust.[206] It would not oppose American presence in Central Asia and even in Georgia in the fight against terrorism, would share intelligence on terrorist presence in Afghanistan, and even reconsider its opposition to NATO expansion. It is very telling that then-Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov declared the emergence of a new world order within this atmosphere of cooperation and mutual interests. Russian support for US policies surely did not mean a unipolar world order; Ivanov meant a multipolar world where Russia is again significant in dealing with international security. The crisis in the international system was the moment for Russia to use great power voice.[207]

When Putin felt that these calls were unheard, especially in the face of American unilateralism following 9/11, he urged Americans to use the authority of the UNSC when taking steps in Iraq on several occasions,[208] and he stated that Russia was ready to contribute even under American military leadership as long as the current legal mechanisms of international order were activated.[209]

Similarly, back in 2000, the foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation[210] had already advised against the American inclination for a unipolar world order and unilateral actions devaluing the UN Security Council. Arguing that the most crucial matters of international security cannot be solved in such a way, it pointed out that this could only bring

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[205] Vladimir Putin, "Interview with the American Broadcasting Company ABC," President of Russia, November 7, 2001, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21392.
[206] Dina Rome Spechler, "Russian Foreign Policy During the Putin Presidency: The Impact of Competing Approaches," *Problems of Post-Communism,* 57, no. 5 (2010): 37, https://doi.org/10.2753/PPC1075-8216570503.
[207] It is worthy of note here that the successor of Ivanov, Sergey Lavrov would resort to same understanding later in 2016 by quoting philosopher Ivan Ilyin, someone Putin also appeals in several occasion, when defining a great power as an actor with an aptitude to burden great international tasks creatively and provide the international society a legal idea. Sergey Lavrov, "Russia's Foreign Policy in a Historical Perspective," Russia in Global Affairs, March 30, 2016, https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/russias-foreign-policy-in-a-historical-perspective/
[208] Putin, "Interview with the Wall Street Journal."
[209] Vladimir Putin, "Interview with American Television Channels," President of Russia, September 20, 2003, http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/interviews/22125.
[210] "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation", 2000.

about destabilization, arms race, and weakening of legal international order. In the face of this, Russia would opt for promoting a multipolar world.

On a question about the implications of the US hegemony, Putin explicitly warned in the same year of the danger of a unipolar world and emphasized the need for "balance of interests":

> Our position on that is perfectly clear. The new world order means stable and peaceful development without crises and upheavals. To this end it is necessary to form a multi-polar, if you like, "non-monopolised," system of international relations. A system that accommodates all the diversity of the world and ensures diversity and the balance of interests. Such a world order should be based on collective solution of key problems, supremacy of the law and sweeping democratisation of international relations. That is an objective and natural reflection of the processes connected with the growing inter-dependence of states, globalisation and emerging new challenges and threats to international security. Any other approaches based on anyone's hegemony contradict these realities. They are dangerous and counter-productive. No country, however important, can solve all the world problems single-handed. We seek to build our relations with the United States proceeding from this vision. What we value is mutual assistance, equality and balance of interests.[211]

The problem with the American approach after the end of the Cold War was not only that the US foreign policy was unilateral, but it also targeted Russia. On Russia's delayed accession to the World Trade Organization, Putin proposed that "Russia is being treated like no other country" and preconditions that were not applied to other candidates were being applied to Russia.[212] Putin interprets this situation as a result of the Cold War mentality and views it as undermining Western interests. Similarly, he stated in 2006[213] that considering Russia as an enemy or an opponent that requires to be in check is "a relic of Cold War thinking," and such an approach disregards the geopolitical changes that took place.

In the Munich speech, Putin reprimanded the Western leaders for their unilateral efforts and stated, "Russia – we – are constantly being taught about democracy. But for some reason those who teach us do not want to learn themselves." He emphasized that he opposed

[211] Putin, "Interview with the French Newspaper Le Figaro."
[212] Vladimir Putin, "Interview with the Financial Times," President of Russia, 2001, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21447.
[213] Vladimir Putin, "Interview with NBC Television Channel (USA)," President of Russia, July 12, 2006, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23699.

a unipolar world order not only because it is practically (militarily, politically, and economically) impossible but because there are no moral foundations for modern civilization to be shaped in this way. Interesting to note here that Putin often attributes a moral aspect to Russia's great power status by invoking the Russian role and sacrifices in the Nazi defeat. Emphasizing the lack of moral foundations in efforts to establish a unipolar world not only disregards this but also attributes the US and its allies a victorious position, which has been challenged by several Russian decision-makers, as noted above.

Pointing out the lack of moral foundations of a unipolar world, Putin drew examples of why it cannot work. Unilateral and illegitimate actions have not resolved international problems; rather, they have created even more problems, resulting in more people dying ("Significantly more, significantly more!").[214] Furthermore, the current realities of international order did not match with a unipolar world:

> The combined GDP measured in purchasing power parity of countries such as India and China is already greater than that of the United States. And a similar calculation with the GDP of the BRIC countries – Brazil, Russia, India and China – surpasses the cumulative GDP of the EU. And according to experts this gap will only increase in the future. There is no reason to doubt that the economic potential of the new centres of global economic growth will inevitably be converted into political influence and will strengthen multipolarity.[215]

Such realities convinced Putin that the world has "reached a decisive moment" to reconsider global security architecture. His promotion of a multipolar world has been endless, and he commented much later- 8 months after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, that the main pillar of a multipolar world is the opportunity for any society to choose its own distinct socio-political path and if the privilege to do this is given to Western countries, the rest of the world should also enjoy it: "The world is diverse by nature and Western attempts to squeeze everyone into the same pattern are clearly doomed."[216] Therefore, he claimed, today we witness many alternative models to the Western self-attributed monopoly.

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[214] Vladimir Putin, "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy," President of Russia, February 15, 2007, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034.
[215] Putin.
[216] Vladimir Putin, "Vladimir Putin Meets with Members of the Valdai Discussion Club. Transcript of the Plenary Session of the 19th Annual Meeting," Valdai Club, 2022, https://valdaiclub.com/events/posts/articles/vladimir-putin-meets-with-members-of-the-valdai-club/.

Russian foreign policy practices may have been fruitful in carving out Russia a specific place in the face of US hegemony. But it is hard to be convinced of the legalism and moralism that Putin bases his claims for this status. Even the fact that he does not attribute the same freedom and distinctness theorized in his statements to Ukraine and appeals a very similar unilateralism to his criticism in dealing with the 'Ukraine question' is alone counterproductive to Russian great power status revolving around such principles. When this is the case, it is possible to conclude that the Russian call for multipolarity does not attune with what Ivan Ilyin described as providing creative legal ideas to the international community but as serving Russian great power nationalism only.

3.2.4.2. NATO Expansion

It would be astounding for many to read Putin's reply in 2000 to whether he thought it was possible for Russia to join NATO was "I don't see why not." He would continue to argue that Russia's opposition to NATO expansion in the post-Soviet space was not about Russia's special interests in these regions.[217] It was more about how the configuration of the new state of affairs was disregarding Russia. Pretending that Russia has nothing to do with NATO expansion, he would note, is in vain.

On a question whether Russia felt encircled by NATO in 2000, he responded that they opposed NATO enlargement not because of the fear of encirclement but because of the fact that Russia preferred that European security was ensured by a mechanism that was open to other countries, endowed its members with equal rights and duties and functioned in line with UN Charter and "universally accepted international legal norms."[218] He underlined that NATO sometimes circumvented these norms and acted against its purpose of security.

For Putin, NATO expansion further concretized the line between Russia and other European countries. Stating that Russia does not wish to see new Berlin walls, he reiterated that NATO circumvents UN resolutions and mutual confidence in Europe can be ensured only either by NATO dissolving like the Warsaw Pact[219] or Russia becoming a full member

[217] Putin, "Interview to 'BBC Breakfast with Frost.'"
[218] Putin, "Interview with the French Newspaper Le Figaro."
[219] The dissolution of USSR and the Warsaw Pact were followed by a set of organizations that would substitute some of the functions of these organizations. The successor organization to USSR, the Commonwealth of Independent States (excludes Estonia, Lithuanis, Latvia, Ukraine and Georgia) set forth a free trade area, a single market via Eurasian Economic Union, and a military alliance via Collective Security Treaty Organizaton (CSTO). Not all CIS members have joined these mechanisms but they represent a significant aspect of Russian

of NATO or another security architecture that would include all parties, like OSCE.[220] Thus, Russia would not be a "junior partner" cooperating with NATO; such an arrangement was out of the question, and Russia only wanted equal and mutually beneficial cooperation.[221]

Putin also thought that NATO expansion lacked any practical meaning. On the question of whether he opposed the accession of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia to NATO, Putin drew a picture to convey his opinion. He emphasized that NATO was built to counter the Soviet threat, and there was no Soviet threat anymore. The democratic Russia was one of the countries that emerged as a result of the collapse of that threat. He pointed out that the people on the street in NATO countries would respond to the question whether the inclusion of these Baltic states made them feel more secure; they would probably say no; however, the same question with Russia's accession to NATO would reveal a positive answer simply because Russia was capable of countering the newly emerging threats of 21st century that were much different from the Cold War period, thus could not be resolved by "mechanical enlargements" such as the accession of Baltic states. He continued to underline the need to reformat the quality of the relationship between NATO and Russia and then enlargement would not be a problem. But under the present conditions, he opposed NATO enlargement and reckoned that it made no sense.[222]

Putin's resentment of NATO expansion culminated in his Munich speech's specific section on The Adapted Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, signed in 1999. The former version of the treaty was to govern the limitations of foreign military presence in Europe on the basis of two blocks, NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The adapted version prescribed the limitations based on national ceilings, in other words, countries. Putin complained in Munich that NATO countries had still not ratified the agreement despite

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foreign policy in near abroad. Especially 2000s was marked by Russia's growing emphasis on CSTO in order to counter the US "normative expansion" in the form of NATO expansion and color revolutions in post-Soviet space by mirroring the formation of NATO (see Ruth Deyermond, "The Collective Security Treaty Organization," in *Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy*, ed. Andrei P. Tsygankov (Routledge, 2018), 421–29.) For example, in 2022 January uprising, Kazakhstan invoked the article 4 of the CSTO charter that foresees collective defense in case of a "foreign interference", and a peacekeeping force under CSTO mandate was deployed in Kazakhstan to suppress the uprising. Putin would frame the events as part of Western infiltration to post-Soviet space in the shape of color revolutions and pledge that they would not let such events occur anymore (see Jamie Dettmer, "Putin: No More Color Revolutions," Voice of America, January 10, 2022, https://www.voanews.com/a/putin-no-more-color-revolutions/6390636.html.) The matter of color revolutions will be examined further in the upcoming chapters.

[220] Vladimir Putin, "Interview With the Italian Newspaper 'Corriere Della Sera,'" President of Russia, September 18, 2001, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21286.

[221] Putin, "Interview with the French Newspaper Le Figaro."

[222] Vladimir Putin, "Interview for the National Public Radio," 2001, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21402.

Russia having already done so. Furthermore, Putin protested that while NATO countries proposed that they would not ratify the treaty as long as Russia abided by the flank restrictions that regulated the number of armed forces in designated flank zones like Moldova and Georgia, they increased American presence in other flanks over time. In other words, while Russia gradually withdrew from Georgia and was present in Moldova with 1500 peacekeeping personnel 'protecting Soviet leftover ammunition,' NATO countries were doing vice versa. Infuriated, Putin protested:

> And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended? And what happened to the assurances our western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact? Where are those declarations today? No one even remembers them. But I will allow myself to remind this audience what was said. I would like to quote the speech of NATO General Secretary Mr Woerner in Brussels on 17 May 1990. He said at the time that: "the fact that we are ready not to place a NATO army outside of German territory gives the Soviet Union a firm security guarantee". Where are these guarantees?[223]

To sum up, NATO expansion appears to symbolize for Putin the Western disregard for Russia and the concrete evidence that the US and its partners do not reckon Russia as an equal partner whose security concerns are worthy of consideration. Putin is further aggravated that the US and its allies have used the collapse of the Soviet Union as an opportunity to assert their dominance in the post-Soviet space. Thus, it is not only a geopolitical challenge that Russia experiences via NATO expansion but also a humiliation, rubbing salt in the "wounds of the past." While Russia struggled with the trauma of the Soviet collapse and got over its detriments, the US and its allies worked to freeze Russia in time and treat it with its status in the 1990s.

3.3. Conclusion

Vladimir Putin's formulation of a foreign policy based on Russian greatness and sui generis interests has resulted in Russia's involvement in many conflicts in post-Soviet space and beyond. His narrative of Russian history and social formation as well as Russia's increasing material capabilities- economic growth and military power- designated Russia as one of the centers of a multipolar world. Although decision-makers before Putin and his

[223] Putin, "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy."

success in Russia's development also considered the end of the USSR as the beginning of a multipolar world rather than US hegemony, they lacked the necessary tools to ascertain this vision.

In the name of an independent foreign policy, Vladimir Putin has utilized a combination of direct communication of intent and hidden objectives in using these tools. He has conveyed Russian grievances over its treatment by the Euro-Atlantic block, especially the US, on many platforms, but he has also crossed the boundaries that he drew himself. Convinced that the Euro-Atlantic block holds an unwavering disregard for Russia's rightful status, Putin made use of Russia's growing capabilities in the form of military interventions to signal his resoluteness in demanding respect for Russian interests- to block NATO expansion and be included in the resolution of Libya and Syria crises. His justification for Russian interventions included a considerable degree of "whataboutism," pointing out the similar actions taken by the US in other countries and an adamant belief in Russia's right to engage in such actions. The upcoming chapters will deal with how Russian perception that its great power status is not recognized by the West paves the way for military interventions in Georgia, Syria and Ukraine- all of which has a particular importance in Russia-West relations.

4. RUSSIAN INTERVENTION IN GEORGIA (2008)

> The most dangerous combination of symbolic and material aspects of Russia's existence includes its growing sense of humiliation by Western powers accompanied by Russia's rising material capabilities.[224]

The Russian intervention in Georgia in 2008 is widely accepted as a turning point in both Russia-West relations and Russian foreign policy. After all, the Russia-Georgia War of August 2008 marked the first direct intervention of Russia to a former member of the USSR. It was also the first conventional war in Europe in the twenty-first century, albeit not long-lasting. It was popularly dubbed as "five-day war," considering the beginning of Russian incursion into Georgia on 7 August and halting its advance on 12 August. Still, Russian withdrawal from the Georgian territory (except for the two breakaway regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia) took longer, and the repercussions of the conflict – Russia's recognition of the two self-claimed republics on 26 August, for example- continued to emerge. The war also changed the course of Russia-US relations, resulting in a "reset" and reconsideration of NATO expansion in post-Soviet space. Although this rapprochement did not last long, subsequent Russian interventions in Ukraine in 2014 and 2022 were considered as Russia's application of the same scenario in Georgia to Ukraine.[225] This is why the Georgia-Russia war mattered more than its scope, and examining it has broader implications than the case itself.

Considering the emphasis on the role of the president in Russian foreign policy in the previous chapter, it should be noted that the president in Russia was the newly elected Dmitry Medvedev when Russian intervention in Georgia took place. The constitution of Russia did not allow Vladimir Putin to run for a third presidential term in 2008. Thus, he had to leave the presidential seat to Medvedev and was appointed as prime minister for the second time. Many analysts had suspicions that this new formation of the rule- Putin-Medvedev tandemocracy- was pre-agreed or that Putin continued to have its heavy influence in Russian

[224] Andrei P. Tsygankov and Matthew Tarver-Wahlquist, "Duelling Honors: Power, Identity and the Russia-Georgia Divide," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 5, no. 4 (2009): 318, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-8594.2009.00095.x.

[225] Natia Seskuria, "Russia Is Reenacting Its Georgia Playbook in Ukraine," *Foreign Policy*, 2022, https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/02/22/russia-ukraine-invasion-georgia-2008-south-ossetia-tskhinvali/.

politics, especially foreign policy.[226] In fact, Putin himself stated prior to his candidacy for a third presidential term that he and Medvedev had an agreement on their course[227], which makes the case that Putin actually was never overshadowed by Medvedev's presidency.

In revealing the recognitive dynamics and Russian status-seeking motives in its intervention in Georgia, this chapter uses statements from both Medvedev and Putin. Therefore, this arrangement between Putin and Medvedev does not affect the method of this research that focuses on the president. After all, Putin and Medvedev did not differ in their speeches about the Russian military activities in Georgia, and the decision to take military action was made unanimously in the Kremlin.[228] It should also be noted that Putin initially underlined that the decision to intervene was made by the President, not himself.[229] However, he later reassured of his role in the decision, stating that he had talked to Medvedev on the phone twice about what to do in the early hours of the war, although Medvedev claimed that he had not spoken to Putin on that day.[230] This difference in accounts of their weight on the intervention decision was probably about the rift between the two in the face of the 2012 presidential elections. The rumors that Medvedev intended to run for a second term, diverting from Putin's claimed agreement between them, and a significant degree of public support for Medvedev pushed Putin to draw attention to his role. This role may indeed be as crucial as Putin claimed. Ismayilov reports, for example, that Putin had a swift meeting with the commanders in North Ossetia as the war broke out,[231] which paves the way for the conclusion that Putin was, in fact, included in the decision to intervene in Georgia.

Taking these into account, this chapter first provides the background of the Russia-Georgia, Georgia-South Ossetia, and Georgia-Abkhazia conflict, in which the events leading up to Russia's intervention in Georgia are detailed as well. Second, the chapter lays the ground for framing the Russia-Georgia war as a Russian intervention. Third, it sets out the

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[226] Alexander Osipovich, "Putin, Not Medvedev, Remains Master of Russian Foreign Policy," Eurasianet, 2010, https://eurasianet.org/putin-not-medvedev-remains-master-of-russian-foreign-policy.
[227] "Putin Announces Presidential Bid, With Medvedev Backing," Radio Free Europe, 2011, https://www.rferl.org/a/medvedev_says_putin_should_be_next_russian_president/24338593.html.
[228] Elnur Ismayilov, *Russia's Military Interventions in Georgia and Ukraine: Interests, Motives, and Decision-Making* (Washington, DC: Academica Press, 2021).
[229] Vladimir Putin, "CNN Interviews Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin," Government of the Russian Federation, 2008, http://archive.government.ru/eng/docs/1697/.
[230] Fred Weir, "Was Putin in Charge during Georgia War? Medvedev Begs to Differ.," Christian Science Monitor, 2012, https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2012/0810/Was-Putin-in-charge-during-Georgia-war-Medvedev-begs-to-differ.
[231] Ismayilov, *Russia's Military Interventions in Georgia and Ukraine: Interests, Motives, and Decision-Making*.

role of Georgia in Russia's great power identity and status-seeking, followed by an examination of Russian justification for the intervention. Fourth, the chapter argues for looking at the recognitive dynamics in understanding the Russian rationale in the intervention and claims that Russia sought status in Georgia by imitating American unilateralism in Kosovo and countering Western complicity in the Georgian offensive that has roots in NATO expansion and color revolutions. Finally, the chapter evaluates whether Russia achieved more recognition of its great power status by and after the intervention.

4.1. Background

The collapse of the USSR and the independence of Georgia in the early 90s marked two different but sometimes intertwined conflicts in the Georgian territory. South Ossetia and Abkhazia conflicts dominated not only Georgian security and politics but also Georgia-Russia relations due to the latter's ostensible support and protectoral role for the breakaway regions. While both conflicts have roots in the Russian Civil War, the weakening of Soviet rule at the end of the 1980s can be considered the major factor contributing to the current situation in these regions.

The thrilled atmosphere of possible Georgian independence during this period did not resonate with the Abkhaz and South Ossetian leaders. The Abkhaz appeal to remain within the Soviet Union and the South Ossetian request to be recognized as an autonomous republic rather than an oblast went unheeded, resulting in the outbreak of bloody separatist clashes. The war in Abkhazia developed more violently than the one in South Ossetia, and the elimination and forced displacement of the Georgian population in the Abkhazia region was condemned by various actors like OSCE, UNHCR, and Human Rights Watch. As part of the ceasefire agreement with Russia, Georgia joined the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in 1993, and Russian forces intervened in the conflict and deployed between Georgian and Abkhazian lines.[232] This would later on be legitimized as a peacekeeping operation by CIS.[233] The hostilities between Georgian and Abkhazian forces continued intermittently in the following decade. Abkhazia was not initially a party to the war in August 2008, but on 9 August, two days after the Georgian offensive to Tskhinvali started, the Abkhazian forces opened a second front for Georgia in the Kodori Valley to dispel the Georgian troops there.

[232] S. Neil Macfarlane, "On the Front Lines in the near Abroad: The CIS and the OSCE in Georgia' s Civil Wars," *Third World Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1997): 514.
[233] Macfarlane, 514.

At the end of the August 2008 war, Abkhazia, alongside South Ossetia, gained official recognition from Russia.



Figure 5. Georgia with Breakaway Regions[234]

The contested territory of South Ossetia was created as an autonomous region within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic through a Soviet administrative decision in 1922. The designated borders of South Ossetia included many Georgian villages, sowing the seeds of ethnic strife. The Supreme Soviet of Georgian SSR revoked the autonomous status of South Ossetia in 1990 in the face of growing South Ossetian nationalism and appeals for independence.

An independence vote resulting in the de facto independence of South Ossetia in January 1992 was followed by a ceasefire agreement in June of the same year. As per the following Sochi Agreement, the parties created a peacekeeping organization- the Joint Control Commission constituting a peacekeeping force made up of Russian, Georgian, North Ossetian and South Ossetian militia deployed in the region. OSCE representatives would also monitor the situation.[235] The conflict remained frozen for the following decade until

[234] "Abkhazia Profile," *BBC News*, May 23, 2012, sec. Europe, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18175030.
[235] Bertil Nygren, "The 2008 Russia-Georgia War," in *Routledge Handbook of Russian Security*, ed. Roger E. Kanet (Routledge, 2019), 377.

Mikheil Saakashvili came to power, toppling Eduard Shevardnadze with the Rose Revolution in November 2003. The re-ignition of the conflict in South Ossetia pertains to several developments unfolding after the revolution.

Despite being uneasy with "color revolutions," Russia did not dismiss possibilities for cooperation with Saakashvili immediately and, in fact, helped him during the Adjara uprising of 2004. Russian influence in the Autonomous Republic of Adjara was unequivocal; it had a military base and close ties with the chairman of the Adjara government, Aslan Abashidze, and prominent Russian businessmen were actively involved in the region.[236] Despite the very possibility of turning this region into another frozen conflict and humiliation that the Western-inclined Saakashvili had to deal with in his early tenure, Russia's strategy was to intervene and evacuate Abashidze by helicopter following his resignation.[237] This move was interpreted as Russia's quid pro quo for Saakashvili in exchange for not following a NATO membership path.[238]

Having successfully suppressed the Adjara uprising in May 2004, Saakashvili promised and sought to provide Georgia with territorial integrity by retrieving the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions and ending separatism. Let alone feeling obliged to seek closer ties with Moscow, it is possible that he interpreted Russian help at this moment as approval of Georgia's reintegration with the two breakaway regions.[239] Furthermore, Saakashvili portrayed himself as the staunch supporter of the color revolutions at the expense of the Moscow-friendly leaders of the post-Soviet space and endorsed US foreign policy so much that Georgian troops joined the coalition forces in Iraq in 2004.[240]

Against the backdrop of these developments, the disagreements between Georgia and Russia started to dominate the bilateral relations. The existence of Russian military bases within Georgia was a consistent matter of dispute between the countries. Saakashvili administration insisted on the withdrawal of Russian bases in many platforms, while Russia took its time to fulfil this request and was ambiguous in its planning.[241] Russia even argued

[236] Maxim A. Suchkov, "The Caucasus," in *Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy*, ed. Andrei P. Tsygankov (Routledge, 2018), 318.
[237] Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist, "Duelling Honors: Power, Identity and the Russia-Georgia Divide," 2009, 310.
[238] Suchkov, "The Caucasus," 318.
[239] Suchkov, 318.
[240] Dimitri K. Simes, "Losing Russia - The Costs of Renewed Confrontation," *Foreign Affairs*, 2007, 45.
[241] Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist, "Duelling Honors: Power, Identity and the Russia-Georgia Divide," 2009, 310.

that it reserved the right to use force preventively within Georgia against potential terrorists.[242] Insecure and distrusting, Georgia started to pay attention to military development with the help of NATO arms supply and training. Prior to the 2008 war, Georgian military expenditures increased considerably. Kofman cites SIPRI data demonstrating that military spending's share in Georgian GDP rose from 1.1 per cent in 2003 to 9.2 per cent in 2007 and concludes that Georgia's military was the most expanding army in post-Soviet space before the 2008 war, engendering its capacity being adequate not only to seize South Ossetia and Abkhazia but also deter Russia from intervention.[243]

Russia was not indifferent to Saakashvili's military and "anti-Russia" attitude. In 2006, a delegitimization campaign in Russian official statements and media started to portray Saakashvili as "authoritarian, anti-democratic, militaristic, reckless and unstatesmanlike"[244] while Saakashvili would compare Russia with "barbarous tribes of Huns." The campaign to undermine Saakashvili and the Rose Revolution was followed by economic pressure on Georgia. The explosions in the Mozdok-Tbilisi natural gas pipeline in January 2006 were perceived by Georgians as Russian punitive actions against Georgia. The explosions took place in Russia's North Ossetia region and coincided with a very cold period, leaving two-thirds of Georgians without gas supply and causing blackouts in Tbilisi.[245] The delay in the repair of the pipeline further frustrated Georgians. Later in the spring of the same year, disclosing that they did not satisfy the Russian health standards, Russia banned the import of the two goods that have the largest share in Georgian exports to Russia- Georgian wine and mineral water.[246] In September 2006, Georgia arrested four Russian officers on accusations of espionage. Vladimir Putin reacted to the detaining of Russian nationals as an "act of state terrorism with hostage-taking," recalled the Russian ambassador to Georgia and declared that Russia had suspended the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia.[247] A

[242] Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist, 311.
[243] Michael Kofman, "The August War, Ten Years On: A Retrospective on the Russo-Georgian War," War on the Rocks, August 17, 2018, https://warontherocks.com/2018/08/the-august-war-ten-years-on-a-retrospective-on-the-russo-georgian-war/.
[244] Gail W. Lapidus, "Between Assertiveness and Insecurity: Russian Elite Attitudes and the Russia-Georgia Crisis," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 23, no. 2 (2007): 152, https://doi.org/10.2747/1060-586X.23.2.138.
[245] "Mozdok-Tbilisi Gas Pipeline Restored," The Australian Pipeliner, February 7, 2006, https://www.pipeliner.com.au/internationalnews/mozdok-tbilisi-gas-pipeline-restored/.
[246] Lapidus, "Between Assertiveness and Insecurity: Russian Elite Attitudes and the Russia-Georgia Crisis," 152.
[247] "Putin Fury at Georgia 'Terrorism,'" *BBC News*, October 2, 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5397102.stm.

month later, Gazprom announced that it would double the gas price for Georgia.[248] Russia also deported, in retaliation, 2000 Georgian nationals living in Russia.

Russian attitude towards the breakaway regions in Georgia was further concretized after the espionage controversy. No matter that some Western countries were helpful in alleviating the crisis and urged Tbilisi not to use force in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Russia did not perceive these actions as a recognition of its interests.[249] After the incident, a top Russian official- Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov would refer to Abkhazia and South Ossetia as "republics" and the leaders of these regions as "presidents," marking the first time that Russia depicted these regions as such.[250]

The rising tension was transformed into a military sphere, too. Several clashes between the Russian peacekeeping force and Georgia, as well as between Georgia and South Ossetian militia, took place, especially since 2006. One example is the Russian air forces' striking some Georgian administrative buildings and radar centers. In April 2008, Russia unilaterally increased its peacekeeping forces in South Ossetia by another 1500 personnel. At the same time, ethnic Russians were appointed as prime ministers, security ministers, and defense ministers by the government of South Ossetia.[251] The defense minister was even a former Russian general.[252] In April- the same month when the NATO Bucharest Summit was held- Russia established formal relations with two breakaway republics.

In May, additional Russian troops entered Abkhazia "to repair infrastructure," as well as additional paratroopers and artillery were stationed at the border. This was perceived by Georgians as preparations for intervention and Medvedev assured Saakashvili that this was not the case.[253] The tension between Georgia and Russia culminated in the summer when Russia initiated a military exercise titled "Caucasus Border" on July 6th, and the NATO-Georgia joint exercise began on July 15th. Until the eruption of the conflict, Georgian and

[248] Lapidus, "Between Assertiveness and Insecurity: Russian Elite Attitudes and the Russia-Georgia Crisis," 153.
[249] Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist, "Duelling Honors: Power, Identity and the Russia-Georgia Divide," 2009, 321.
[250] Lapidus, "Between Assertiveness and Insecurity: Russian Elite Attitudes and the Russia-Georgia Crisis," 154.
[251] Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist, "Duelling Honors: Power, Identity and the Russia-Georgia Divide," 2009, 312.
[252] Nygren, "The 2008 Russia-Georgia War," 378.
[253] Sophia Kishkovsky, "Georgia Is Warned by Russia Against Plans to Join NATO," *The New York Times*, June 7, 2008, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/07/world/europe/07russia.html.

South Ossetian forces kept exchanging fire. Although the Russian exercises ended by 2 August, the Russian troops did not withdraw from the region.[254]

4.2. The Intervention

On 7 August, Saakashvili ordered the Georgian military to attack South Ossetia and capture Tskhinvali. Although the Georgian army succeeding marching into South Ossetia and taking the city center of its capital, Russian air forces started bombing Georgian positions both in South Ossetia and Georgia proper on 8 August, and the Georgian army was not able to hold positions. By 9 August, Russia had already outnumbered the Georgian troops, and Abkhazia had opened a second front against Georgia. Russia did not accept Georgia's offer of ceasefire on 10 August, and Russian troops continued organizing air attacks against Georgian positions in Abkhazia, Gori, and in the vicinity of Tbilisi. The situation for Georgia was so dire that the army was ordered to retreat to Tbilisi and focus on protecting the capital.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy brokered a ceasefire agreement with President Medvedev on 12 August. Although the agreement included "the absolute cessation of all hostilities" and that "The Armed Forces of the Russian Federation must withdraw to the line where they were stationed prior to the beginning of hostilities," Russian operations continued in the following days, Georgia protesting the delay on the withdrawal of Russian troops. On 17 August German Chancellor Angela Merkel also tried to mediate the withdrawal of Russian troops in an effort of shuttle diplomacy between Moscow and Tbilisi. Three days later, Russia rejected a French-sponsored UNSC resolution about the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia and the implementation of the agreement of 12 August.[255] Until 26 August, Russia reinforced its positions in the breakaway regions and continued crippling Georgia's capabilities and control. On 26 August, Russia officially recognized the

[254] Nygren, "The 2008 Russia-Georgia War," 378.
[255] Svante E. Cornell, Johanna Popjanevski, and Niklas Nilsson, "Russia's War in Georgia: Causes and Implications for Georgia and the World" (Nacka: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2008), 19–20, https://silkroadstudies.org/resources/pdf/SilkRoadPapers/2008_08_PP_CornellPopjanevskiNillson_Russia-Georgia.pdf.

independence of the two breakaway regions and completed the withdrawal of its troops from Georgia proper only on 8 October.[256]

As the account of the process above indicated, the first shot in the Georgia-Russia war was actually fired by Georgia. In defense of its attack on Tskhinvali, Georgia claimed that Russia had prepared for intervention prior to 7 August, and actually, Russian troops had already entered the region through the Roki tunnel connecting North Ossetia to South Ossetia.[257] On the other hand, Russia initially justified its intervention, claiming that Georgia launched genocidal atrocities in South Ossetia, and they had to stop this. Both these claims lacked hard evidence.[258]

The three-volume, nearly 1800-page long report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia,[259] established by a decision of the Council of the European Union in December 2008, concluded that it was Georgia who started the war but Russia had provoked it for a long time and responded disproportionately[260]. The head of the fact-finding report team, Swiss diplomat Heidi Tagliavina, commented:"…there was no massive Russian military invasion underway, which had to be stopped by Georgian military forces shelling Tskhinvali", still Russia broke international law because "the military action by the Russian Armed Forces on Georgian territory, (was) far beyond the needs of a proportionate defense of Russian Peace Keepers in Tskhinvali."[261]

Although one may expect that the initial Georgian offensive in South Ossetia might rule out the case of the August 2008 war as part of Russian assertive foreign policy actions, this aspect of the conflict rendered it a case of military intervention. The scale of Russian response to Georgia's offensive in South Ossetia and the following recognition of the two breakaway republics exceeded the practical requirements of "protecting Russian

[256] "Russia Hands over Control of Georgian Buffer Zones to EU," Sputnik International, 2008, https://sputnikglobe.com/20081009/117637460.html.
[257] C. j Chivers, "Georgia Offers Fresh Evidence on War's Start," *The New York Times*, September 16, 2008, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/16/world/europe/16georgia.html.
[258] Samuel Charap et al., "Russia's Military Interventions: Patterns, Drivers, and Signposts" (RAND Corporation, September 27, 2021), 84, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA444-3.html.
[259] "Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, Report, Volume I-III, 2009," Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law, accessed May 12, 2024, https://www.mpil.de/en/pub/publications/archive/independent_international_fact.cfm.
[260] Shaun Walker, "Georgia Began War with Russia, but It Was Provoked, Inquiry Finds," *The Independent*, September 30, 2009, sec. News, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/georgia-began-war-with-russia-but-it-was-provoked-inquiry-finds-1795744.html.
[261] "Georgia 'triggered' War with Russia, EU Investigation Finds," France 24, September 30, 2009, 24, https://www.france24.com/en/20090930-georgia-war-russia-eu-south-ossetia-tskhinvali-putin-military.

peacekeepers and citizens." Instead, corresponding to Vertzberger's definition of intervention presented in the introductory chapter, the Russian actions aimed coercively affecting Georgian foreign policy inclinations towards the West as well as the secessionist process between the two regions and Georgia. Vladimir Putin would later frame the use of extensive force in Georgia as a punishment for an aggressor as well. Considering also Russian disapproval of the Saakashvili government and Foreign Minister Lavrov's request from US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that Saakashvili must be dismissed for the solution of the conflict, it can be argued that Russia also sought regime change with its military activities in Georgia. All these aspects turn the Russian response in Georgia beyond a self-defense case and an intervention.

4.3. The Significance of the Intervention Venue and Russian Justification for the Intervention

4.3.1. The Significance of the Intervention Venue for Russia

Chapter 2 underlined that the intervention venue must be a part of the recognition games between the intervening actor and its interlocutor. The degree to which the intervening actor attaches importance to the intervention venue as part of its great power identity and status considerations can be determinant in the intervention decision. The importance of the intervention venue for the intervening actor's identity renders the intervention symbolically significant as well as impacts how the actor perceives the material benefits from the intervention. Evoking this tenet of recognitive dynamics of intervention, it should be noted that Georgian foreign policy and the situation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia before the 2008 war have been substantial in Moscow's foreign policy considerations. The ethnic tensions, the increasing Islamic radicalism, and the competition for energy reserves in the Caspian basin already made the Caucasus a source of "chronic instability" for Russia[262], but Russian involvement in the region has had great power status aspect as well.

Russia's specific policy choices for this region have been rooted in its foreign policy formulations since the Yeltsin era. The previous chapter demonstrated that great power identity has been the dominant factor shaping Russian foreign policy through different leaders and doctrines. As such, Russia's attitude towards post-Soviet space derived from this

[262] Suchkov, "The Caucasus," 311.

identity and remained largely the same since the formulation of the near abroad (*blizhneye zarubyezhe*) doctrine in 1993-1994. The doctrine committed Russian foreign policy to (1) maintaining Russian military presence in CIS countries, in other words, dictating to CIS countries that Russia has the right to hold military bases in their territory, (2) stopping anti-Russian influences in this region, (3) defending the rights of ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking population.[263]

The doctrine was formulated against the backdrop of the conflicts following the breakup of the Soviet Union. In 1993, President Yeltsin declared that "the time has come for the relevant international organizations, including the UN, to grant Russia special powers as the guarantor of peace and stability on the territory of the former USSR."[264] Considering how harshly Foreign Minister Kozyrev has been criticized for his "soft" approach to the West, it is unanticipated that he was also one of the proponents of the near abroad doctrine. He stated in a meeting with the Russian ambassadors to CIS countries that post-Soviet space constituted vital interests for Russia[265] and paved the way for further Russian assertion in this region. Framing Russia's vital interests this way, Russia's CIS policy prescribed Russian military presence in these countries, from which threats to these interests emanate.[266] In explaining this approach, Kozyrev, similar to Yeltsin, would attribute Russia's role to regional security at such a level that he would ask the Western actors to recognize Russia's special relations with CIS countries and responsibility in the region; otherwise, he argued, another Yugoslavia scenario would take place.[267] He would seek, through diplomatic efforts, UN endorsement for the Russian troops already existing in the conflictual regions of post-Soviet space, but when the UN declined this request, Kozyrev declared that Russia would no longer pursue approval in its peacekeeping operations in the CIS region.[268]

Echoing the discussion on Russian temporal status inconsistency in the previous chapter, Litera mentions that the existence of CIS countries was also considered a "temporary phenomenon" for some top officials in the Kremlin. For example, A. Migranyan- a member of the Presidential Council, the advisory board Yeltsin established to make effective decisions during the tumultuous 1990s - would argue in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* that

[263] Bohuslav Litera, "The Kozyrev Doctrine - a Russian Variation on the Monroe Doctrine," *Perspectives*, no. 4 (Winter -1995 1994): 51.
[264] Litera, 50.
[265] Litera, 45.
[266] Litera, 45.
[267] Litera, 47.
[268] Litera, 50.

the borders of some CIS countries, especially Ukraine and Kazakhstan, were artificial and had to be redrawn in a way to include their Russian-speaking populations. Furthermore, he considered creating ethnically Russian formations within these countries a possibility.[269] Although Litera was suspicious about whether Migranyan's thoughts were dominant in the Kremlin, Russia pursued a similar path since then, wielding already existing ethnic Russians and creating new compatriots through passportization in Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, and Kazakhstan for influence. Still, in 1994, Litera resembled the new Russian near abroad doctrine to the Monroe doctrine and, in a remarkable foresight, argued that the Russian foreign policy formulation in this line would lead to "the doctrinal possibility of Russian intervention in regional confrontations."[270]

The significance of CIS countries as a region where Russia holds exclusive interests was also a part of Primakov doctrine that became dominant after Kozyrev's replacement with Primakov. Primakov assumed the seat of the foreign minister at the dawn of the first NATO enlargement wave after the collapse of the Soviet Union. While in the early years of the Russian Federation, foreign policy regarding CIS was more about resisting the decline of Russia and addressing the thirty million Russians that found themselves as minorities in other countries, it had an intersubjective aspect anymore that required preventing US influence in the region. Thus, the Primakov doctrine was more confrontational than the former and centered on Russia's insistence on a multipolar world order, rejecting US unilateralism. Putin's early tenure differed from Primakov in terms of having a less confrontational approach and less prioritizing the CIS integration in the face of the economic problems Russia was facing. Still, he did not differ from his predecessors regarding Russia's role in the region vis-à-vis the Western block. Back in 1999, he also designated CIS as a special area of interest and formulated Russia-EU relations along this line:[271]

> "As a world power situated on two continents, Russia should retain its freedom to determine and implement its foreign and domestic policies, its status and advantages of a Euro-Asian state and largest country of the CIS. The "development of partnership with the EU should contribute to consolidating Russia's role as the leading power in shaping a new system of interstate political and economic relations in the CIS area" and thus,

[269] Litera, 46.
[270] Litera, 47.
[271] Stephen Blank, "From Neglect to Duress: The West and the Georgian Crisis Before the 2008 War," in *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*, ed. Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr (M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 109.

> Russia would "oppose any attempts to hamper economic integration in the CIS (that may be made by the EU), including through 'special relations' with individual CIS member states to the detriment of Russia's interests."

Putin clearly considered that the CIS region made up a natural domain for Russia and that any large-scale interference in the CIS region by the EU was a breach of Russian interests. Similarly, Putin's defense minister Sergey Ivanov proposed in 2006 Baltic States Media Forum reaching a certain understanding between NATO and the Collective Security Treaty Organization regarding the CIS region [272]:

> "The next logical step on the path of reinforcing international security may be to develop a cooperation mechanism between NATO and the CSTO, followed by a clear division of spheres of responsibility. This approach offers the prospect of enabling us to possess a sufficiently reliable and effective leverage for taking joint action in crisis situations in various regions of the world."

Although Russia's expectations regarding CIS countries and the Western involvement there have been very clear, NATO followed the opposite course in Georgia, launching the Individual Partnership Action Plan in 2004 and Intensified Dialogue with Georgia in 2006[273]. In this regard, Russia made sure that the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions were economically and politically dependent on Russia and provided many South Ossetians and Abkhazians with Russian passports.[274] By 2006, 90% of the Abkhazian and South Ossetian population had Russian passports.[275] The passportization policy aimed crippling Georgia's intentions to resolve the matter militarily and attributed to Russia responsibility. This policy also paved the way for the later argument that Russia sought to protect the dignity and rights of its compatriots and citizens via the intervention in Georgia. Furthermore, Russian leadership had developed a latent view that these regions belonged to Russia, manifesting itself in Vladimir Putin's statement after the intervention: "What did you want us to do? … When an aggressor comes into **your territory**, you need to punch him in the face- an aggressor needs to be punished".[276] The Russian-supported South Ossetian leadership does

[272] Blank, 109.
[273] Elias Götz, "Taking the Longer View: A Neoclassical Realist Account of Russia's Neighbourhood Policy," *Europe-Asia Studies* 74, no. 9 (2022): 1729–63, https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2022.2120183.
[274] Kofman, "The August War, Ten Years On."
[275] Nicu Popescu, "'Outsourcing' de Facto Statehood Russia and the Secessionist Entities in Georgia and Moldova" (Center for Europen Policy Studies, 2006), 5, https://cdn.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/1361.pdf.
[276] Bridget Kendall, "Putin Defends Georgia Offensive," BBC News, September 11, 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7611482.stm.

not differ on this matter either, considering several proposals to join Russia in the last two decades. Most recently, a possible referendum to decide this has come to the attention of news outlets in March 2024.[277]

Similarly, in Putin's CNN interview following the intervention, he provided a historical reading of the situation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia to support these regions' claim for independence. Asserting that Ossetia, Georgia, and Abkhazia became parts of the Russian Empire during the 17th and 18th centuries upon 'their own will,' he draws attention to the imperial administrative arrangements that placed South Ossetia within the administrative jurisdiction of Tbilisi Province, with which Ossetians were not contented. When the Empire was dissolved in 1917, Georgia declared independence but Ossetians wished to remain within Russia. Later on, underlining Stalin's Georgian origin, Putin suggested that it was Stalin who ordered these territories to remain within Georgia.[278] In his selective reading of the history of the situation, Putin delegitimized the Georgian claims over these regions, where Georgians were subjected to ethnic cleansing, and underlined their connection to Russia. This kind of historical arguments would be a routine practice in the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

All in all, Russia highly regarded its bilateral relations with Georgia and how these relations were affected by Georgia's Western inclinations because of Russia's foreign policy doctrines that have been loaded with restoring Russian influence in the CIS region and prescribed preventing Western influence there. These doctrines foresaw Russian military presence in South Ossetia, as in many other conflictual regions under the façade of peacekeeping, and helped Russia manipulate the situation there when Georgia declared its intentions to join the Euro-Atlantic bloc. Russia's persistence in viewing Georgia as part of its own civilizational domain was concretized by Vladimir Putin's interview with CNN after the intervention, where he depicted the Russia-Georgia war as a tragedy because the ancient Georgian culture has become part of Russia's multinational culture, and from this point of view, the conflict had a "tinge of civil war" dimension for Russians.[279] As the previous chapter underlined, Russia's emphasis on its multinational existence represented its exceptionalism and great power identity, and Georgia has become a venue for Russia to

[277] "Breakaway Georgian Region Is Discussing Becoming Part of Russia, Says Local Official," Reuters, March 17, 2024, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/breakaway-georgian-region-is-discussing-becoming-part-russia-says-local-official-2024-03-17/.
[278] Putin, "CNN Interviews Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin."
[279] Putin.

realize this identity and could not evade entangling in Russia's status-seeking vis-à-vis the Euro-Atlantic bloc. Examining Russian justifications for the intervention reveals these dynamics.

4.3.2. Russian Justification for Intervening in Georgia: Self-Defense and Protecting Russian Nationals

A closer look at the Russian justification for intervening in Georgia demonstrates that Russian calculations in the decision of the intervention went further than the practically necessary campaign to implement its peacekeeping mission and, in the worst scenario, retaliate for the Georgian troops attacking South Ossetia. Russian claims for the legality of its actions in Georgia fall mostly within a loose interpretation of international law. Furthermore, the military preparations and the collective naturalization of the South Ossetian population into Russian citizenship indicate that Russian intervention was premeditated. Therefore, it only makes sense to examine the broader dynamics that encouraged Russian decision-makers to conduct an intervention in Georgia.

One line of Russian justifications for the intervention asserts that the intervention was entirely in accordance with international law, as the UN Charter article 51 endorses the right to self-defense. This tenet of Russian argument directed to the international audience was crucial for the integrity of the Russian legalism detailed in the previous chapter. Russia could not simply breach international law when accusing the US of unilateralism and disregard of international law, intervening in other countries without UNSC authorization, especially in Iraq.

In this regard, the Russian official terminology refrained from using the phrase 'military intervention' and representing the conflict as a war between Georgia and Russia.[280] Rather, Russia argued that its actions constituted a peacekeeping response in the face of the Georgian offensive.[281] Putin argued, for instance, that Russian actions were in line with international law as the attacks on the Russian peacekeepers and the peacekeeping posts were equal to attacking Russia.[282] In his CNN interview just after the intervention on 28

[280] Roy Allison, "The Russian Case for Military Intervention in Georgia: International Law, Norms and Political Calculation," *European Security* 18, no. 2 (2009): 174, https://doi.org/10.1080/09662830903468734.
[281] Allison, 174.
[282] Vladimir Putin, "Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Interviewed by the German ARD TV Channel," Government of the Russian Federation, August 29, 2008, http://archive.government.ru/eng/docs/1758/.

August 2008, he protested that Russia was portrayed as the aggressor in Georgia when it was the Georgian army who fired the first shots, outnumbered Russian peacekeepers by 1:6, and attacked civilian areas as well. He also claimed they tried to contact Georgian leadership during this time but were unanswered.[283] Similarly, President Medvedev would argue after the ceasefire negotiations with French President Nicolas Sarkozy that the intervention was, in fact, a peacekeeping operation:

> "First, we protected Russian Federation citizens living in South Ossetia. Second, we restored the status quo and defended law and order in accordance with the international agreements signed in 1992 and subsequent years, upon which conflict resolution efforts in this region have been based. In other words, we have acted in full accordance with our peacekeepers' mandate, expanding it only as much as these regrettable circumstances required."[284]

Evidently, Russian decisionmakers considered that the scale of the intervention was necessarily increased in order to counter the Georgian offensive and "protect Russian citizens." Putin claimed elsewhere, for instance, that the scale of the intervention was wider than South Ossetia because the Georgian attacks were orchestrated from various points within Georgia. Therefore, they needed to launch the operation at the radar and control centers that reached beyond Tskhinvali- the capital of South Ossetia. He even went further and drew and analogy from the occupation of Berlin in the Second World War. He suggested that the coalition forces did not stop at Berlin and marched in because they needed to punish the aggressor. For Putin, Russia also had to do the same in Georgia.[285]

The framing of the scale of the Russian response in this way is problematic in its claim for legality. First, Russia's restoration of the status quo alongside South Ossetian militia was not justified as international law did not endorse an intervention to assist an opposition within another state. Although Russia interprets UN Charter article 51 as approving of its intervention as a third party to the conflict, Russian activities could only be allowed within the territory of South Ossetia.[286] Russia could simply evacuate its peacekeeping force

[283] Putin, "CNN Interviews Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin."
[284] Dmitry Medvedev, "Press Statement Following Negotiations with French President Nicolas Sarkozy," President of Russia, August 21, 2008, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/1072.
[285] Vladimir Putin, "Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Met with Members of the Valdai International Discussion Club," Government of the Russian Federation, 2008, http://archive.premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/1897/print/.
[286] Allison, "The Russian Case for Military Intervention in Georgia: International Law, Norms and Political Calculation," 177.

through an operation rather than marching through the undisputed Georgian land beyond South Ossetia[287] with a combat force four times bigger than Georgia.[288] Considering Putin's remarks on the Russian peacekeeping force being outnumbered by 1:6 when they got caught by the Georgian offensive at the outbreak of the war, Russia increased its combatants in Georgia only in a day by twenty-four times, illustrating how Russia escalated its role in Georgia. Allison emphasizes that the Georgian offensive did not obligate such escalation; many peacekeeping forces in various conflicts around the world have come under fire, and there was no instance of the "mother" country intervening with such massive force in the name of assisting the peacekeepers.[289] Furthermore, the fact that Russian peacekeeping casualties were only two (the Russian initial claim was ten) demonstrates how disproportionate the Russian response was.[290]

The Russian response did not only go beyond South Ossetia towards the city of Gori and the vicinity of Tbilisi; Russia also intervened in Abkhazia and opened another front during the August 2008 war. Although the Georgian offensive was not directed at Abkhazia, both Foreign Minister Lavrov and Russian Permanent Representative in UN Vitaly Churkin claimed, albeit with no proof, that Georgia was in preparation for a "military provocation" in Abkhazia and defended Abkhazians' attack on Georgian positions with Russian support as a preemptive measure.[291]

Russia advocated its "self-defense" measures in Georgia with its responsibility to protect the Russian nationals as well. As mentioned above, 90% of the South Ossetia population was Russian citizens by the time when the August 2008 war broke out. In this respect, Russia claimed that the intervention in Georgia aimed to protect Russian nationals abroad who faced the danger of mass atrocities by Georgian forces. This claim was supported by the proposition that Russia acted in accordance with the principles of human security and responsibility to protect.[292] Vladimir Putin framed the intervention as an effort to protect the lives of Russian citizens, defending their honor and dignity and Russia's commitment to

[287] Allison, 178.
[288] Nygren, "The 2008 Russia-Georgia War," 381.
[289] For example, 10 Pakistani peacekeepers operating as part of UNOSOM II were killed in Somalia in 1993. Similarly, Belgian peacekeepers were killed and kidnapped in Rwanda in 1994.
[290] Allison, "The Russian Case for Military Intervention in Georgia: International Law, Norms and Political Calculation," 178.
[291] Vasile Rotaru, "'Mimicking' the West? Russia's Legitimization Discourse from Georgia War to the Annexation of Crimea," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 52, no. 4 (2019): 4, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2019.10.001.
[292] Rotaru, 4.

international law via its peacekeeping troops. He further drew a parallel with the Srebrenica massacre and claimed that if Russia had not intervened the same as the Dutch peacekeepers in Bosnia, a similar kind of tragedy could have occurred.[293] Within this argument, Russia also drew a parallel with the US justification for using force in Serbia to prevent ethnic cleansing and genocide of Kosovars when portraying its peacekeeping activities in Georgia as preventing the genocidal policies of Georgia against South Ossetians.[294]

Both the Independent International Fact-Finding Report's findings and Allison's interpretation of satellite images from Russian sources and the UN Satellite Center dismiss the direness of the situation in South Ossetia depicted by Russia.[295] On the contrary, these findings indicated the "forced displacement of thousands of ethnic Georgians by South Ossetia militia."[296] The existence of Russian nationals in South Ossetia, on the other hand, was another issue. For instance, Allison draws attention to the fact that it was problematic for Russia to convert a large number of South Ossetians into Russian citizens in a very short time without the permission of Georgia- de jure sovereign of this region, and to claim an unequivocal right to protect them.[297] He also underlined the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission's verdict that this passportization policy "violates first the specific prohibition of extraterritorial collective naturalizations, and also several general principles of international law."[298]

When this is the case, it appears that Russia's passportization policy was, in fact, premeditated precisely for a situation like the August 2008 war, defined by the near abroad doctrine ensuring Russia's great power role in post-Soviet space. If this policy is premeditated, then the rationale for a large-scale intervention in Georgia must be something other than the Russian claim of responsibility to protect. Furthermore, the apparent contradiction of Russian actions in Georgia with what international law envisages and Russia's eagerness to escalate the situation (and "punish the aggressor") imply that Russia did not care for the scale of the Georgian offensive to which proportionately respond. What mattered was the fact that Georgia dared to cross the red lines drawn in Moscow. These red lines did not only consist of Georgia's aspiration to reclaim its territorial integrity by

[293] Putin, "Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Interviewed by the German ARD TV Channel."
[294] Nygren, "The 2008 Russia-Georgia War," 383.
[295] Allison, "The Russian Case for Military Intervention in Georgia: International Law, Norms and Political Calculation," 183.
[296] Allison, 183.
[297] Allison, 179.
[298] Allison, 180.

absorbing South Ossetia or the casualties of the Russian peacekeeping force, but their imprints were traceable in Georgia's relations with the Euro-Atlantic bloc and US unilateralism underscored in the late 90s and early 2000s. In other words, the examination above facilitates looking *elsewhere* for the Russian rationale for intervening in Georgia, that is, the Russian status-seeking.

4.4. Russian Status Seeking in Georgia

The fact that Russia sought recognition of its great power status in Georgia is reflected in the Russian account of the intervention that centers upon the US complicity in the Georgian offensive and triumphalist policies that the Euro-Atlantic bloc pursued via Kosovar independence and color revolutions in post-Soviet space. This account of the intervention is firstly characterized by Russia's status claims in the shape of replicating US actions. In explaining the intervention to Georgia, Russian officials draw examples from unilateral American actions that they consider similar to Russia's moves. Portraying the intervention as such cannot be taken only as a rhetorical tool to justify Russia's position because asserting that Russia has the right to conduct the very unilateralism that the US has pursued in a triumphalist manner after the end of the Cold War indicates Russia's equal status to the US, which Russia reckons to be misrecognized.

In this line, Foreign Minister Lavrov suggested regarding Russia's intervention in Georgia that their action was more justified considering the US intervention in Panama in 1989, which was conducted after a few US soldiers were attacked.[299] If the Americans had the right to intervene in Panama, Russia had the right to intervene in Georgia as well. Similarly, Russia's ambassador to NATO, Dmitry Rogozin, penned an article titled "Washington's hypocrisy" for The New York Times on 18 August 2008, reprimanding the US attitude against Russia on the intervention in Georgia. Rogozin drew examples from the American interventions in Grenada and Panama that were conducted under the pretext of protecting American nationals and the interventions in Serbia, Afghanistan, and Iraq, where no American national needed to be protected, but the Americans did not refrain from using extensive force.[300] Quoting Bill Clinton's statement on the intervention in Serbia and George

[299] Rotaru, "'Mimicking' the West? Russia's Legitimization Discourse from Georgia War to the Annexation of Crimea," 4–5.
[300] Dmitry Rogozin, "Washington's Hypocrisy," *The New York Times*, August 18, 2008, sec. Opinion, https://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/18/opinion/18iht-edrogozin.1.15388472.html.

W. Bush's address on the invasion of Iraq, Rogozin asked: "Does that mean that the United States and NATO can use brute force where they want to, and Russia has to abstain from it even if it has to look at thousands of its own citizens being shot? If it's not hypocrisy, then what IS hypocrisy?" (emphasis belongs to the original text).[301]

Pointing at the American interventions functioned in two ways. First, it underlined Russia's grievances over US unilateralism that overlooked the international security mechanisms, which Russia is a significant party to consider. In other words, the Americans' circumvention of the great power management consisted of UNSC and the bilateral understandings between Russia and the US, such as respecting "privileged interests," meant disregarding Russia's status. Second, it signaled that if the US can disobey international norms, it does not have the right to teach manners to others. In the absence of these norms, Russia, too, was entitled to act unilaterally, replicating the American attitude, albeit Russian officials would sometimes draw inferences to the legality of their actions. For instance, commenting on the role of the Georgian leadership in the atrocities in South Ossetia, Putin asserted that the Georgian rulers did not deserve their positions. When the interviewer reminded that it is only for Georgians to decide, Putin again drew an analogy with American actions in Iraq and how they dealt with Saddam Hussain.[302] If America could facilitate regime change in Iraq, why would Russia not do the same in Georgia?[303] As part of Russia's replicating attitude towards American actions, the case of Kosovo appeared prominently in Russia's motivation for intervention in Georgia.

4.4.1. Kosovar Independence Analogy

Within the Russian account of the intervention in Georgia, Kosovar independence features repeatedly with a focus on US unilateralism and misrecognition of Russian status. The previous chapter mentioned Russia's opposition to the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999, which resulted in Serbian forces withdrawing from Kosovo. The UN resolution 1244 deployed a NATO peacekeeping force and mandated a transitionary UN rule in Kosovo. After the direct talks between Serbia and Kosovo started in 2006, the UN Secretary-

[301] Rogozin.
[302] Putin, "Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Interviewed by the German ARD TV Channel."
[303] In fact, Condoleezza Rice accounted that Russia did not only aimed for the restoration of the status quo in Georgia, it sought dismissal of Saakashvili as well, expressed directly by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to Condoleezza Rice. See Kofman. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov later denied this, stating that Rice must have misunderstood him.

General's Special Envoy for Kosovo, Martti Athisaari, devised a plan of "supervised independence" for Kosovo. Russia blocked Kosovar independence in the UNSC, stating that it would not approve any plan that was not acceptable both for Serbs and Kosovar Albanians. When Kosovo declared independence in 2008 unilaterally, many NATO countries, including the US, recognized it in a considerably short time (the US recognized Kosovo just the following day).

The legitimizing argument for Kosovar self-determination was that it constituted a sui generis case. First, it was an autonomous region until Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic ended this status against the constitution in 1989. Second, the ethnic Serbs comprised only 5% of the Kosovar population. Third, there was a high probability that Albanians could opt for violence if turned over to the Serbian administration again after having governed by the temporary UN mandate. And finally, it was argued that Serbia's human rights violations in Kosovo undermined to the full extent its sovereignty over Kosovo. The counter-arguments by Serbia and Russia for this case were overshadowed by heavy NATO presence in Kosovo.[304]

As in many Russian foreign policy issues dealt with in the scope of this research, Russia had made its position in relation to Kosovo vis-à-vis the situation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia very clear. Speaking to BBC in 2006, Putin criticized the proposals for Kosovar independence, asserting that the solutions that the international community created for such problems should have a universal character and be applicable to similar problems. If independence was the solution for Kosovo, it could as well be perfectly fit for Abkhazia and South Ossetia.[305] Furthermore, at the dawn of Kosovo's declaration of independence, the 2007 "Survey of Russian Federation Foreign Policy" published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs recommended that the status quo in South Ossetia and Abkhazia should be preserved with Russian peacekeepers present. It also urged Russian foreign policy practitioners to "consistently uphold the thesis that Kosovo's eventual acquisition of independence will have a precedent character," which would also be welcomed by many in

[304] Valur Ingimundarson, "The 'Kosovo Precedent': Russia's Justification of Military Interventions and Territorial Revisions in Georgia and Ukraine," Strategic Update (LSE IDEAS, 2022), 7, https://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/Assets/Documents/updates/2022-SU-Valur-RussKosovo.pdf.
[305] Gearóid Ó Tuathail, "Russia's Kosovo: A Critical Geopolitics of the August 2008 War over South Ossetia," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 49, no. 6 (2008): 683, http://dx.doi.org/10.2747/1539-7216.49.6.670.

Russia as this precedent will pave the way for many post-Soviet territories looking for integration with Russia.[306]

Once Kosovo declared independence, expectedly Russia did not grant recognition and considered it a clear example of Western double standard. Later on, its recognition of the independence of the two breakaway regions in Georgia was tied to the Kosovo precedent. The fact that Russia did not change its position over Kosovo even after taking it as a precedent for Abkhazia and South Ossetia implicates that the application of the precedent was not about accepting a new norm but demonstrating Russia's capability to act as unilaterally as the US did.

In his interview with German ARD TV on 29 August 2008, Putin lamented Russia's passive attitude to Kosovo's independence and reminded that they "swallowed" this decision, although the expectation in the West was that Russia would recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In return, he added, they faced the escalation of the conflict in South Ossetia and the killing of their peacekeepers and civilians.[307] Thus, Russia expected an appreciation of their attitude toward Kosovo's independence in the form of acknowledging the Russian role in South Ossetia and Abkhazia rather than facing misrecognition once again.

Similarly, when asked whether the Georgian war might have undermined the prestige and success Russia achieved in the last decade, Putin defended Russia's position, pointing out that they did not start the war and that it was actually the US who lost prestige by trying to order the world by its "might is right" principle. He, again, exemplified Kosovo's independence in proving his point. Referring to Russia's blocking attempt at Kosovar independence, Putin mentioned his appeal to the American partners that the Kosovar independence would complicate the situation for the small nations of the Caucasus, and Russia would be in an awkward position to hold them off from the same principle being applied to them. He reproached: "But who opened this Pandora's box? Was it us? No, it wasn't us. It was not our decision and not our policy."[308]

Putin's framing of the intervention in this way not only advocates the application of the Kosovo precedent as replicating US status but also portrays the US as responsible for the

[306] Simes, "Losing Russia - The Costs of Renewed Confrontation."
[307] Putin, "Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Interviewed by the German ARD TV Channel."
[308] Putin, "CNN Interviews Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin."

out-of-the-norm developments. After all, the bombing of Serbia by NATO was perceived by Russians as targeting Russia and considered a rehearsal of what NATO planned to do in the South Caucasus.[309] Consequently, the Russian account of the intervention was characterized by the allegation that the West was complicit in the Georgian offensive through both their policies in Georgia and post-Soviet space. According to the Russian narrative, Western complicity in the situation in Georgia manifested itself in the form of NATO's swaying Georgia into membership and 'democracy promotion' via color revolutions.

4.4.2. Western Complicity in the Georgian Offensive

Russian perception of American complicity in the Georgian offensive and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic orientation mattered a great deal in solidifying Russian resoluteness to conduct an intervention. In his CNN interview following the intervention, Vladimir Putin connected the Georgian attempt to become victorious against Russia in South Ossetia to the overall NATO and American humiliation in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the mortgage crisis in the US. Hinting that the US administration orchestrated the conflict to rally its population around the flag in the face of these crises, he commented: "A small victorious war would be helpful."[310] This direct accusation was accompanied by his criticism of the Western media. Putin repeatedly lashed in different platforms Western media's coverage of the first hours of the Georgian operation in South Ossetia.[311] It appears that this was very important and telling for him at the time. He protested that the Western media started to cover the incident only after the Russian troops were involved, but only to use captions such as "disproportionate response" and "breach of Georgian territorial integrity." He resented that the Western media did not report the initial Georgian offensive.

Putin's accusations towards the Euro-Atlantic bloc went further than such speculative comments. He claimed that the US "sent instructors who helped mobilise the Georgian forces" and continued, "Of course, we had to respond."[312] Clearly, Putin considered that the intervention was a response to both Georgia and the US. President Medvedev also accused Condoleezza Rice of encouraging Saakashvili to reconsider the Russia-Georgia deal on the

[309] James Sherr, "The Implications of the Russia-Georgia War for European Security," in *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*, ed. Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr (M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 204.
[310] Putin, "CNN Interviews Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin."
[311] Putin, "Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Met with Members of the Valdai International Discussion Club."
[312] Jonathan Steele, "Bush Failed to Halt Georgia War, Says Putin," *The Guardian*, September 11, 2008, sec. World news, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/sep/12/putin.georgia.

use of force in the breakaway regions and prepare for war on South Ossetia: "Rice met him and the boy changed miraculously afterwards. He started to postpone the agreement. He started preparations for war."[313] He would also argue that the war was geared toward increasing US presence in the southern Caucasus and positioning NATO warships in the Black Sea.[314] He would elsewhere claim again bluntly that the Saakashvili's offensive was conducted "at the instigation of forces abroad."[315]

The American account, on the other hand, stressed that they discouraged Saakashvili from using force in South Ossetia. In her Washington Post article ten years after the intervention, Condoleezza Rice- the US Secretary of State during the August war, stated that she had actually warned the Georgian president Saakashvili against the possible Russian provocations to lure Georgian army to attack the breakaway regions.[316] Similarly, then-assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Daniel Fried reported that the US urged Georgians to stay calm in the face of the South Ossetian paramilitary attacks on Georgian villages before 8 August.[317] Although this study is in no capacity to verify either Russian claims or American counter-arguments, it suffices to emphasize that American efforts to mitigate the situation in South Ossetia were not perceived as such in Moscow. On the contrary, they were interpreted as part of a larger American strategy in which NATO is an instrument of influence in the post-Soviet space.

4.4.2.1. NATO Expansion

The previous chapter delineated how NATO expansion denoted the misrecognition of Russia's great power status for Vladimir Putin. For him and many Russian decision-makers, NATO expansion is constructed in a way to disregard Russia's *droit de regard*, i.e., its privileged interests in post-Soviet space. For Russians, NATO enlargement did not only mean a geopolitical challenge put before them as a result of great power rivalry. It had a humiliating aspect, too. Russians perceived that NATO- a defensive organization against the

[313] Steele.
[314] Mike Bowker, "The War in Georgia and the Western Response," *Central Asian Survey* 30, no. 2 (2011): 206, https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2011.570121.
[315] Sherr, "The Implications of the Russia-Georgia War for European Security," 207.
[316] Condoleezza Rice, "Russia Invaded Georgia 10 Years Ago. Don't Say America Didn't Respond.," *The Washington Post*, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/russia-invaded-georgia-10-years-ago-dont-say-america-didnt-respond/2018/08/08/ba4279d4-9b3e-11e8-8d5e-c6c594024954_story.html.
[317] Vazha Tavberidze, "Interview: With The 2008 Georgia War, 'We Knew What Was Coming, But We Were Slow To Believe It,'" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 2022, sec. Georgia, https://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-russia-war-fried/31987472.html.

USSR- transformed itself into an offensive alliance by attacking Yugoslavia in 1995 and 1999 when Russia "barely existed as a state."[318] While Russia was trying to recover from the turbulent outcomes of the collapse of the USSR, NATO started to expand in the post-Soviet space[319], resulting in further grievances in Russian perception.

As for the Georgian case, NATO represented nothing different. NATO's involvement in Georgia was typically opposed by the Russian side in a fierce manner. It marked the clear division between Russia and NATO over how to handle the post-Soviet space and address Russia's security concerns. When Vladimir Putin was invited to NATO's Bucharest Summit in April 2008, he once again warned that NATO's powerful existence in Russia's borders could not indicate NATO's peaceful intents and Russia would not be convinced only by promises of that nature.[320] Still, the final communique of the summit declared without ascertaining the timing that Ukraine and Georgia will become NATO members. Not offering Georgia and Ukraine a concrete Membership Action Plan was NATO's softened approach in the face of the opposition from France and Germany to grant these countries a membership prospect immediately.[321]

The outcome of the Bucharest Summit was ambiguous. NATO countries, especially France and Germany, acknowledged Russia's strong opposition to Georgia and Ukraine's membership in NATO, and this could be perceived as recognizing Russia's great power status. This is especially pertinent considering French Prime Minister François Fillon's statement that the Georgian and Ukrainian memberships are not "the right response to the balance of power in Europe and between Europe and Russia," and France wishes "to have a dialogue on this subject with Russia."[322] However, despite Vladimir Putin's direct warnings when he spoke as a guest, the summit declaration invited Croatia and Albania into NATO and included that Georgia and Ukraine will be members one day too, further aggravating Russians.

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[318] Sergei A. Karaganov, "An Iron Fist to Keep NATO Expansion at Bay," Russia in Global Affairs, March 4, 2011, https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/an-iron-fist-to-keep-nato-expansion-at-bay/.
[319] Until the Russian intervention in Georgia, two NATO expansion waves occurred. Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland became NATO members in 1999, and Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia in 2004.
[320] Kofman, "The August War, Ten Years On."
[321] Götz, "Taking the Longer View: A Neoclassical Realist Account of Russia's Neighbourhood Policy."
[322] "France Won't Back Ukraine and Georgia NATO Bids," *Reuters*, April 1, 2008, sec. World, https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL01151170/.

This declaration was retaliated by Russia in the form of establishing further relations with the two breakaway regions in Georgia as well as initiating negotiations with Moldova about lightening its attitude towards Transnistria on the condition that Moldova would not seek NATO membership and remain neutral. Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist interpret these developments as Russia's signal for offering a "no to NATO membership in exchange for territorial integrity" deal.[323] This approach was also reflected in Georgia. Making sure that the conflicts in the two breakaway republics remained frozen rather than solved was a precondition for Moscow's efforts to hinder NATO expansion because NATO is a "fair weather" organization[324], requiring political and territorial stability to consider a potential membership- a principle established by 1995 NATO Study on Enlargement.[325] In rejecting a Membership Action Plan for Georgia, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel would also refer to this principle, commenting that "countries that have unresolved conflicts cannot become members".[326] If Georgia managed to control South Ossetia, it would lift a significant barrier to applying NATO.

On the other hand, Russia was prepared to prevent this. Russia's ambassador to NATO would note, for example, "if this country [Georgia] does join NATO, then it will do so only with the territory on which the referendum on joining the alliance was conducted," implying that Georgia's membership would split the country forever.[327] Thus, the conflict in South Ossetia with respect to Georgia's NATO membership may have created a rationale for escalation for both Russia and Georgia.

Before the intervention, especially the Bush administration's insistent efforts to provide another NATO expansion created an atmosphere where even the NATO members who were in more friendly relations with Russia were convinced that there would be another NATO expansion.[328] However, the Russian intervention turned this expectation into an impossibility because Georgian membership in NATO would mean a much higher risk of military confrontation with Russia anymore[329] regarding Article 5 of the NATO Treaty. In

[323] Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist, "Duelling Honors: Power, Identity and the Russia-Georgia Divide," 2009, 323.
[324] Karaganov, "An Iron Fist to Keep NATO Expansion at Bay."
[325] Charap et al., "Russia's Military Interventions," 91.
[326] F. Stephen Larrabee, "Georgia on Their Mind," RAND, March 27, 2008, https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2008/03/georgia-on-their-mind.html.
[327] Andrey Makarychev, "Russia, NATO, and the 'Color Revolutions,'" *Russian Politics and Law* 47, no. 5 (2009): 46, https://doi.org/10.2753/RUP1061-1940470503.
[328] Charap et al., "Russia's Military Interventions," 91.
[329] Charap et al., 91.

2011, President Medvedev paid tribute to the soldiers of the North Caucasus Military District for their efforts to turn around NATO's Georgia plan, stating that without their stance, Georgia "would have most likely already been part of it [NATO] now."[330] Such comments actually affirmed the perspective that the war was of a proxy nature over NATO enlargement, in which Russia made an example of Georgia to discourage others.[331] The American view was also similar. The late Ronald Asmus, a key actor in NATO's eastward enlargement, proposed that the 2008 Georgia-Russia war was fought between Georgia's commitment to the Western path and Russia's dedication to prevent this.[332]

Thus, the US commitment to invite Georgia into NATO was perceived by Russia as a sign of misrecognition of its privileged interests in post-Soviet space as a great power. Preventing Georgian membership in NATO appeared for Russia as an instrument of assuring recognition of its status and role in this region.

4.4.2.2. Color Revolutions

Another aspect of the Russian perception that the US was complicit in Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations was related to the wave of 'color revolutions' overthrowing governments in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan. These revolutions were characterized, especially in Ukraine and Georgia, by a pledge to transform the political system of their countries so that they would be suitable candidates for Euro-Atlantic security architecture and the European Union. This transformation would undermine the structural dependencies of these countries to Russia by weakening oligarchs owing their power and wealth to their positions in the former USSR and still mostly opting for pro-Russian policies. For Russia, these developments were orchestrated from *outside* and through the activities of the 'fifth column' in these countries. Therefore, Russian officials reiterated on various platforms that the new political orientation of the governments established by color revolutions mainly did not represent the majority of their population. In this line, for Russia, Georgia's concrete steps for NATO membership were unnatural and coordinated in Washington, so much so that in an interview at the dawn of the annexation of Crimea, Vladimir Putin talked about the strong ties between Georgian and Russian peoples, and claimed that Georgian people sided with

[330] Charap et al., 91.
[331] John Berryman, "Russia, NATO Enlargement, and 'Regions of Privileged Interests,'" in *Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century*, ed. Roger E. Kanet, 1st ed. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 234.
[332] Berryman, 233–34.

and rooted for Russia to topple Saakashvili during the war in 2008.[333] Thus, Saakashvili- the champion of the color revolution and Western orientation in Georgia, who did not hide his disfavoring of Russia's policies, was an anomaly in Russia-Georgia relations. This anomaly, for the Russians, was a result of US interference in post-Soviet space.

If NATO expansion was the hard power challenge that was put before Russia by the US, the color revolutions were outcomes of the US soft power instruments. Russian decision-makers have viewed color revolutions not only as part of the US strategy to penetrate into post-Soviet space but also as a destabilizing factor for Russia itself, so much so that they felt the need to adopt several precautions. Vladimir Putin, back in 2005, stated that he would not let "an amorphous state formation" that would be wielded from the outside like what happened in Ukraine with the Orange Revolution. Accordingly, one of the ideologists of Putin's circle and the first deputy chief of the presidential administration, Vladislav Surkov, came up with the concept of "sovereign democracy," denoting that Russia has its own form of democracy that does not necessarily conform to Western standards and that Russian sovereignty precedes democracy.[334]

Thus, questioning Russia's democracy or engaging in democratic promotion in Russia would be taken as an intervention in Russian domestic politics.[335] Endorsed by Putin, this framework aimed to counter Western interference in domestic politics through criticism of Russia's worsening democratic standards. Furthermore, it enabled certain policies to strengthen the state at the expense of civil society. With a new law drafted in 2006, the NGOs funded by international donors became under strict scrutiny. In order to counter the influence of these NGOs, the state also increased its spending on Russian NGOs and established a nationalist youth organization, "Nashi" (Ours), to prompt support for the constitutional order.[336]

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[333] Joshua Kucera, "Putin: In 2008 War, Georgians Wanted Us To Win," Eurasianet, 2013, https://eurasianet.org/putin-in-2008-war-georgians-wanted-us-to-win.

[334] Sarah Fisher, "Sovereign Democracy : Russia's Response to the Color Revolutions" (Senior Honors Thesis, University of Louisville, 2014), 18, https://ir.library.louisville.edu/honors/90/.

[335] Maria Lipman, "Putin's 'Sovereign Democracy,'" Carnegie Endowment, 2006, https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2006/07/putins-sovereign-democracy?lang=en&center=europe.

[336] John Berryman, "'Fear and Loathing' in the Kremlin: Russia and the Challenge of Intervention," in *Shifting Priorities in Russia's Foreign and Security Policy*, ed. Rémi Piet and Roger E. Kanet (London: Routledge, 2014). Also see Thomas Ambrosio, "Insulating Russia from a Colour Revolution: How the Kremlin Resists Regional Democratic Trends," *Democratization* 14, no. 2 (2007): 232–52, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13510340701245736.

These precautions corresponded to the alleged US involvement in the color revolutions as well as the overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia in 2000. Arguably, funding and training the youth organization Serbian Otpor, the US initiated a series of youth activism that triggered revolutions in Serbia, Belarus, Georgia, and Ukraine.[337] Furthermore, the successful Otpor organization and the Georgian activists who managed to bring about the Rose Revolution traveled to Ukraine and aided the mobilization of the Ukrainian youth organization PORA- the pioneers of the Orange Revolution in 2004.[338] Both Ukrainian activists[339] before the Orange Revolution and reportedly Saakashvili before the Rose Revolution visited Otpor in Serbia.[340] The chain reaction of this youth activism was also attempted to spread to Russia as Ukrainian activists from Pora and Znayu held US-funded meetings over "organizational techniques" with their counterparts in Russia.[341]

Against the backdrop of these developments, the Russian judgment of US complicity in Georgia's Euro-Atlantic orientation was not a disproportionately formed view. After all, Saakashvili did come into power as a result of a color revolution and dramatically changed his country's policies, culminating in an attack against South Ossetia. Thus, Russian commitment to respond resolutely in Georgia was formed with, first, the perception that the US was using all its cards in turning Georgia- one of the bulwarks of the Russian near abroad doctrine- into a NATO country and, second, US broader unilateralism in Kosovo, that was to be imitated by Russia to draw a parallel with its status and US status. The following section will accordingly examine whether the new status quo after the intervention has provided Russia with more recognition of its great powerness.

4.5. Russian Status After the Intervention

Some commentators found the Western attitude to the intervention accommodating Russian aggression. The Western actors were not very proactive in resolving the conflict in Georgia prior to 8 August, and neither did they put pressure on Russia when the Russian

[337] Ian Traynor, "US Campaign behind the Turmoil in Kiev," *The Guardian*, November 26, 2004, sec. World news, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/nov/26/ukraine.usa.
[338] Ambrosio, "Insulating Russia from a Colour Revolution: How the Kremlin Resists Regional Democratic Trends," 232.
[339] John Simpson, "Serb Activists Helped Inspire Ukraine Protests," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 2005, https://iwpr.net/global-voices/serb-activists-helped-inspire-ukraine-protests.
[340] Traynor, "US Campaign behind the Turmoil in Kiev."
[341] Michael Schwirtz, "Russia's Political Youths," *Demokratizatsiya* 15, no. 1 (2007): 74,79.

military presence in Georgia violated the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe and the OSCE Istanbul Commitments of 1999.[342] Stephen Blank succinctly puts it:

> "… throughout this time, Washington advanced no plan to resolve the stalemates in the disputed provinces, did not publicly warn Moscow about the consequences, and was unable to organize a coherent Western response to Russian pressures, all failures that Moscow exploited to the hilt."[343]

Furthermore, the fact that NATO held a special Foreign Ministerial session upon the intervention rather than the head of states meeting was interpreted as the epitome of the Western softened approach. The lack of a collective response to the intervention illustrated "a reverse for NATO, a sidelining of the EU and OSCE, and an unambiguous humiliation for the Bush administration, which had invested so much in Saakashvili's project to restore the territorial integrity of Georgia."[344]

The intervention in Georgia did not stop the overall NATO enlargement, but it definitely put a halt to Georgia's prospect of joining NATO. Three months after the intervention, NATO's Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, declared a policy change, including stalling the membership processes of Georgia and Ukraine and "conditional and graduated re-engagement" with Russia, which was interpreted by Russia's ambassador to NATO Dmitry Rogozin as 'NATO having accepted the reality shaped by Russia.'[345]

Obviously, the intervention was a defining moment for Russia's resurgence.[346] Russia reckoned that the intervention enabled them to present their perspective onto reality and harvest recognition of its great power status. For example, Dimitry Rogozin stated[347]: "We came out of the crisis stronger, our Western partners now regard Russia as a partner they cannot wipe their feet on. We are restoring cooperation and on our terms." President Medvedev would also declare that the war in Georgia illustrated Russia's regaining of its capability in combat and put up a defense in the regions where Russia holds "privileged interests."[348] Considering how these privileged interests in the CIS region were tied to

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[342] Blank, "From Neglect to Duress: The West and the Georgian Crisis Before the 2008 War," 107.
[343] Blank, 118.
[344] Berryman, "Russia, NATO Enlargement, and 'Regions of Privileged Interests,'" 235.
[345] "Nato 'to Resume Ties with Russia,'" *BBC News*, December 3, 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7759833.stm.
[346] Sherr, "The Implications of the Russia-Georgia War for European Security," 209.
[347] Sherr, 207.
[348] Bowker, "The War in Georgia and the Western Response," 208.

Russia's great power identity via near abroad doctrine, the intervention actualized thick recognition of this identity. In other words, Russia ensured that the essential components of its identity reflected in this case, such as the fact that it had certain red lines and entitlements in deciding Georgia's future, were respected. Thus, Russia's great power status halted NATO's eastward expansion.

Russia was also contented that it had the possibility to assert its perspective for transforming the international system into a multipolar order. A month after the intervention, President Medvedev urged the Western countries to reconsider arming Georgia with no clear objectives and take lessons from August 8. Further, he argued that the conflict emerged as one of the manifestations of the weaknesses of the current world order, and thereby, the need for a multipolar world was once again certified.[349] Similarly, when asked about Russia's possible exclusion from G8 after the intervention in Georgia, Prime Minister Putin reiterated his vision of a multipolar world and suggested that G8 was already an inefficient platform as it did not include China and India. He underlined that without consulting these countries and cooperating with them, global economic development was not possible. Furthermore, he reaffirmed Russia's position as it would be in vain to handle the matters of nonproliferation, fighting against terrorism and international crime without Russia.[350]

In fact, Russia's status was revalidated, especially by some actors, after the intervention beyond expelling it from G8. Let alone excluding Russia from G8, Polish foreign minister Radoslaw Sikorski proposed that Russia should join NATO, to which Russia's NATO ambassador Rogozin would comment that Russia was able to solve its problems independently and not content with many things with NATO, such as its "fully siding with the aggressor" in August 2008, and straightforwardly added: "Great powers don't join coalitions, they create coalitions. Russia considers itself a great power".[351] Furthermore, he stated that Russia would consider NATO a partner on the condition that it did not disregard Russia's interest, in other words, its opposition to NATO enlargement to Georgia and Ukraine.[352] President Medvedev also noted in Valdai Club just one month after the intervention that the West "does not belong" in Russia's near abroad, which is connected to

[349] Dmitry Medvedev, "Press Conference Following the Collective Security Treaty Organisation Summit," President of Russia, September 15, 2008, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/1309.
[350] Putin, "CNN Interviews Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin."
[351] Valentina Pop, "Russia Does Not Rule out Future NATO Membership," EUobserver, April 1, 2009, https://euobserver.com/news/arbda1d87d.
[352] Pop.

Russia by shared history, and Russia would not anymore tolerate the West's "unfair and humiliating" policies here.[353] Thus, the intervention in Georgia proved Russia's resoluteness as well as it drew Russia's red line harder.

The US response to such claims was not accommodating. The newly elected Obama administration's Vice-President Joe Biden underlined at the Munich Security Conference in 2009 that they would not accept the claims for spheres of influence and would maintain the view that sovereign states had the right to choose their own policies.[354] President Obama reiterated the same view in Moscow, too.[355] Still, the recognized Russian status took shape in 'resetting' US-Russia relations, materialized by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov pressing a 'reset' button together.[356] Although NATO-Russia and US-Russia relations would spin back to be problematic once again later, the reset symbolized an essential step by the West to allow for an opportunity to come to terms with Russia's status claims and increase cooperation.

4.6. Conclusion

It is significant to underline that the material benefits of the intervention in Georgia were defined through Russia's great power identity. These material benefits were 1) maintaining stronger military bases and peacekeeping units, 2) ensuring the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and 3) significantly impaired Georgian military capability.

First, as explained above, Russian military existence in post-Soviet space was prescribed by Russia's near-abroad doctrine and Russian decision-makers' contention that Russia has naturally privileged interests in this region. The significance of post-Soviet space or the CIS region stems not only from geostrategic calculations. The CIS represents a source whereby Russia would regain its great power status through its widespread influence that is not supposed to meet US interference.

Second, the independence of the two breakaway regions had more symbolic aspect than its practical significance. Unlike Kosovo, South Ossetia and Abkhazia were not

[353] Sherr, "The Implications of the Russia-Georgia War for European Security," 206.
[354] "Highlights-U.S. VP Biden Speech at Munich Conference," *Reuters*, February 7, 2009, sec. Business, https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL7274734/.
[355] Berryman, "Russia, NATO Enlargement, and 'Regions of Privileged Interests,'" 228.
[356] *Clinton Gift of "Reset" Button Lost in Translation*, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ee4PfhogtdQ.

recognized by most countries, including even the members of CSTO. Even Belarus has been dragging its feet. Moreover, South Ossetia's proposal to join Russia has gone unheeded, and Abkhazia has no intention to give up its de facto sovereignty.[357] Thus, Russia's recognition of the independence of these countries attunes more with responding to the humiliation it felt with the Kosovo independence. In his address declaring that Russia recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, President Medvedev noted that Russia had a patient attitude in the face of Georgian violations of the current agreements regarding South Ossetia. In the following sentence, he altered the referent object of his criticism to the West, stating that Russia was patient even after the unilateral proclamation of Kosovo's independence.[358] Russia's great power identity made it imperative to replicate American unilateralism in Kosovo when Russia became able to do so.

Third, Georgia's diminished military capabilities, including its command infrastructure[359] , undoubtedly ensured less risk for another offensive against Russian soldiers in Georgia. But it is crucial to remember that the increasing scale of the Russian response was more about punishing Georgia and making an example of it than the tactical necessities of protecting Russian peacekeepers. By conducting a large-scale intervention instead of a special operation (not in the sense of the use of the term in the 2022 invasion of Ukraine), Russia proved its military capabilities that could be reapplied in post-Soviet space when necessary. Thus, the interlocutor of Russia's response was not Georgia but those who would cross Russia's red lines in post-Soviet space.

In conclusion, Russia's intervention in Georgia represented Russia's stern attitude against those who consider that it has a lesser status than Russia attributes itself. As the material interests from intervening in Georgia were very much tied to Russia's status claims, Russia harvested recognition from the intervention in the shape of asserting its interests, i.e., halting eastward NATO expansion and putting its multipolarity agenda in effect via reset in US-Russia relations.

[357] Gabriel Gavin, "We Don't Want to Join Russia, Breakaway Georgian Region Warns," Politico, 2023, https://www.politico.eu/article/georgia-breakaway-region-abkhazia-joining-russia-south-caucasus/.
[358] Dmitry Medvedev, "Statement by President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev," President of Russia, August 29, 2008, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/1222.
[359] Ivan Kotlyarov, "The Logic of South Ossetia Conflict," *Russia in Global Affairs*, 2008, https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/the-logic-of-south-ossetia-conflict/.

5. RUSSIAN INTERVENTION IN UKRAINE AND ANNEXATION OF CRIMEA (2014)

"Napoleon once said that justice is the embodiment
of God on earth. In this sense, the reunification of
Crimea with Russia was a just decision."
Vladimir Putin[360]

When Vladimir Putin was asked in 2008 whether Russia's "next target" after Georgia was Crimea and Sevastopol, he protested the construction of the question with the 'provocative' "next target" phrasing and emphasized that Russia did not target anyone in Georgia. Furthermore, he pointed out that Crimea is not a disputed territory like South Ossetia, and it did not have an ethnic conflict ongoing. Russia "had long recognized the borders of today's Ukraine."[361] Similarly, on 4 March 2014, only two weeks before Russia formally annexed Crimea, he stated that Crimea had no prospect of joining Russia and that Russia would not instigate such aspirations.[362] Yet, Russia's next target after Georgia indeed emerged as the Crimean peninsula, and Russia formally annexed the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the federal city of Sevastopol on 18 March 2014, following the controversial referendum two days before.

This chapter argues that the disregard for Russian interests in the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and the overthrowing of President Yanukovych by the Euromaidan protests severely consolidated Russia's perception of misrecognition of its great power status. In delineating this, the chapter first provides the background of the 2013-14 Ukraine crisis; second, it justifies why the case can be labeled as an intervention; third, it accounts for the significance of Crimea and Ukraine for Russia; fourth, examines Russian justifications; fifth, provides how Russia sought status in Ukraine through encountering Western complicity in Ukraine crisis and misrecognition of its status in the EU-Ukraine agreement and preserving the deployment of Black Sea Fleet in Crimea. Finally, the chapter reviews the Russian status after the intervention.

[360] Putin, "Interview to German Newspaper Bild. Part 1."
[361] Putin, "Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Interviewed by the German ARD TV Channel."
[362] Vladimir Putin, "Vladimir Putin Answered Journalists' Questions on the Situation in Ukraine," President of Russia, March 5, 2014, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20366.

5.1. Background

It is possible to trace the controversies in Russian-Ukrainian relations from the 1990s onward and even earlier periods if the tracing in question includes the Ukrainian identity formation vis-à-vis Russia. Still, taking into account the space limitations and scope of this research, the 2004 Orange Revolution provides a favorable starting point for analysis. When none of the candidates could reach the 50% threshold in the first round of the presidential elections in October 2004, Ukraine held the second round of the election, as the constitution prescribed, with the two highest-voted candidates- Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovych. While the former was a self-declared reformist and pro-Western politician, the latter was widely regarded as a pro-Russian candidate and the favorite of the incumbent president Leonid Kuchma. Both candidates served as prime ministers, Yushchenko between 1999 and 2001, and Yanukovych was the incumbent prime minister since 2002. The nationwide protests, with the exception of the Yanukovych-dominated cities like Donetsk and Luhansk, began when the Central Election Commission considerably increased overnight the turnout figures in eastern regions, with 90% of the added votes favoring Yanukovych.[363] The election fraud was the final blow to the already frustrated opposition, which the incumbent government suppressed during the campaign. Yushchenko's campaign was barred on several occasions, its members were taken under custody, and most importantly, Yushchenko was seriously poisoned two months before the election. His complications began to appear following a meal served for him in a meeting with the head of the Ukrainian secret service.[364] The protests lasted six days; Yushchenko declared himself president with a symbolic oath ceremony, and the protesters blockaded the cabinet, the presidency, and the incumbent President Kuchma's residence. Under pressure, the parliament voted by majority to declare the election invalid. The Supreme Court also annulled the election upon examining the evidence submitted by the Yushchenko's team, and required a re-election. In December, Yushchenko was elected Ukraine's third president, declaring, "We are free. The old era is over. We are a new country now."[365]

Yushchenko's term was marked by a series of major political crises in Ukraine. Yushchenko and other elements of the Orange Revolution, especially his prime minister Yulia Timoshenko, turned against each other by the first year of Yushchenko's presidency.

[363] Adrian Karatnycky, "Ukraine's Orange Revolution," *Foreign Affairs*, 2005, 36.
[364] "Yushchenko and the Poison Theory," December 11, 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/4041321.stm.
[365] Karatnycky, "Ukraine's Orange Revolution," 45–47.

Yushchenko fired Timoshenko and appointed first Yuriy Yekhanurov and then his rival in the elections- Yanukovych, in 2006, who would last only a little more than a year in the government. Timoshenko would return as prime minister in 2007 following a successful parliamentary election. Yushchenko's constant efforts to dissolve the parliament further created political instability, and his popularity went down so much that he rated in 5th place in the presidential elections in 2010, in which Yanukovych won over Timoshenko in the second round.

Yanukovych's presidency was also seemingly characterized by keeping Ukraine in the balance between Russia and the West. He declared that Ukraine must be a neutral state, refraining from joining either NATO or CSTO. He was also against recognizing neither Kosovo nor the breakaway republics in Georgia. Unexpectedly from a president perceived as pro-Russian, his first visit was to Brussels and second to Moscow. Only two months after his election, though, he would sign the Kharkiv Pact with Russia, which extended the lease of the Crimean ports to deploy the Black Sea Fleet until 2042. This was seen by the Ukrainian opposition as an unacceptable act. The previous governments suggested that the lease would not be extended, and the Fleet had to leave Crimea in 2017. The opposition was further aggravated by Yanukovych's denial of the Holodomor as a genocide committed against Ukrainians and efforts to make Russian a state language. By the language law enforced in 2012, the minorities composing more than 10% of the population were allowed to declare their language as the official regional language. Many Russian-speaking cities and regions followed the application of the law. The opposition perceived this law as an attack on the Ukrainian language.

Yanukovych seemed committed to the EU-Ukraine efforts to create a free trade regime via the Association Agreement. However, in 2011, the signing of the agreement was impeded by the jailing of Yulia Timoshenko over her dealing of the gas deal with Russia in 2009, where the court claimed she accepted disadvantageous terms for Ukraine and sought personal gain.[366] The EU prioritized Ukraine's adherence to the rule of law over the agreement and decided to wait until Ukraine fulfilled necessary legal reforms. The case of Timoshenko was especially important for the EU. Meanwhile, in 2011, Putin invited Ukraine

[366] Olzhas Auyezov, "Ukraine-Russia Gas Deal: Tymoshenko's Biggest Bet," Reuters, October 11, 2011, accessed July 25, 2024, https://www.reuters.com/article/world/ukraine-russia-gas-deal-tymoshenkos-biggest-bet-idUSTRE79A4BB/.

to the Eurasian Customs Union[367], swaying it from the EU agreement with economic incentives, such as discounts on gas pricing. However, Yanukovych did not accept the offer and stated that Ukraine preferred a 3+1 format to establish relations with the Union members, Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan.[368]

2012 and 2013 were marked by European pressure on Ukraine to implement electoral, judiciary, and constitutional reforms, and depending on Ukraine's performance, the signing of the agreement was foreseen in the November 2013 Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius.[369] After some improvements, the matter for Ukraine was stuck in Timoshenko's condition. Her health had considerably deteriorated in prison, so much so that she was unable to walk.[370] The EU had put Timoshenko's freedom as a precondition for signing the agreement and warned Ukraine that the signing of the agreement could not be possible after 2014. On 21 November 2013, the Ukrainian parliament failed to grant Timoshenko freedom and enact other reforms,[371] and the government declared that Ukraine would not sign the Association Agreement in Vilnius.

Canceling the signing of the agreement took place following the talks between Russian and Ukrainian prime ministers[372], and the Ukrainian prime minister stated that they took the decision to ensure Ukraine's national security.[373] Throughout the process, Russia exerted much effort to sway Ukraine's decision to sign the agreement. For instance, Yanukovich would be quoted by Lithuanian officials justifying his decision on the grounds that "pressure from Moscow was irresistible."[374]

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[367] The idea of a customs union within the Eurasian Economic Community emerged in 2008 as an alternative to EU Eastern Partnership. In 2010, Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan started to implement a common external tariff. The goods travelling within the Union markets would be free of customs too. In 2015, Eurasian Economic Community evolved into Eurasian Economic Union and the customs union continued within this body. The same year, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan also acceded to the Union.

[368] Andrei P. Tsygankov, "Vladimir Putin's Last Stand: The Sources of Russia's Ukraine Policy," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 31, no. 4 (2015): 279–303, https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2015.1005903.

[369] "Council Conclusions on Ukraine" (Council of the European Union, December 10, 2012), https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/134136.pdf.

[370] "Tymoshenko's Health 'Failing' In Jail," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 18:26:39Z, sec. Ukraine, https://www.rferl.org/a/ex-ukraine_pm_health_failing_daughter_says/24388491.html.

[371] "Ukraine Drops EU Plans," Al Jazeera, November 21, 2013, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2013/11/21/ukraine-drops-eu-plans-and-looks-to-russia.

[372] Ian Traynor and Oksana Grytsenko, "Ukraine Suspends Talks on EU Trade Pact as Putin Wins Tug of War," *The Guardian*, November 21, 2013, sec. World news, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/21/ukraine-suspends-preparations-eu-trade-pact.

[373] "Ukraine Drops EU Plans."

[374] Ian Traynor, "Russia 'Blackmailed Ukraine to Ditch EU Pact,'" *The Guardian*, November 22, 2013, sec. World news, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/22/russia-ukraine-eu-pact-lithuania.

The Russian interference in Ukraine's backing of the Association Agreement was no secret, and this sparked a wave of protests larger than the one in 2004. Within a week, the crowd in Kyiv's Independence Square (*Maidan Nezalezhnosti*) reached a few hundred thousand. The first violent response from the government came on November 30, when the Ukrainian riot police dispersed the crowd. The violence continued throughout December and January, with anti-Maidan protests emerging in pro-Russian regions. Meanwhile, Putin tried to mitigate the resentment toward Yanukovych in an agreement that Russia would purchase around 15 million dollars worth of Ukrainian debt and offer natural gas for a significantly discounted price. When the violence peaked at Maidan, Russia's representative Vladimir Lurkin, Commissioner for Human Rights in Russia, and the foreign ministers of Poland, Germany, and France brokered an agreement on 21 February for an interim government, holding elections in the following autumn, and constitutional reform. The Maidan protesters rejected the agreement, and the emerging resolution of the crisis only lasted a few days. Yanukovych fled to Moscow the next day.[375] On February 27, troops without insignias began seizing control of Crimea. Supported by the Russian troops already residing in Crimea, the pro-Russian militia seized the local parliament and held a referendum to join Russia on 16 March, followed by Russia's official annexation of the peninsula on 18 March.

Meanwhile, separatist armed groups started to emerge in Donetsk and Lugansk. The separatists took control of government buildings and communication centers, countered by Ukraine's declaration of an anti-terrorist operation in these regions in April 2014. Finally, already proclaiming themselves as republics, these regions claimed to hold referendums in May and declared their independence.

5.2. The Intervention

To many, the Russian actions during and after the Euromaidan constituted a clear case of intervention as these actions included prompting secessionist movements with the help of the Russian military and annexing a territory as a result of one of these movements. For example, in the UNSC meeting concerning the situation in Ukraine on 3 March, the British representatives evidenced that Russia "had forcibly taken over military and civilian airports, pressured Ukrainian military leaders to defect … and blocked Ukrainian ports." These

[375] For a more detailed and well-documented timeline of the Euromaidan, see Euromaidan Timeline, accessed June 19, 2024, http://maidantime.org/en.html.

actions violated the 1997 bilateral treaty between Russia and Ukraine, specifying the status of the Black Sea Fleet and prohibiting its interference with Ukrainian internal affairs.[376]

For several weeks, Putin denied the Russian military involvement during the Crimean annexation process, but on 18 March, announcing the annexation of Crimea into Russia, he accepted that Russia helped to "create conditions so that the residents of Crimea for the first time in history were able to express their free will regarding their own future peacefully."[377] Later, in June 2014, he admitted that Russian soldiers facilitated the referendum to join Russia, emphasizing that Russian troops deployed in the Russian military base in Crimea "helped Crimeans hold a referendum on their (a) independence and (b) desire to join the Russian Federation." He based this support on the principle of self-determination, coded in Article 1 of the UN Charter.[378] Elsewhere, Putin praised that Russia did not shoot a single fire during the Crimea referendum, and the Russian army only made sure that the 20,000 Ukrainian soldiers stationed in Crimea did not interfere with the referendum taking place.[379]

Russia's actions in Crimea did not only violate the bilateral agreements between Russia and Ukraine but international law as well. Clearly, considering the prohibition on the use of force and protection of territorial integrity cherished in Article 2 (4) of the UN Charter effectively renders the Russian actions as an aggression.[380] Furthermore, the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 also guaranteed Ukrainian territorial integrity in exchange for turning over its nuclear arsenal. The Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also invoked the 1974 Definition of Aggression General Assembly Resolution 3314 (XXIX), suggesting that the troops of one state deployed in another state through treaties must abide by the treaty in question, and any action not foreseen by the treaty enabling their deployment is an act of aggression.[381]

Russian claim in the face of these allegations was that the Russian-speaking and ethnic Russians in Crimea were endangered by the forces who took over the Kyiv government by

[376] Roy Allison, "Russian 'deniable' Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules," *International Affairs* 90, no. 6 (November 2014): 1263, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12170.
[377] Vladimir Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation," President of Russia, March 18, 2014, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603.
[378] Putin, "Vladimir Putin's Interview with Radio Europe 1 and TF1 TV Channel."
[379] Putin, "Interview to German Newspaper Bild. Part 1."
[380] Russian justifications are detailed below.
[381] James A. Green, "Editorial Comment: The Annexation of Crimea: Russia, Passportisation and the Protection of Nationals Revisited," *Journal on the Use of Force and International Law* 1, no. 1 (2014): 6, http://dx.doi.org/10.5235/20531702.1.1.3.

a coup, and Russia responded to their appeal for protection. Also, Russia's Permanent Representative in the UN, Vitaly Churkin, presented in the UNSC a letter of invitation to intervene by 'the legitimate' President Yanukovych.[382] This claim is elaborated below, but what is essential to consider to label the case as an intervention is the fact that there was no documented violence against the Russians and the Russian-speaking population in Crimea. Therefore, we cannot even assess whether the Russian response was proportionate and, thus, did not correspond to an illegitimate intervention because there was no aggression to which a comparison can be made.[383]



Figure 6. Ukraine after the 2014 Intervention[384]

[382] "Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Updates Security Council as It Holds Second Meeting on Ukraine in Three Days," United Nations, March 3, 2014, https://press.un.org/en/2014/sc11305.doc.htm. On a separate note, only one day after the UNSC meeting, Putin seemed to have accepted that Yanukovych "has no political future". "Russia's Putin told Yanukovich he has 'no political future,'" Reuters, March 4, 2014, accessed July 27, 2024, https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSBREA230S4/. Yanukovych, on the other hand, had rejected the claims over his resignation earlier and promised to return to Kyiv as soon as the conditions allowed. He also called the new government illegitimate and fascist. ABC News, "Ukraine Crisis: Viktor Yanukovych Says He Is Still Legitimate President, Expects Return to Kiev Soon," March 11, 2014, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-03-12/yanukovych-says-still-president,-expects-return-to-kiev/5314120.

[383] Green, "Editorial Comment: The Annexation of Crimea: Russia, Passportisation and the Protection of Nationals Revisited," 9.

[384] Michael Ray, "Russia-Ukraine War," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2024, https://www.britannica.com/event/2022-Russian-invasion-of-Ukraine.

Similarly, the denied Russian military presence in Donbas was later replaced by the acceptance of Russian mercenaries fighting in the region.[385] Upon a question that the US also had evidence for Russian involvement in Donbas, Putin backlashed, asking them to show it, and drew examples from US actions where they claimed to have evidence. Still, it appeared that there was none, such as the US claim that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, resulting in US intervention in Iraq and the death penalty for Saddam Hussein.[386] Later, it was revealed that Russian mercenaries led by Igor Girkin, also known by his nom-de-guerre Igor Strelkov, organized the rebellion in Donbas.[387] Before Donbas, he also led the separatist movement in Crimea.[388] Girkin was famous for his activities in Bosnia, Chechnya, and Transnistria.[389] Although he was known as a volunteer in Bosnia, his capacity in other places where the Russian military took place was not certain. Ukrainian sources claimed that Girkin worked for GRU, the Russian military intelligence. Girkin himself admitted having worked for FSB until 31 March 2013.[390]

Last but not least, Putin argued that if what happened with the Euromaidan was a revolution in Ukraine as the Maidan movement claimed, then a new state was being formed, and the bilateral relations with Russia and Ukraine had to get a clean slate, abolishing all previous agreements. Thus, in the new turn of events, Russia was not under the obligation of any binding agreements with the new Ukrainian state.[391] In this line, Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, stated that the coup in Kyiv placed Ukraine "beyond international law."[392] These statements are significant as they reveal the underpinning understanding of Russian activities in Ukraine, which denied the sovereignty of Ukraine and paved the way for any kind of interference in the political process in Ukraine, from proxying to irredentism. Due to these statements, the justifications from Russian officials become less convincing, and the

[385] Allison, "Russian 'deniable' Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules," November 2014, 1257.
[386] Putin, "Vladimir Putin's Interview with Radio Europe 1 and TF1 TV Channel."
[387] Tatyana Malyarenko, "Playing A Give-Away Game? The Undeclared Russian-Ukrainian War in Donbas," Small Wars Journal, 2015, https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/playing-a-give-away-game-the-undeclared-russian-ukrainian-war-in-donbas.
[388] "Ukraine Crisis: Key Players in Eastern Unrest," *BBC News*, April 29, 2014, sec. Europe, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-27211501.
[389] Rob Picheta, Sebastian Shukla, and Anna Chernova, "Pro-war Putin critic Igor Girkin sentenced to four years in Russian prison on extremism charges," CNN, January 25, 2024, accessed July 25, 2024, https://edition.cnn.com/2024/01/25/europe/igor-girkin-russia-trial-verdict-intl/index.html.
[390] Noah Sneider, "Shadowy Rebel Wields Iron Fist in Ukraine Fight," *The New York Times*, July 10, 2014, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/11/world/europe/russian-seizes-authority-over-ukraine-rebels.html.
[391] Putin, "Vladimir Putin Answered Journalists' Questions on the Situation in Ukraine."
[392] Allison, "Russian 'deniable' Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules," November 2014, 1267.

tenets of intervention indicated in the introductory chapter are fulfilled to denote Russian activities in Ukraine as an intervention. In other words, these activities were coercive, state-organized and controlled, and convention-breaking that targeted the political structure and the domestic political process of Ukraine- another sovereign state.

5.3. The Significance of the Intervention Venue and Justification

5.3.1. The Significance of Ukraine for Russia

The previous chapter focused on Georgia and delineated the Russian near-abroad doctrine, envisaging exclusive interests for Russia in the post-Soviet space that stemmed from Russian great power identity. The doctrine stipulated Russian military presence in post-Soviet countries, encountering the influence of other powers, and protecting the interests and rights of Russians and Russian-speaking peoples. Within this tenet of Russian foreign policy, Ukraine constituted the center pillar. It has been a fraternal country with the highest cultural affinity to Russia in the post-Soviet space, hosting a large Russian population as well.[393] To the frustration of Russian decision-makers, it also represented a political organization that is more than occasionally resilient to Russian influence. Ukraine's geopolitical significance for Russia is undeniable; they share a border more than 2,200 km long; Ukraine constitutes a substantial part of Russian economic gains, transferring Russian gas to Europe and having a large trade volume; and finally, Ukraine is a buffer zone between Russia and NATO. In addition, Crimea's location in the Black Sea gives it the characteristic of a perfect outpost to monitor NATO activities, especially the newly established US military bases in Bulgaria in 2006 and Romania in 2010.[394]

While such geopolitical postulates of Russia-Ukraine relations are evident, Russia's identity-based attitude toward Ukraine requires elaboration. First, it should be noted that Crimea and the Black Sea coastal regions of Ukraine, such as Odesa, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia, have been viewed by Russians as territories that Ukraine received for no

[393] Ukraine's latest official census of 2001 recorded 8,334,100 Russians and Russian-speakers in Ukraine, which accounted for 17,3% of the total population. Refworld - Global Law and Policy Database, "World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Ukraine : Russians and Russian-speakers," Refworld, February 12, 2024,
https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/mrgi/2008/en/64931.

[394] Ismayilov, *Russia's Military Interventions in Georgia and Ukraine: Interests, Motives, and Decision-Making*.

reason.[395] The fact that Russian speakers have constituted the majority in most of these regions reinforced this idea. When the Russian Empire took control of the Black Sea coastal regions in the 18th century, it joined them under the administrative unit of Novorossiya (New Russia). Since then, the peninsula became a favorite vacation destination for the elites of the Russian Empire, and "European travel literature, Russian literature, and the Crimean War crystallized a Russian romantic attachment to the land."[396] The attachment to New Russia today converted into irredentist aspirations with claims of historical Russianness of the region.

This attitude also led Russians to view Ukraine as an artificial state. At the Bucharest NATO Summit in 2008, Putin told the audience that Ukraine was a "complicated state" created in the Soviet period and received territories from its neighboring states.[397] He was also quoted by Russian media telling George W. Bush, "You don't understand, George, that Ukraine is not even a state. What is Ukraine? Part of its territories is Eastern Europe, but the greater part is a gift from us."[398] Putin's negation of Ukraine's statehood culminated in 2022 when he recognized Donetsk and Lugansk republics as independent states and initiated a full-scale invasion attempt of Ukraine three days later.

In his speech declaring that Russia recognized Donetsk and Lugansk republics, Putin provided a lengthy and selective summary of the state formation in Ukraine to delegitimize Ukraine's statehood. He emphasized that the Ukrainian state formation was constructed in a way to negate everything that united Ukrainians and Russians and "to distort the mentality and historical memory of millions of people, of entire generations living in Ukraine."[399] He held this responsible for the rise of nationalism and Russophobia in Ukraine. "The external forces" were also complicit in the emergence of an anti-Russia Ukraine as they helped Ukrainian oligarchs since 1991, when Ukraine "opted for mindlessly" to implement their model of statehood (because "Ukraine actually never had stable traditions of real statehood) so that Ukrainian oligarchs became able to hold their wealth stolen from Ukrainian people

[395] All these regions, with the exception of Odesa, are under Russian occupation as of 24 February 2022.
[396] John Biersack and Shannon O'Lear, "The Geopolitics of Russia's Annexation of Crimea: Narratives, Identity, Silences, and Energy," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 55, no. 3 (2014): 250, https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2014.985241.
[397] "Text of Putin's Speech at NATO Summit (Bucharest, April 2, 2008)," Unian Information Agency, 2008, https://www.unian.info/world/111033-text-of-putin-s-speech-at-nato-summit-bucharest-april-2-2008.html.
[398] James Marson, "Putin to the West: Hands off Ukraine," TIME, May 25, 2009, https://time.com/archive/6946776/putin-to-the-west-hands-off-ukraine/.
[399] Vladimir Putin, "Address by the President of the Russian Federation," President of Russia, February 21, 2022, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828.

in Western accounts, at the same time, "reverently accommodating the geopolitical rivals of Russia."[400]

One can argue that Putin's views increased in their negative tune against Ukraine in the face of the rising tension in 2022. However, this was not the case, as his statements regarding Ukraine's sovereignty have usually been accompanied by an addendum of historical accounts of Ukrainian territory. For example, in 2014, he pointed to the 1922 decision of the Soviet Union to transfer the Novorossiya region, which included Odesa, Kherson, Lugansk, Donetsk, Kharkiv, and Mykolaiv to Ukraine. He claimed that this region "historically always bore the name of Novorossiya."[401] Let alone the historical reality of the socio-political formation of this region, the name Novorossiya itself contradicts the claim as it literally means New Russia. In fact, this region was annexed and named so by the Russian Empire only after the Russo-Turkish War (1768-1774). Nevertheless, Putin also lamented in the same address Khrushchev's decision to transfer Crimea to Ukraine in 1954, underlining that this was against Soviet law as it required the confirmation of both Russian and Ukrainian Supreme Soviets. Instead, Russian and Ukrainian Presidiums took the decision of the transfer.[402]

The negation of Ukraine's statehood accompanied the questioning of Ukrainian nationhood as well. In 2013, in an interview about Ukraine's EU Association Agreement choice over the Eurasian Economic Union, Putin stated that Ukrainians and Russians are "one nation." He drew attention to the fact that Ukrainian territory became subject to different countries' rules throughout history, and only through unification with Russia was it able to prosper, accessing "huge investments" in infrastructure and industrial development. Despite this, he added, Russia respected the current reality- the fact that many Ukrainians highly regard their independence.[403]

Putin reiterated elsewhere in addition to having very similar languages, Ukraine and Russia had "common traditions, a common mentality, a common history and a common culture," which made them "one people." Although he acknowledged the distinct features of Ukrainian identity, he reckoned that Ukraine is part of the "greater Russian, or Russian-

[400] Putin, "Address by the President of the Russian Federation," President of Russia, February 21, 2022.
[401] Putin, "Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club," October 29, 2014.
[402] Presidiums were the highest state authority in the Soviet republics and were elected by the legislative bodies-Supreme Soviets.
[403] Vladimir Putin, "Interview to Channel One and Associated Press News Agency," President of Russia, 2013, http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/interviews/19143.

Ukrainian, world." He also stated that Ukraine's territory occurred as an independent state in the historical process despite this unity and Russia respected that.[404] Reading between the lines, for Putin, the Ukrainian state formation and a separate Ukrainian identity from that of Russia appear to be a historical anomaly that is instigated by foreign powers and facilitated by the faulty choices of Ukrainian leaders.

To further prove this point, Putin published an article in 2021 titled "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians," where he provided a lengthy but highly selective overview of the Ukrainian state and identity formation presented as an invention of foreign powers to balance Russia or each other.[405] Later, in 2023, the Russian State Archive released an 800-page book titled *On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians-Documents*.[406] The book includes Putin's 2021 article, 2022 "special operation" speech, and various archival documents belonging to multiple periods spanning from the 11th century to the modern days, all of which, the book claims, evidence Russian-Ukrainian unity.

The 2021 article can be read as a justification for further Russian aggression in Ukraine, an effort to rally further the domestic audience around Russia's Ukraine policy, or an appeal for Ukrainians to come to terms with Russia's request not to steer toward the West. Nevertheless, the length and the complexity of the text, despite criticisms from historians, do not provide the conclusion that the article was written for a general audience, especially considering it was supported by an 800-page long documentary appendix. Instead, the text seems to be Vladimir Putin's reflection and theorizing of Russian foreign policy toward Ukraine. Indeed, this does not mean that the text does not provide an ample amount of justification for Russian aggression in Ukraine. Especially from this aspect, it is a crucial source for analysis.

It, for instance, connects Ukraine's 'true sovereignty' to its relations with Russia:

> I am confident that true sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia. Our spiritual, human and civilizational ties formed for centuries and have their origins in the same sources, they have been hardened by common trials, achievements

[404] Putin, "Vladimir Putin Meets with Members the Valdai International Discussion Club. Transcript of the Speech and the Meeting."
[405] Vladimir Putin, "Article by Vladimir Putin "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians"," President of Russia, July 14, 2021, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181.
[406] "Об Историческом Единстве Русских и Украинцев. Документы," Государственный архив Российской Федерации, 2023, https://rusarchives.ru/sites/default/files/book_o-edinstve-rus-ukr_hrest.pdf.

> and victories. Our kinship has been transmitted from generation to generation. It is in the hearts and the memory of people living in modern Russia and Ukraine, in the blood ties that unite millions of our families. Together we have always been and will be many times stronger and more successful. For we are one people.[407]

Although this section so far included some sources like this from the period after 2014 - the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the Donbas war - the conclusions derived from them are attuned with Putin's invigorating the concept of *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World) much earlier. In the 2006 Year of Russian Language address, Putin had asked the Russian intelligentsia to promote the idea of Russkiy Mir.[408] The idea of *Russkiy Mir* denoted the unity of Russians, Belarussians, and Ukrainians under the Russian language and culture and "was shaped by the dominant vision of Self as a great power and a legitimate center of a wider civilizational space, and served to reinforce this vision."[409]

In 2007, Putin established the Russkiy Mir Fund to promote the Russian language, culture, and image worldwide.[410] Later, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) contributed to the idea of *Russkiy Mir* as conceptualizing Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarussians constituting 'Holy Rus'.[411] The spiritual identity of Holy Rus was traced back to the adoption of Christianity by Kyivan Rus in 988. The ROC considered this date as the incorporation of Eastern Slavs into a single civilization.[412] Thus, the foundations of a Russian sphere of influence were established. Although *Russkiy Mir* was proposed as only a spiritual or civilizational identity, it definitely had a foreign policy dimension. After all, civilizational choice was a crucial matter for most post-Soviet countries, especially for Ukraine. Furthermore, a distinct Ukrainian consciousness and identity has been heavily tied to the emergence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church contra the Russian Orthodox Church.[413] Russkiy Mir created the necessary arguments for Russian decision-makers to sway Ukrainian public opinion into its sphere of influence. The foreign policy aspect of *Russkiy Mir* was further approved by Patriarch Kirill's inclusion of Moldova and Kazakhstan into

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[407] Putin, "Article by Vladimir Putin "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians"."
[408] Mariya Y. Omelicheva, "Critical Geopolitics on Russian Foreign Policy: Uncovering the Imagery of Moscow's International Relations," *International Politics* 53, no. 6 (2016): 714.
[409] Valentina Feklyunina, "Soft Power and Identity: Russia, Ukraine and the 'Russian World(s),'" *European Journal of International Relations* 22, no. 4 (2016): 791, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066115601200.
[410] Nicolai N. Petro, "The Russian Orthodox Church," in *Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy*, ed. Andrei P. Tsygankov (Routledge, 2018), 222.
[411] Petro, 221.
[412] Petro, 221.
[413] Sevinç Alkan, "Russia in the Newly Independent States: A Comparative Analysis Between the Cases of Kazakhstan, Ukraine and the Baltic States" (Master's, İstanbul, Marmara University, 2002).

the Russian World.[414] Apparently, the constituting element, baptized as Christians together, was replaced by possible Russian influence.

In 2009, Patriarch Kirill proposed certain areas where the ROC could contribute to Russia's foreign policy. Among these were "improving contacts with Russians living abroad" and "promoting a positive image of Russia, its history, culture and religion abroad."[415] The Orthodox Church had found a place in Putin's formulation of Russia as representing an alternative civilizational core to the Western one. For him, the abandonment of Christian and traditional values led the West to a moral crisis, which, as underlined in Chapter 3, was also reflected in Western attitudes in international politics.

The idea of *Russkiy Mir* became more pertinent when, in 2013, President Putin spoke in Kyiv in the commemoration of the 1025th anniversary of the baptism of Rus, where he underlined the shared history and culture of the two countries.[416] Next year, he would express similar thoughts in his speech declaring the annexation of Crimea:

> Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. This is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptised. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilization and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. The graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian empire are also in Crimea. This is also Sevastopol – a legendary city with an outstanding history, a fortress that serves as the birthplace of Russia's Black Sea Fleet. Crimea is Balaklava and Kerch, Malakhov Kurgan and Sapun Ridge. Each one of these places is dear to our hearts, symbolising Russian military glory and outstanding valour.
>
> Crimea is a unique blend of different peoples' cultures and traditions. This makes it similar to Russia as a whole, where not a single ethnic group has been lost over the centuries. Russians and Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars and people of other ethnic groups have lived side by side in Crimea, retaining their own identity, traditions, languages and faith.[417]

[414] Omelicheva, "Critical Geopolitics on Russian Foreign Policy: Uncovering the Imagery of Moscow's International Relations," 715.
[415] Petro, "The Russian Orthodox Church," 225.
[416] Petro, 224.
[417] Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation."

The fundamental problem with *Russkiy Mir*, or how Ukraine is placed in Russian foreign policy per *Russkiy Mir*, is that it has reserved very little agency for Ukraine. Within Russian rhetoric concerning Ukraine, Ukraine's agency is delimited by its inclination to be part and act in accordance with Russian formulation of a larger civilizational sphere, in which it is, in fact, regarded as the junior constituent so much that Putin once referred Ukraine, perhaps as a result of a faux pas, as Little Russia (Malorossiya)- the imperial denotation of today's Ukraine, and his country as Big Russia. He further stated that no one should interfere with the relations between Big and Little Russia as they were only Russia's business itself.[418]

Thus, Putin's formulation of Russian-Ukrainian unity not only places great importance on Ukraine but also paves the way for assertive policies toward them as it is the lesser partner without traditional statehood and nationhood. As Russia turns to its imperial past as a positive drive in its identity, Ukraine is rendered politically, culturally, historically, and spiritually integral to Russia.[419] In other words, Ukraine represents the most significant aspect of Russia's reconciliation with its status lost- its correction of temporal status inconsistency. Any interference with this integrality by the West becomes an attack against Russia's identity, and its efforts become great again. From this aspect, for Russia, Ukraine is "more than a foreign policy priority; it is an existential imperative."[420]

5.3.2. Russian Justification for the Intervention in Ukraine

Russian justification for the intervention in Ukraine coalesced into a similar set of arguments with the Georgia case. Putin applied the Kosovo precedent in his statements to Crimea, drew examples from US unilateralism and how Russian actions are more adherent to international law, argued that Russia protected Russians and Russian speakers, and finally claimed that the intervention in Crimea was conducted via invitation by Crimean authorities and legitimate Ukrainian president in self-exile.

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[418] Marson, "Putin to the West."
[419] Ted Hopf, "'Crimea Is Ours': A Discursive History," *International Relations* 30, no. 2 (2016): 244, https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117816645646.
[420] Alexander Bogomolov and Oleksandr Lytvynenko, "A Ghost in the Mirror: Russian Soft Power in Ukraine," Briefing Paper, The Aims and Means of Russian Influence Abroad (Chattam House, 2012), 1, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Russia%20and%20Eurasia/0112bp_bogomolov_lytvynenko.pdf.

The previous chapter delineated how Kosovar independence was paramount for Russia's perception of misrecognition of its status. In defending Crimea's referendum to join Russia, Putin repeatedly appealed to the Kosovo precedent. If people in Kosovo had the right to self-determination, so did the Crimean people.[421] "Crimean authorities" simply followed "a precedent our Western colleagues created with their own hands in a very similar situation." Further justifying the referendum, he cited the 2010 International Court of Justice (ICJ) advisory opinion on Kosovo's declaration of independence, affirming that Kosovar independence was not against international law and that the UNSC cannot practice against declarations of independence. He also referred to the American statement to the ICJ regarding Kosovo, which asserted that "Declarations of independence may, and often do violate domestic legislation. However, this does not make them violations of international law." While it was the Americans who wrote this down and distributed it to everyone, why would they be so outrageous when the Crimean people applied them?[422]

Once again, the Kosovo precedent appeared, similar to the Georgian case, both as a justifying instrument and a reference point of US unilateralism, which Russia was allowed to replicate to assert its status as equal. In defending the annexation of Crimea elsewhere, Putin once again drew the Kosovo precedent and stated that Russia-West relations must be based on respect for each other's interests and the same rules that were applicable everywhere rather than changing rules according to someone's interests.[423] If the US was able to create a new norm in Kosovo, why would Russia not be allowed to practice it in Crimea?

Indeed, whether the cases of Kosovo and Crimea were analogous mattered less than Russia's ability to reflect the same out-of-norm attitude. Still, Putin protested the US argument that Kosovo made up a sui generis case because the Kosovo conflict resulted in so many casualties. For him, not only was this not a legal argument, but also it was beyond double standard.[424] At least, in Crimea, there was a referendum. There was no referendum in Kosovo's declaration of independence, but only a parliamentary decision. Thus, Russia did not annex Crimea; it acted according to the will of the Crimean people.[425] Furthermore, if "the Crimean local self-defense units" did not step up to take control of the situation, there

[421] Putin, "Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club," October 29, 2014.
[422] Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation."
[423] Putin, "Interview to German Newspaper Bild. Part 1."
[424] Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation."
[425] Vladimir Putin, "Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club," President of Russia, October 19, 2018, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58848.

would also be casualties in Crimea. Putin argued for this danger but also proposed that the fact that there was no armed confrontation in Crimea was a demonstration of the people's will.[426]

In Putin's rhetoric, the requirement of the Crimean people's appeal to self-determination emerged in the face of the alleged imminent danger to Russians living in the peninsula. One of the first actions of the new parliament formed after Yanukovych fled Ukraine was to abolish the 2012 law that allowed minorities to adopt official languages other than Ukrainian if they make up more than 10% of the population. This enabled many Russian-populated regions and municipalities to declare Russia as the official regional language. Repealing the law contributed to Russia's claim that the Russian-speaking population was endangered, no matter that the acting President Oleksandr Turchynov vetoed repealing the 2012 law as a gesture for the Russian-speaking population getting restless.[427]

In fact, this move was perceived by Putin as further Western interference in the crisis and proof of the Western backing of the "illegitimate" government. Claiming that the revolution in Maidan was orchestrated by radicals, "ideological heirs of Bandera, Hitler's accomplice during World War II," Putin asserted that the government in Kyiv was not legitimate. The first thing they did when they took over the government was to introduce restricting languages other than Ukrainian, but their "foreign sponsors" "disciplined" them, and they halted the enforcement. Putin further claimed that when the intentions of the new Ukrainian government became evident as they suppressed those who went against the revolution, especially in Russian-speaking regions, the Russian-speaking population asked for Russia's help. He added, "Naturally, we could not leave this plea unheeded; we could not abandon Crimea and its residents in distress. This would have been betrayal on our part".[428]

The protection that was to be provided by Russia emerged in the shape of annexation because Putin viewed the territorial integrity of Ukraine as conditional to the status of Russians, which enabled Russian intervention regardless of the existence of a real danger to them. Putin stated that Russia had tried to accommodate Ukraine about the status of Crimea and the maritime boundary in the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait so that Russia-Ukraine

[426] Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation."
[427] Biersack and O'Lear, "The Geopolitics of Russia's Annexation of Crimea: Narratives, Identity, Silences, and Energy," 2014, 249.
[428] Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation."

relations would not be stuck in the narrow realm of territorial disputes. Furthermore, Russia hoped that Russians and the Russian speakers in Ukraine would "live in a friendly, democratic and civilised state that would protect their rights in line with the norms of international law." Despite this, he resented Ukraine's attempts several times to deprive Russians of their "historical memory" and language, subjecting them to forced assimilation.[429] Thus, Russia stepped in to prevent this from happening.

In the UNSC sessions of early March 2014 before the annexation, the Russian delegate Vitaly Churkin claimed that "unknowned armed men from Kiev" tried to seize the Crimean Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the "self-defence" groups had to respond to them. The alleged self-defense groups were led by Sergei Aksyonov and Igor Girkin, who stormed the Crimean parliament to elect Aksyonov as the prime minister behind closed doors guarded by armed men.[430] Churkin also showed the documents that Aksyonov and Yanukovych requested the Russian military's help in restoring order in Ukraine. Thus, Russia's military measures in the Crimean peninsula were conducted as an intervention by invitation. The following day, Putin stated that the official request from Yanukovych tasked Russia to protect the Russian and Russian-speaking people in the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine as well. If Russia deemed it necessary, the help would reach there, too.[431] The US rejected the validity of these requests on the grounds that the sub-national authorities could not invite neighboring states for intervention, nor the President of Ukraine alone, without the approval of the Ukrainian parliament.[432]

Whether the annexation of Crimea was lawful under international treaties and norms has been discussed widely.[433] More important for the purposes of this study is that the Autonomous Republic of Crimea declared independence under questionable circumstances, and it dissolved itself via voluntary absorption into Russia within five days. This fait accompli aspect of the Crimean parliament's decisions implicates intervention and casts

[429] Putin.
[430] Simon Shuster, "Putin's Man in Crimea Is Ukraine's Worst Nightmare," TIME, March 10, 2014, https://time.com/19097/putin-crimea-russia-ukraine-aksyonov/.
[431] Allison, "Russian 'deniable' Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules," November 2014, 1264.
[432] Allison, 1264–65.
[433] See, for example Christian Marxsen, "The Crimea Crisis – An International Law Perspective," *Zeitschrift Für Ausländisches Öffentliches Recht Und Völkerrecht (Heidelberg Journal of International Law)* 74, no. 2 (2014): 367–91; Theodore Christakis, "Self-Determination, Territorial Integrity and Fait Accompli in the Case of Crimea," *ZaöRV/Heidelberg JIL* 75, no. 1 (2015): 75–100; "Politics and International Law: Three International Experts Debate the Annexation of Crimea," Geschichte der Gegenwart, March 20, 2019, https://geschichtedergegenwart.ch/10285-2/.

doubt on Russian allegations about the conditions of ethnic Russians. Igor Girkin himself admitted in a TV debate that they forced the parliament to vote for a referendum and the rebellion did not find support from the authorities in Crimea.[434] The necessary conditions for the protection of Russians in Crimea had not occurred. Russian statements already provided a preemptive nature to the intervention. When this is the case, the Russian justifications only point to circumstantial motivations at best rather than larger drives in decision-making. A closer analysis below traces Russian status-seeking in Ukraine with countering Western complicity in the crisis and ensuring the Black Sea Fleet's status- an important marker of Russia's great power status.

5.4. Russian Status-Seeking in Ukraine

The previous chapter underlined that the intervention in Georgia harvested Russia recognition in the shape of resetting Russia-US relations. With the "reset," the cooperation between the parties peaked, especially in the first couple of years. In 2009, the US canceled the European Interceptor Site - the missile defense system planned to be based in Poland and Czechia. In 2010, the new START treaty was signed and ratified, and this was considered by both sides as the building block of the emerging atmosphere of cooperation and trust. The same year, the UNSC comprehensively sanctioned Iran with Russia's support. Russia would also stop the delivery of S-300 systems to Iran. In 2011, UNSC Resolution 1973 authorized a NATO-led coalition to create a no-fly zone over Libya and the protection of civilians. Although Russia harshly criticized how the US applied the resolution afterward, it did not use its veto during the vote. Later on, Russia was granted WTO membership in 2012.[435] During the reset, the US also refrained from commenting on the status of democracy and human rights in Russia. On a question about former oligarch Khodorkovsky's trial, Obama responded: "I think it is improper for outsiders to interfere in the legal processes of

[434] *Ukraine War - Russian FSB Colonel Strelkov: Crimea Referendum Was Fake* (YouTube, 2015), pt. 0:10-1:20, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mcCqrzctxH4. Girkin was found guilty by a Dutch court on murdering the 298 passengers of MH17 flight shot down over Donetsk by the separatists in July, 2014. Jennifer Rankin, "Three Men Found Guilty of Murdering 298 People in Shooting down of MH17," *The Guardian*, November 17, 2022, sec. World news, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/17/three-men-found-guilty-of-murdering-298-people-in-flight-mh17-bombing.

[435] Michael McFaul, Stephen Sestanovich, and John J. Mearsheimer, "Faulty Powers: Who Started the Ukraine Crisis?," *Foreign Affairs*, 2014, 167.

Russia."[436] It appeared that the US made a note of constant Russian protests regarding comments on its political system.

The outbreak of the Arab Spring and Putin's reinstation in the presidency in 2012 hindered the momentum of the bilateral cooperation between the parties. The Americans were contended with their progress with Medvedev, but they found Putin's approach less cooperative and suspicious of American intentions. Putin was already disappointed with how the NATO-led coalition carried out the UNSC resolution in Libya and had grown wary of US moves in Syria. Just before he re-assumed presidency, Medvedev and Putin met with President Obama's national security adviser, Tom Donilon, who was there to convey the message that Americans wished to preserve the momentum of the relations. To the American delegation's surprise, Putin opened the meeting with an outright question: "When are you going to start bombing Syria?"[437]

Considering Putin's unequivocal opposition to regime change from outside, the American attitude in the Arab Spring clearly frustrated Putin. NATO's plans for the deployment of significantly diminished missile systems in Eastern Europe were also backlashed with Russian reaction. For Putin, these plans aimed crippling Russian nuclear capability.[438] Furthermore, the Magnitsky Act[439] signed by Obama in late 2012 and Russia's providing asylum to Edward Snowden[440] in 2013 further deteriorated the relations. The American actions in the second half of the reset period were regarded by Russia as the continuation of the same old unilateralism.

The previous chapter underlined that the US unilateralism constituted one of the tenets of the Russian perception of misrecognition. The overthrowing of Muammar Qaddafi as a result of the involvement of the NATO-led coalition set a proper example of how Russia would react to regime change by international action, interpreting it as acting beyond one's

[436] Ruth Deyermond, "Assessing the Reset: Successes and Failures in the Obama Administration's Russia Policy, 2009–2012," *European Security* 22, no. 4 (2013): 506, https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2013.777704.
[437] Peter Baker, "U.S.-Russian Ties Still Fall Short of 'Reset' Goal," *The New York Times*, September 3, 2013, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/03/world/europe/us-russian-ties-still-fall-short-of-reset-goal.html.
[438] Aruel Braun, "Resetting Russian–Eastern European Relations for the 21st Century," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 45 (2012): 396, http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2012.07.009.
[439] After exposing large-scale corruption in Moscow, Sergei Magnitsky had been jailed in 2008 and died in prison in 2009. The Magnitsky Act aimed at sanctioning the Russian officials responsible for his death.
[440] Snowden leaked highly classified documents from National Security Agency, revealing complicated surveillance projects of the US government. Charged with espionage, Snowden fled to Russia in 2013, where he was provided asylum and citizenship later in 2022.

status. In other words, the US's overuse of its status would also come at the expense of Russia's status because such actions would place the US in a higher place in the hierarchy. The 2013 foreign policy concept immediately took note of this and criticized the use of force without and beyond the UN charter and UNSC resolutions under the pretext of responsibility to protect. Commenting that such unilateral actions only resulted in the deterioration of the conflicts, it reckoned unilateralism as a risk to world stability and peace.[441]

Commenting on the situation in Ukraine, Putin again drew parallels with US military involvements in Iraq, Libya, Serbia, and Afghanistan. He asserted that these actions were conducted without resorting to international law. While the US had the right to ignore international law, how could Russia was not entitled to "protect the interests of the Russian-speaking and Russian population of Crimea"?[442] Putin reckoned that "Like a mirror, the situation in Ukraine reflects what is going on and what has been happening in the world over the past several decades" and held US unilateralism responsible:

> Key institutions are not getting any stronger; on the contrary, in many cases, they are sadly degrading. 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. They have come to believe in their exclusivity and exceptionalism, that they can decide the destinies of the world, that only they can ever be right. They act as they please: here and there, they use force against sovereign states, building coalitions based on the principle "If you are not with us, you are against us." To make this aggression look legitimate, they force the necessary resolutions from international organisations, and if for some reason this does not work, they simply ignore the UN Security Council and the UN overall.[443]

For Putin, the crisis in Ukraine occurred precisely because of the US attitude and the bandwagoning of European countries to US policies. Therefore, Russia's action in Ukraine must have been geared toward refuting this unilateralism, or, in other words, misrecognition of Russia's status.

[441] "Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation."
[442] Putin, "Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club," October 29, 2014.
[443] Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation."

5.4.1. Countering Western complicity in the Ukraine crisis

The Russian account of Western involvement in the Ukraine crisis concluded that the 2014 crisis was an extension of the 2004 Orange Revolution. Putin stated that the color revolutions imposed the same standard for everyone, regardless of whether their way of life and traditions did not fit the promoted model. In consequence, Western promotion of democracy created chaos and violence instead of freedom. For him, similar steps were taken in 2004 against the constitution in Ukraine. And all these were directed against Russia:

> We understand what is happening; we understand that these actions were aimed against Ukraine and Russia and against Eurasian integration. And all this while Russia strived to engage in dialogue with our colleagues in the West. We are constantly proposing cooperation on all key issues; we want to strengthen our level of trust and for our relations to be equal, open and fair. But we saw no reciprocal steps.
>
> On the contrary, they have lied to us many times, made decisions behind our backs, placed us before an accomplished fact. This happened with NATO's expansion to the East, as well as the deployment of military infrastructure at our borders. They kept telling us the same thing: "Well, this does not concern you." That's easy to say.
>
> …
>
> In short, we have every reason to assume that the infamous policy of containment, led 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, continues today. They are constantly trying to sweep us into a corner because we have an independent position, because we maintain it and because we call things like they are and do not engage in hypocrisy. But there is a limit to everything. And with Ukraine, our western partners have crossed the line, playing the bear and acting irresponsibly and unprofessionally.[444]

Despite the Russian frustration with the 2004 Orange Revolution, the subsequent developments did not actually steer against Russian interests. The democratic improvement was marginal in Ukraine; a pro-Russian president was elected in 2010, who extended the lease of Sevastopol port for the Russian Black Sea Fleet until 2042, and the "no-bloc" policy of the government practically suspended Ukraine's NATO membership plan.[445]

[444] Putin.
[445] McFaul, "Putin, Putinism, and the Domestic Determinants of Russian Foreign Policy," 119.

But, of course, the problem for Russia was the high possibility of this course swinging between neutrality and pro-Russia being blocked with the new government instigated by the Maidan. Russian frustration with the Western partners was that the Western partners did not encourage the Maidan protesters and their political representation to implement the agreement brokered by European foreign ministers on 21 February and instead let the overthrowing of Yanukovych happen.[446] Two days after Yanukovych fled Ukraine, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs protested the embracement of the new status quo by the Euro-Atlantic bloc:

> We are surprised that several European politicians have already sprung to support the announcement of presidential elections in Ukraine this May, although the agreement of the 21 February envisages that these elections should take place only after the completion of the constitutional reform. It is clear that for this reform to succeed all the Ukrainian political forces and all regions of the country must become its part, but its results should be approved by a nationwide referendum. We are convinced that it is necessary to fully take into account concerns of deputies of eastern and southern regions of Ukraine, the Crimea and Sevastopol, which were expressed at the conference in Kharkov on the 22 February.[447]

It should also be noted that the Russian representative in the negotiations, Vladimir Lukin, had not signed the agreed terms on 21 February. In any case, should the agreement have been implemented by the Ukrainian government and a peaceful reform period started, Russia would have time and opportunity to influence the process via pro-Russian elements in Ukraine.[448] By refusing to implement the agreement, the Euromaidan movement further blocked Russia from the process.

In his thorough essay, for example, Allison concludes that "…the Russian perception of the new Ukrainian leadership as especially hostile to Russia and its political system seemed to trigger strategic worst-case thinking and with that a rapid decision to implement a plan for the occupation and eventual annexation of Crimea."[449] While this assessment aptly

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[446] Hopf, "'Crimea Is Ours': A Discursive History," 246.
[447] "Statement by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Regarding the Events in Ukraine," The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2014, https://archive.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/73918.
[448] Tatyana Malyarenko and Stefan Wolff, "The Logic of Competitive Influence-Seeking: Russia, Ukraine, and the Conflict in Donbas," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 34, no. 4 (2018): 197, https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2018.1425083.
[449] Allison, "Russian 'deniable' Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules," November 2014, 1296.

summarizes what happened, Western involvement as a larger facilitating factor appears more significant in Russia's intervention decision. In his speech at UNGA in 2015, Putin emphasized the Western complicity in the Maidan revolution, stating that the people's dissatisfaction with the government was used as a tool to prompt a coup d'état from *outside*.[450] In 2018, he would argue that the US encouraged the coup in Ukraine, spending billions of dollars.[451] And finally, in his speech at the Valdai Discussion Club in 2023, Putin reiterated:

> I think, I have no doubt that it was the United States that provoked the Ukraine crisis by supporting the coup in Ukraine in 2014. They could not fail to understand that this was a red line, we have said this a thousand times. They never listened. Now we have today's situation.[452]

He also added that this was not accidental but premeditated by the US, so the European dependency on the US would increase. As a result of the sanctions against Russia, for example, European states had to buy energy from the US at a 30% higher price than Russia's offer.

Certain US policies, in fact, enabled this perception. The appearance of the US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, Victoria Nuland, in the Euromaidan protests distributing food[453] was proof for Russians to consider the movement Western-instigated. Nuland's statements[454] regarding US investment of "over 5 billion dollars" to help Ukraine achieve its democratic goals and "European aspirations" were also oft-quoted. John Mearsheimer also drew attention to the activities of the American NGO, National Endowment for Democracy, supported by the US Congress in encouraging the anti-Yanukovych movement. He cited, for example, the president of the NGO, Carl Gershman, who stated in September 2013 that Ukraine's steering toward Europe would bring

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[450] Vladimir Putin, "Read Putin's U.N. General Assembly Speech," *Washington Post*, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/09/28/read-putins-u-n-general-assembly-speech/.
[451] Vladimir Putin, "Interview of the Russian President Vladimir Putin to American TV Channel NBC," Embassy of the Russian Federation in the USA, March 10, 2018, https://washington.mid.ru/en/press-centre/news/interview_of_the_russian_president_vladimir_putin_to_american_tv_channel_nbc/.
[452] Vladimir Putin, "Valdai International Discussion Club Meeting," President of Russia, October 9, 2023, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/72444.
[453] *Victoria Nuland Gives Food for Demonstration People in Ukraine* (YouTube, 2013), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fbjNJbjEy04.
[454] "Remarks at the U.S.-Ukraine Foundation Conference," U.S. Department of State, 2013, //2009-2017.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2013/dec/218804.htm.

democracy to Russia, too, toppling Putin.[455] Already disliking revolutions and regime change, Putin was concerned that the Maidan revolution would provide an example for ousting governments in post-Soviet space, and allowing such an action would mean that everyone could try the same.[456]

A Western-inclined wave in post-Soviet space was not only a threat to Putin's political career but also Russia's great power aspirations as the post-Soviet space would drift apart from Russia and its vision of being one of the gravitational centers of international politics. After all, the West contained Russia whenever it emerged powerful: "The policy of containment was not invented yesterday. It has been carried out against our country for many years, always, for decades, if not centuries. In short, whenever someone thinks that Russia has become too strong or independent, these tools are quickly put into use."[457]

Putin clearly expressed in June 2014 that the annexation of Crimea was a response to such containment attempts in the form of NATO enlargement. Because the Western partners preferred to support "the anti-constitutional state coup in Ukraine" instead of responding to Russia's appeals for dialogue and a multilateral solution:[458]

> "…we could not be sure that Ukraine would not become part of the North Atlantic military bloc. In that situation, we could not allow a historical part of the Russian territory with a predominantly ethnic Russian population to be incorporated into an international military alliance, especially because Crimeans wanted to be part of Russia. I am sorry, but we couldn't act differently."

This excerpt not only indicates the increased Russian threat perception but also that Putin did not consider Crimea within Ukraine's territorial integrity but as a "historical part of the Russian territory." Putin's views on Ukraine's statehood and how it is related to Russia's great power identity were detailed above; therefore, it suffices to remind at this point that in the 2008 Bucharest NATO Summit, Putin had underlined that Ukraine is a "complicated state formation," consisted by ethnic Russians who made up "one third" of the population, and having gained territory from various states in different arrangements. If

[455] McFaul, Sestanovich, and Mearsheimer, "Faulty Powers: Who Started the Ukraine Crisis?"
[456] Allison, "Russian 'deniable' Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules," November 2014, 1291.
[457] Vladimir Putin, "Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly," President of Russia, December 4, 2014, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/messages/47173.
[458] Putin, "Vladimir Putin's Interview with Radio Europe 1 and TF1 TV Channel."

Russia brought these matters to the table, Ukraine would come to "the verge of its existence." Thus, he had warned, "We should act very-very carefully."[459]

Surely, Ukraine's NATO prospects were shelved aside before the Euromaidan, and the new government had no intention of NATO membership[460]; at the same time, NATO Secretary General Anders Rasmussen stated it was still an option if Ukraine decided in this way, but there was more urgent matters for Ukraine.[461] Only after the Russian intervention in eastern Ukraine became certain did Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseny Yatsenyuk appeal to the parliament to apply for NATO membership.[462] But regardless of such statements, Putin viewed the overthrowing of Yanukovych as having all kinds of negative implications and an overall Western effort to contain, humiliate, and deter Russia:

> I ask myself, what was the purpose of all this? I want to understand why this was done. He had in fact given up his power already, and as I believe, as I told him, he had no chance of being re-elected. Everybody agrees on this, everyone I have been speaking to on the telephone these past few days. What was the purpose of all those illegal, unconstitutional actions, why did they have to create this chaos in the country? Armed and masked militants are still roaming the streets of Kiev. This is a question to which there is no answer. Did they wish to humiliate someone and show their power? I think these actions are absolutely foolish. The result is the absolute opposite of what they expected, because their actions have significantly destabilised the east and southeast of Ukraine.[463]

Ukraine's NATO membership would significantly hinder Russian influence in the Black Sea and draw the military threat posed by NATO too close to Russian borders. However, Putin did not assess the situation only from this point of view. For him, "the coup in Kiev" endangered "everything Russia has fought for since Peter the Great, and a NATO base in Crimea would "have excluded Russia from this region, for which so many Russian bones have been buried over previous centuries."[464]

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[459] "Text of Putin's Speech at NATO Summit (Bucharest, April 2, 2008)."
[460] "Deschytsia States New Government of Ukraine Has No Intention to Join NATO," Interfax-Ukraine, 2014, https://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/198372.html.
[461] "Door to NATO Remains Open for Ukraine," Euronews, 2014, https://web.archive.org/web/20210118035504/https://www.euronews.com/2014/02/26/door-to-nato-remains-open-for-ukraine.
[462] "Ukraine to Seek Nato Membership, Says PM Yatsenyuk," *BBC News*, August 29, 2014, sec. Europe, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28978699.
[463] Putin, "Vladimir Putin Answered Journalists' Questions on the Situation in Ukraine."
[464] Hopf, "'Crimea Is Ours': A Discursive History," 247.

All in all, Western countries were unequivocally responsible for the developments in Ukraine. Their support for ousting Yanukovych once again revealed that they did not regard Russia as having the same status as themselves. The account of the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement below demonstrates that Russia's perception of misrecognition was not limited to the embracement of "the coup" by the West but also how Russia was treated during the agreement negotiations earlier.

5.4.2. Countering Misrecognition of Russia in the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement Negotiations

The association agreement is the highest degree of economic integration offered to noncandidate countries within the EU scheme.[465] It was one of the instruments of the Eastern Partnership initiative that focused on the relations between the EU and six post-Soviet states (Armenia, Georgia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, and Azerbaijan). The initiative constituted one of the branches of the European Neighborhood Policy, which aimed to promote domestic reforms in exchange for privileged access to the EU market, financial aid, and convenient visa regulations. It represented a controversial European power tool to become immediately available for exerting influence because of its incremental and composite nature, but it aimed to economically and politically stabilize the periphery of the EU without offering membership.[466]

In the Ukraine case, the association agreement foresaw a progressively established visa-free regime and free trade area between Ukraine and the EU. Ukraine would also be committed to a series of judiciary, economic, and political reforms to adapt its political system to the EU standards. However, the agreement was not only about trade and economic relations; it also envisaged a security dimension. The parties would "promote gradual convergence on foreign and security matters with the aim of Ukraine's ever-deeper involvement in the European security area" and take "full and timely advantage of all diplomatic and military channels between the Parties." For Mearsheimer, it was inevitable for any Russian leader to interpret this clause pointing to NATO membership.[467]

[465] David Cadier, "Eastern Partnership vs Eurasian Union? The EU–Russia Competition in the Shared Neighbourhood and the Ukraine Crisis," *Global Policy* 5 (2014): 76, https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12152.
[466] Cadier, 78–79.
[467] McFaul, Sestanovich, and Mearsheimer, "Faulty Powers: Who Started the Ukraine Crisis?," 175.

Although Ukraine's NATO prospects might have been an aspect of Russian concerns during the agreement negotiations (it was definitely pertinent with the Euromaidan revolution as detailed above), the Russian account of the process indicates that Putin was more frustrated with European actors' disregard for Russian interests by swaying Ukraine into complex economic relations with EU at the expense of Russia-Ukraine relations. Therefore, the incremental nature of EU processes loaded with bureaucratic weight did not mitigate Russian perception.

But how come Russia came into the picture in a matter of bilateral relations between Ukraine and the EU? It was precisely this question that frustrated Putin. He stated that Russia appealed to the EU to hold broad discussions about the association agreement between Ukraine and the EU because the repercussions of the agreement would hinder the Russian economy as Russia was Ukraine's main trade partner.[468] He elsewhere noted that Russia and Ukraine shared the CIS free-trade zone and a "deep rooted cooperation in industry and agriculture", another aspect of Russia-Ukraine relations that the EU disregarded.[469]

Putin commented earlier in 2013 that when Ukraine became part of the customs union with the EU, the decreased import duties in Ukraine would attract cheap and good quality European products into Ukraine and Ukrainian products out of the domestic market. He assured that these Ukrainian products would be thrown out to Russia, pushing Russia toward protectionist measures against this.[470] Putin reiterated elsewhere that the reduced tariff protection and customs barrier alongside European standards and regulation via the EU-Ukraine deal would squeeze less quality Ukrainian products into the Russia-Kazakhstan-Belarus customs union market (Eurasian Economic Union). He added, "We did not agree on that, it will create problems for our economy."[471]

Furthermore, converting the Ukrainian market to meet European technical standards would require massive investment and time. Putin thought that when this occurred, many Ukrainian enterprises were destined for bankruptcy or would again be squeezed into the EEU market. He viewed this conflict of interest beyond technical terms. He stated that such an arrangement would hinder Russia's competitive advantage rooted in "common transport

[468] Putin, "Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club," October 29, 2014.
[469] Putin, "Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly," December 4, 2014.
[470] Putin, "Vladimir Putin Meets with Members the Valdai International Discussion Club. Transcript of the Speech and the Meeting."
[471] Putin, "Interview to Channel One and Associated Press News Agency."

infrastructure, energy," "deep cooperation," and "common language."[472] Thus, the project was constructed at the expense of Russia.

In fact, Ukrainian officials thought that the 10-year grace period envisioned by WTO was adequate for Ukraine and Russia to adjust to the new reality.[473] However, Putin viewed the European attitude against Russia during the association agreement controversy as a matter of pride and sovereignty and proposed that international dialogue required respecting the legitimate interests of all participants.[474] This meant that Putin regarded Russia as a natural participant in the bilateral relations between Ukraine and the EU. But instead of including Russia in the negotiations, Putin protested; the Europeans ignored their offer, instigated government overthrow, and caused chaos in Ukraine.[475] Accounting for the situation in Ukraine in 2017, Putin reaffirmed this:

> Were you really thinking that you and Ukraine would sign an association agreement, open up all Ukrainian markets and borders, and Ukraine, as a member of the free trade zone, would become a gateway to our market? We said right away, "Guys, you cannot do this, stop." No one even wanted to listen to us. They told us, "We do not interfere with your dealings with China. You do not interfere with our dealings with Canada, so stay away from our dealings with Ukraine." That is what they told us, verbatim. What kind of a conversation is that? No one even wanted to hear that we have some special relations with Ukraine, and some branches of the economy are tied up with that country.[476]

For Putin, the US was also complicit in the exclusion of Russia in the Ukraine-EU negotiations. He commented that Americans were also part of the problem because "they are always influencing Russia's relations with its neighbours, either openly or behind the scenes." He also stated that when dealing with certain countries, they could not distinguish whether they were talking to the representatives of these countries or with their "American patrons and sponsors."[477] Thus, Ukraine's insistence on the agreement was instigated by the

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[472] Putin.
[473] Richard Balmforth, "Ukraine PM Tells Russia to Accept 'Reality' of EU Trade Deal," *Reuters*, August 28, 2013, sec. Business, https://www.reuters.com/article/business/ukraine-pm-tells-russia-to-accept-reality-of-eu-trade-deal-idUSBRE97R0JQ/.
[474] Putin, "Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly," December 4, 2014.
[475] Putin, "Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club," October 29, 2014.
[476] Vladimir Putin, "Vladimir Putin Meets with Members of the Valdai Discussion Club. Transcript of the Plenary Session of the 14th Annual Meeting," Valdai Club, 2017, https://valdaiclub.com/events/posts/articles/putin-meets-with-members-of-the-valdai-club/.
[477] Putin, "Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly," December 4, 2014.

overall US policy against Russia that aimed at crippling special relations with post-Soviet countries.

In fact, Putin had invested much effort to prevent Ukraine's signing of the agreement. In a period when Ukraine was desperate to find at least 20 billion dollars in loans from anyone[478], even China[479], he exerted economic pressure against Yanukovich, presenting certain studies to argue that Ukraine's inclusion in the Customs Union with Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan would benefit Ukraine more and otherwise, Ukrainian workers would not be allowed travel freely to Russia.[480] Putin also underlined that they would have to provide firmer controls for Ukrainian exports as the EU association agreement would let some European products with higher tariffs re-exported to Russia. He added that Gazprom would increase its pricing for Ukraine in this case.[481]

Russian pressure had worked until the Euromaidan. In an effort to mitigate the Maidan protests, Putin offered a package for Ukraine, including a reduction in gas prices, construction of a bridge connecting Russia and the Crimean Peninsula, and a considerable amount of debt relief. He would label this offer as fulfilling the requirement of being fraternal people and close relatives.[482] In a way, Putin tried to prove to Ukrainians that they did not miss out on the economic advantages of the EU agreement. Undoubtedly, the matter for Ukrainians was not only about the economic benefits of the agreement but also about a civilizational choice coerced by Russia.

The same identity-based aspect of the agreement was pertinent for Russia, too. The fact that Ukraine opted for the EU customs union instead of the Eurasian Economic Union meant a major blow to Russia's aspirations to create an alternative economic and political model in Eurasia. Ukraine was the central tenet of this project. Tsygankov aptly summarized: "The more the EU presented Ukrainian membership in the organization as a "civilizational" choice, the more Putin and his associates viewed the Eurasian Union as a values-based community. To them, the Eurasian Union was not only not strictly an economic arrangement

[478] Hall Gardner, "NATO, the EU, Ukraine, Russia and Crimea: The 'Reset' That Was Never 'Reset,'" Briefing Paper (NATO Watch, 2014), 8, https://natowatch.org/node/1449.
[479] Pavel Polityuk, "Ukraine Looks to China for Money as Debt Crunch Looms," Reuters, 2013, https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSBRE9B10Z7/.
[480] Hopf, "'Crimea Is Ours': A Discursive History," 245–46.
[481] Hopf, 245–46.
[482] Hopf, 246.

but also an alternative means of defending sovereignty and national unity from political encroachment by the EU."[483]

However, Tsygankov's analysis presents the Russian attitude as a reaction to European assertion in Ukraine. This is not entirely consistent with the dynamics of Russia, Ukraine, and the West because Russian opposition to the Eastern Partnership was also related to the Russian foreign policy formulation, deeming international politics a competition between value systems. Putin perceived the EU processes in post-Soviet space as part of a global clash of values, wherein Eurasian conservatism, traditionalism, religion, and statism were juxtaposed against Western liberal and universalist values, which, for Putin, were the façade for Western strategic goals.[484]

Since the Orange Revolution of 2004, Russia has felt compelled to excel in Western tools in post-Soviet space and produce encountering methods. The Eurasian Customs Union emerged in 2010 in this context, and Putin associated it in 2011 as responding to the requirements of contemporary global politics, where regional economic integrations constitute one of the poles of the emerging multipolarity.[485] Russians considered EU processes in the eastern neighborhood interrupting the "natural" Eurasian integration in the form of the Eurasian Economic Union.[486] The Eurasian Economic Union was structured to favor Russia in decision-making. The votes in the Interstate Council were weighed according to the financial contribution. This led to the understanding of the EEU as a tool for Russian foreign policy goals, aiming at Russian leadership and great power status.[487]

Russian perception that its failure to sway Ukraine into one of the apparatuses of Russia's great powerness project stemmed from continuous Western efforts rendered Russian decision-makers to act more resolutely than they did in Georgia. For Russia, The Western disregard of Russian interests in the association agreement negotiations culminated in the ousting of Yanukovych, who had complied with Russian pressure to opt out from the agreement, and compelled Russians to view the new government and its method of

[483] Tsygankov, "Vladimir Putin's Last Stand: The Sources of Russia's Ukraine Policy."
[484] Allison, "Russian 'deniable' Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules," November 2014, 1256–57.
[485] Cadier, "Eastern Partnership vs Eurasian Union? The EU–Russia Competition in the Shared Neighbourhood and the Ukraine Crisis," 79–80.
[486] Allison, "Russian 'deniable' Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules," November 2014, 1256–57.
[487] Robert Nalbandov, *Not by Bread Alone: Russian Foreign Policy under Putin* (University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 206–7.

establishment as entirely illegitimate. Facing a high level of misrecognition, Russia acted to preserve one of the indicators of its great power status: the Black Sea Fleet.

5.4.3. Preserving Black Sea Fleet

Chapter 2 indicated that accumulating extraordinary military capabilities is a recognitive practice through which aspiring great powers try to ensure their status. The Black Sea Fleet deployed in Crimea functioned in this respect. The 1997 Partition Treaty on the Status and Conditions of the Black Sea Fleet reserved 81.7% of the components of the Soviet Union's Black Sea Fleet to Russia[488] and provided Russia with a lease of the Sevastopol port, where the main facilities and headquarters are based. The treaty was to expire by 2017, and as accounted above, Yanukovych had signed its extension until 2042 by the Kharkiv Accords in 2010.

The geopolitical importance of the fleet's deployment in Crimea for Russia is undeniable, but the treaty entitled Ukraine to prevent the modernization of the fleet. Especially in the 2008 Georgia intervention, the weaknesses of the fleet were revealed. For example, Biersack and O'Lear concluded that the Black Sea Fleet had more symbolic importance than its function of projecting Russian military power.[489] Similarly, in his article examining the Russian interpretations of the Black Sea Fleet, Nilsson concluded that the presence of the Black Sea Fleet was "inextricably linked" to Russia's identity formation and aspiration for its revival as a great power.[490]

When Yanukovych was overthrown, the various factions within Euromaidan voiced that the Kharkiv Accords must be repealed. In any case, their stance on the matter was renowned. For instance, Arseny Yatsenyuk, leader of the Fatherland party and prime minister of the new government, had called the Kharkiv Accords earlier in 2013 "anti-constitutional, anti-state and anti-Ukrainian" and argued for the Russian fleet's dismissal

[488] Emmanuel Karagiannis, "The Russian Interventions in South Ossetia and Crimea Compared: Military Performance, Legitimacy and Goals," *Contemporary Security Policy* 35, no. 3 (September 2014): 407, https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2014.963965.
[489] Biersack and O'Lear, "The Geopolitics of Russia's Annexation of Crimea: Narratives, Identity, Silences, and Energy," 2014.
[490] Rasmus Nilsson, "Russian Policy Concerning the Black Sea Fleet and Its Being Based in Ukraine, 2008–2010: Three Interpretations," *Europe - Asia Studies* 65, no. 6 (2013): 1168, https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2013.813119.

from Crimea.[491] The new government's resoluteness to abolish the Kharkiv Accords and whether Crimea would be a NATO territory were unpredictable for Russia.

By annexing Crimea, Russia eliminated the uncertainty regarding these matters. Furthermore, the 1997 Partition Treaty's prohibition on replacing the old naval craft with the new ones and adding aircraft carriers to the Fleet were not lifted by the Kharkiv Accords; however, the annexation resolved the problem in favor of Russia as well.[492] Still, annexing Crimea was not the only option to keep a hold on the Sevastopol port for the Black Sea Fleet because it would be very hard for Ukraine to push the fleet back, considering the well-armed 20,000 Russian troops and pro-Russian Crimean population in Crimea.

After all, Ukraine's protests over the Fleet's operations in 2008 Georgia intervention went unheeded. The Partition Treaty specifically prohibited the use of the Fleet in conflicts without the approval of Ukraine. When the balance of power between Russia and Ukraine in fulfilling the bilateral agreements favored Russia so much, Russia's concern over the leasing rights of Sevastopol port made less sense. As Daniel Treisman put it in *Foreign Affairs*: "Annexing the territory- at the cost of international isolation, economic sanctions, the reinvigoration of NATO, and the alienation of most of the Ukrainian population- seems like an extreme reaction to a manageable threat."[493] Nevertheless, it is possible to conclude that Russia perhaps perceived a moment of opportunity to be able to modernize the Fleet in the future and reinforce it with more complex systems and aircraft carriers. If the Euromaidan meant the loss of Ukraine for Russia, the annexation of Crimea could mean Russia's future dominance in the Black Sea.

5.5. Russian Status After the Intervention

Russian claim for a new international order, where Russia represented one of the poles, gained importance in the UN General Assembly resolution on 27 March 2014 asserting Ukrainian territorial integrity. The fact that only %52 of the UN members voted in favor of the resolution and China, India, Brazil, Argentina, and South Africa abstained meant- by

[491] Karagiannis, "The Russian Interventions in South Ossetia and Crimea Compared: Military Performance, Legitimacy and Goals," September 2014, 407.
[492] Allison, "Russian 'deniable' Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules," November 2014, 1278.
[493] Daniel Treisman, "Why Putin Took Crimea: The Gambler in the Kremlin," *Foreign Affairs*, 2016, 50.

Churkin's phrasing- a "moral and political victory" for Russia.[494] Although the Euro-Atlantic bloc implemented a series of sanctions on Russia, they hardly had a deterring impact. As a matter of fact, Russian aggression gained pace in Ukraine within the ten years after the annexation of Crimea, not because the Western response meant an implicit endorsement of its actions in Ukraine but because Russia became convinced of its capabilities as a great power. Russia's intervention in Syria next year, despite the sanctions, is a proper example.

Putin had spent a considerable amount of time steering Yanukovych from the Western path and had almost succeeded in it. Valuing the result dearly and having rapidly lost something that he invested in so much, he turned into being more risk-prone.[495] Drawing the conclusion from Euromaidan that Ukraine would not be part of Russia's great powerness project in the near future, Russia preferred an unfriendly and unstable neighbor over an unfriendly and stable one.[496] By instigating a frozen conflict in the eastern part of Ukraine, Ukraine's NATO prospects were also halted in the long term as the alliance does not include members with ongoing territorial conflicts.[497] Russians also figured that having lost Crimea and other Black Sea littoral centers being destabilized and enabling the Black Sea Fleet to have an eternal presence in the Black Sea, Ukraine would not be as important a geopolitical asset for Western powers as before.[498] Russia also significantly increased its maritime territory in the Black Sea after annexing Crimea. The increased maritime territory provides Russia access to the potential gas reserves previously belonging to Ukraine. Thus, Russia proved it was not a lesser power in the region as the Euro-Atlantic bloc attempted to prove by disregarding its interests in EU-Ukraine negotiations and the following Euromaidan revolution. In other words, Russia showed its capability to project a reality-altering impact on the ground.

As a result of the intervention in Ukraine, Russia could not harvest recognition of its status, unlike the Georgia case, from the interlocutor of its great power identity- the Euro-

[494] Allison, "Russian 'deniable' Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules," November 2014, 1268.
[495] Tor Bukkvoll, "Why Putin Went to War: Ideology, Interests and Decision-Making in the Russian Use of Force in Crimea and Donbas," *Contemporary Politics*, 2016, 12, https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2016.1201310.
[496] Malyarenko and Wolff, "The Logic of Competitive Influence-Seeking: Russia, Ukraine, and the Conflict in Donbas," 193.
[497] Allison, "Russian 'deniable' Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules," November 2014, 1273.
[498] Allison, 1277.

Atlantic bloc. However, it asserted itself as one of the independent poles of the international order, which can go out of the norm just like the US. Russkiy Mir - the newly emerging independent pole led by Russia - was reinforced as "Russia has proved that it can protect its compatriots and defend truth and fairness."[499] At the same time, it had a major blow as Ukraine was alienated from it. Losing Ukraine also hindered the prospects of the Eurasian Economic Union as the lack of the Ukrainian market significantly decreased Russian benefits, let alone its improvement with Ukrainian membership and functions as an apparatus of Russian great powerness.

The implicit support from the non-Western powers, made evident by half-hearted protests of breach of territorial integrity, also bolstered Russia's claims for a multipolar order. By countering 'Western hypocrisy,' Russia considered itself championing the underlying principles of the ***new international order***.[500] The military intervention became a tool to ensure this as the non-violent status-seeking, in the Russian perception, materialized ineffective in the face of Western policies.

5.6. Conclusion

Similar to the previous case, the material benefits Russia earned via intervention in Ukraine were defined through the prism of great power identity. First, Russia gained the strategically significant Crimean peninsula, a territory that has been crucial in shaping Russian spiritual identity and the broader foreign policy formulation based on it. Second, Russia reserved a perpetual port for its Black Sea Fleet- an indispensable tool of Russian power projection in the Black Sea as a great power. Third, Russia made sure that Ukraine's geostrategic importance diminished as it lost Crimea. It had long strived for Ukraine and the Euro-Atlantic bloc to recognize that Russia had privileged interests in Ukraine. Making Ukraine less critical for the Western geopolitical calculations compensated for this failure. However, annexing Crimea and especially instigating separatist movements in eastern Ukraine rendered material losses for Russia, too. When the Russian aspirations in Ukraine became apparent, the Euro-Atlantic bloc significantly aided Ukraine in increasing its military capabilities. The scale of this improvement was best illustrated in Ukrainian resistance against the 2022 full-scale invasion attempt.

[499] Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation."
[500] Putin, "Valdai International Discussion Club Meeting."

Alongside material benefits defined by great power identity, Russia harvested symbolic benefits from intervening in Ukraine as well. First, by challenging international law and how it is manipulatively applied by the Euro-Atlantic bloc for the sake of their own strategic goals, Russia materialized its case for a multipolar order. In 2023, Putin himself proposed that what happened in Ukraine from 2013 until now was not about territorial conquests because Russia is the largest country in the world by size and has no need to conquer more. Neither has it been about establishing regional geopolitical balance. He pointed to something else:

> The issue is much broader and more fundamental and is about the principles underlying the new international order. Lasting peace will only be possible when everyone feels safe and secure, understands that their opinions are respected, and that there is a balance in the world where no one can unilaterally force or compel others to live or behave as a hegemon pleases even when it contradicts the sovereignty, genuine interests, traditions, or customs of peoples and countries. In such an arrangement, the very concept of sovereignty is simply denied and, sorry, is thrown in the garbage.[501]

Second, by taking an audacious action when the international community closely watched, Russia signaled resoluteness in its case for a multipolar order and the fact that Russia constituted one of the poles. Russia's intervention in Ukraine represented Russia's strict expectation that the Euro-Atlantic bloc adhered to Russia's privileged interests in post-Soviet space. Disregarding Russia in the region, especially in Ukraine- the foundation of almost every Russian foreign policy formulation geared toward reviving Russia's greatness, resulted in severe consequences for Ukraine and the Euro-Atlantic bloc.

[501] Putin.

6. THE INTERVENTION IN SYRIA

"Now you can feel Russia's power."
A Russian officer serving in Syria in 2017[502]

Not long after annexing Crimea and getting involved in the separatist war in Donbas in 2014, Russia launched another military intervention on 30 September 2015 upon an official invitation by President Bashar al-Assad. The intervention in Syria was the first Russian intervention outside post-Soviet space since the end of the Cold War. From this perspective, it marked the extensive scope of Russian foreign policy and demonstrated Russia's military capabilities ushered by a fierce diplomatic effort. Furthermore, Russian intervention in Syria substantiated that Russian interventionism was not limited to post-Soviet space, where Russian decision-makers are convinced to hold special interests. In fact, the reason for the specialty of post-Soviet space within Russian foreign policy and the motivation to intervene in Syria merge into the same factor: Russia's great power identity and resoluteness to fulfil this identity by obtaining a great power status in international politics.

Similar to Chapters 4 and 5, this chapter initially presents the background of the intervention, establishes why the case constitutes an intervention, and reviews Russian justifications and the importance of the intervention venue for Russia. Subsequently, it accounts for Russian status-seeking via military intervention in Syria by drawing attention to the Russian strategy of materializing multipolarity. This strategy included portraying itself as correcting the faulty Western policies in the region, presenting an alternative leadership in the fight against terrorism, imposing cooperation on the US, and demonstrating its military capabilities. The chapter concludes by reviewing Russian status after the intervention.

6.1. Background

The relentless wave of the Arab Spring hit Syria in March 2011, conjuring a violent reaction from the Assad regime. The regime's attempt to suppress the protests further aggravated the opposition. By summer, the defectors from the regime's army had already

[502] Chris Brown, "'Now You Can Feel Russia's Power:' Russian Military in Syria Eager to Show Its Victories," *CBC News*, September 24, 2017, https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/russia-syria-military-power-1.4299936.

established the Free Syrian Army (FSA) – the armed branch of the opposition. After one year, in the face of brutal clashes between the Assad regime and FSA and FSA's territorial gains, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Herve Ladsous identified the situation in Syria as a civil war.[503] Attempts by both the Arab League and the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to broker a ceasefire became futile as the violence intensified.

In June 2012, the UN convened an international conference, which marked the most significant development for a possible agreement until then. The conference resulted in the Geneva Communiqué- a roadmap for a transitional government in Syria.[504] While the conflict took the shape of a stalemate for most of 2013, the news of the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons in August 2013 attracted severe international reaction. When The Euro-Atlantic bloc appeared to be preparing for an intervention, Russia fiercely spoke against such moves; President Putin even wrote an article for the New York Times titled "A Plea for Caution From Russia" to discourage an intervention. Russia was able to convince the US out of an international intervention, and the parties agreed on the dismantling of Syria's chemical arsenal.

The same year also marked the prominence of ISIS as it managed to start controlling large territories in Iraq and got involved in the Syrian civil war. By 2014, Mosul in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria was largely captured by ISIS. In September 2014, the US started conducting air strikes against ISIS targets. By May 2015, ISIS seized control in Palmyra, and al-Nusra Front initiated an offensive against the regime in northwestern Syria. Russia considered these developments as signposts of a decisive Assad defeat.[505] Its initial reaction was to mobilize its forces in the air base in Latakia province of Syria.[506]

Russia had constantly argued for a political solution in Syria and opposed a possible Western intervention; it even vetoed in UNSC several resolution proposals to sanction Syria for its human rights violations, arguing that the Western actors would use it as a pretext to

[503] Louis Charbonneau, "Syria Conflict Now a Civil War, U.N. Peacekeeping Chief Says," Reuters, June 12, 2012, https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSBRE85B1BI/.
[504] "Syrian Civil War - Conflict, Refugees, Destruction," in *Britannica*, accessed June 29, 2024, https://www.britannica.com/event/Syrian-Civil-War/Civil-war.
[505] Charap et al., "Russia's Military Interventions," 103.
[506] Robert Hamilton, Chris Miller, and Aaron Stein, "Russia's Intervention in Syria: Historical and Geopolitical Context," Russia's War in Syria (Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2020), https://www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/report-1-hamilton-stein-miller.pdf.

replay the Libya scenario in Syria. Instead, Russia called for the implementation of the Geneva communiqué that laid the foundations of a pluralist transitional political solution in Syria, safeguarding Syria's territorial integrity, sovereignty, unity and independence.[507]

By September 2015, Russian decision-makers were convinced that the constant Russian diplomatic efforts were inconclusive.[508] After a long and effortful diplomacy traffic between various opposition groups and the Assad regime, Moscow witnessed that the diplomacy offered so little for a solution.[509] Furthermore, Assad was increasingly losing position in the war. For instance, Russian Chief of the General Staff Valeriy Gerasimov stated that prior to the intervention, Russia expected that Syria would fall under the opposition forces by the end of 2015.[510] Contrary to what it preached or matching with its insistence on regime stability – it depends on the interpretation – Russia started its airstrikes against the opposition forces within Syrian territory on 30 September 2015.

6.2. The Intervention

The most criticized aspect of the intervention was – at least, in its earlier stage – Russia's target choices. The US and other Western actors argued that Russia was cracking down on the Syrian opposition rather than fighting against ISIS as it claimed to do so. In the early stages, Russia aimed at targets other than ISIS without precision with a strategy of "harassment and interdiction" similar to what it conducted in Chechnya with random artillery fire.[511] This time, Russia utilized only the air forces.

The intervention rested on only air forces because, first, an aerial campaign was deemed adequate to reach the objectives; second, deploying ground troops would be too costly so far away from Russia proper; and third, the lessons from the Afghanistan experience psychologically prevented this method.[512] Putin replied to the criticisms, claiming that Russia requested from the US the ISIS targets that they certainly designated,

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[507] Derek Averre, "Russia, the Middle East, and the Conflict in Syria," in *Routledge Handbook of Russian Security*, ed. Roger E. Kanet (Routledge, 2019), 401.
[508] Samuel Charap, Elina Treyger, and Edward Geist, *Understanding Russia's Intervention in Syria*, 2019, 6, https://doi.org/10.7249/rr3180.
[509] Nikolay Kozhanov, *Russia and the Syrian Conflict*, Russia and the Syrian Conflict, 2017, 53, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1hj9wjf.
[510] Samuel Charap, Elina Treyger, and Edward Geist, *Understanding Russia's Intervention in Syria*, 2019, 4, https://doi.org/10.7249/rr3180.
[511] Emil Aslan Souleimanov and Valery Dzutsati, "Russia's Syria War: A Strategic Trap?," *Middle East Policy* 25, no. 2 (2018): 45, https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.12341.
[512] Kozhanov, *Russia and the Syrian Conflict*, 2017, 60.

but the American response was that they were not ready for such cooperation.[513] When this is the case, Spaulding demonstrated in a mapping study that the Russian airstrikes were organized "to address the immediate vulnerabilities of the Syrian regime and to pursue President Assad's most urgent priorities."[514] However, Russia started to target ISIS, and with more complex weapons, after ISIS shot down a passenger plane flying from Egypt to St. Petersburg.[515]

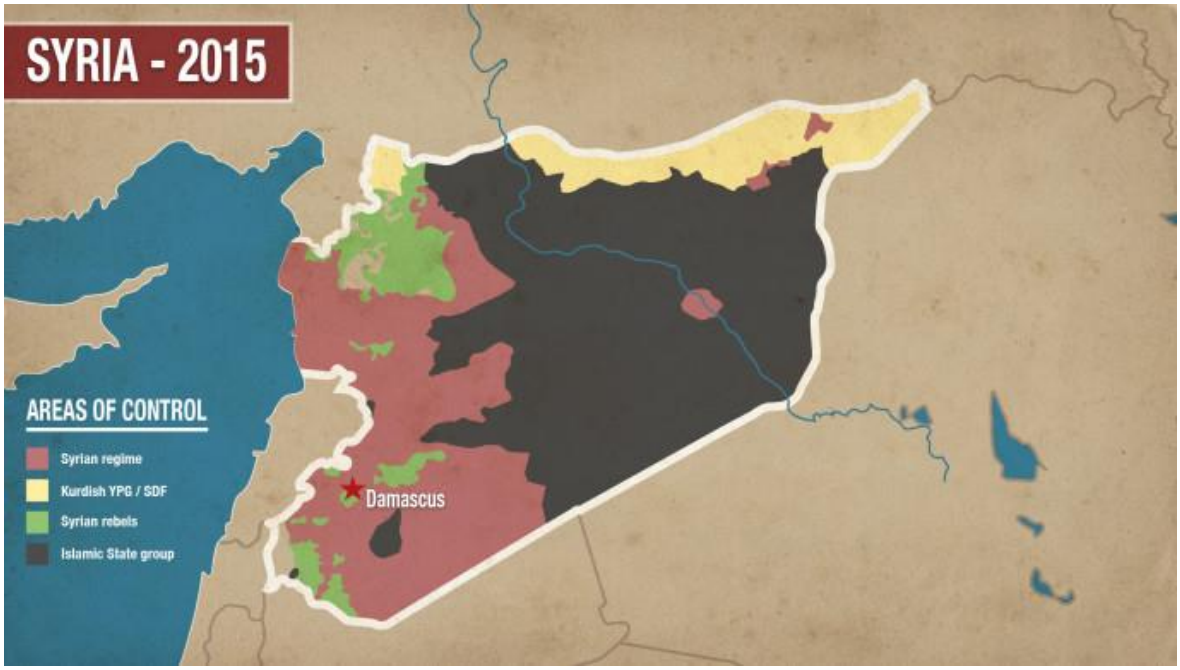


Figure 7. Situation in Syria by March 2015[516]

Unlike the previous cases examined within the scope of this study, there is no dispute over whether Russia's involvement in the Syrian civil war constituted an intervention, as the invitation by the Assad regime placed it into the legal category of intervention by invitation. The traditional understanding in international law is that if a conflict transforms into a civil war, third parties should refrain from intervention on either part so that self-determination will prevail.[517] However, the practice of intervention in cases regarded as going beyond the

[513] Vladimir Putin, "Russia Calling! Investment Forum," President of Russia, October 20, 2015, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50498.
[514] Hugo Spaulding, "Russia's False Narrative in Syria," Institute for the Study of War, 2015, 2, https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russias-false-narrative-syria-december-1-2015.
[515] Charap et al., "Russia's Military Interventions," 105.
[516] Paul McLoughlin, "In Maps: How Syria Changed over Eight Years," (The New Arab, March 15, 2019), https://www.newarab.com/analysis/maps-how-syria-changed-over-eight-years.
[517] Petra Perisic, "Intervention By Invitation – When Can Consent From A Host State Justify Foreign Military Intervention?," *Russian Law Journal* 7, no. 4 (2019): 27, https://doi.org/10.17589/2309-8678-2019-7-4-4-29.

threshold of civil war is almost commonplace now, and the international community seems to internalize this.[518] There are also opinions proposing that Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, which prohibits the use of force, does not apply to the intervention by invitation.[519] The international reaction to Russia's intervention was in this line. While China and several Arab states supported Russia's actions, the reactions from the Euro-Atlantic bloc were about Russia's choice of targets rather than the fact that Russia conducted an intervention. From this aspect, it is possible to assert that it was regarded as more legitimate than the interventions in Georgia and Ukraine.

Considering the intervention definition that this study committed itself to in the introductory chapter, it is also important to note that Russian involvement in the Syrian civil war bore the characteristic of a "coercive" activity "intended to affect the domestic political process" as it largely rested on preventing the collapse of the Assad regime. It was also reported in 2020 that Russia and Turkey reached a ceasefire in Idlib, but Russia did this despite the regime's will, violating its sovereignty.[520] Since we do not have the details of the initial negotiations and agreement between Putin and Assad in 2015, we cannot reach a definitive conclusion. Still, it is highly likely that Assad's invitation did not include overriding his decision-making. From this aspect, the intervention moved away from the legal framework of intervention via invitation to some degree.

6.3. The Significance of the Intervention Venue and Justification

6.3.1. The Significance of Syria for Russia

Since Vladimir Putin assumed power, Russia discovered a new engagement with the Middle East, but until the Syrian crisis, Russia's MENA policy had been devoid of concrete definitions of interests and objectives, driven by a conviction Russia must be present in the region and its processes as a great power.[521] This approach also resonated with the Primakov doctrine, which designated the Middle East within the geopolitical scope where Russia must

[518] Perisic, 27.
[519] Laura Visser, "May the Force Be with You: The Legal Classification of Intervention by Invitation," *Netherlands International Law Review* 66 (2019): 21–45.
[520] Anna Borshchevkaya and Andrew J. Tabler, "Triangular Diplomacy Unpacking Russia's Syria Strategy," Policy Notes (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2021), 4.
[521] James Sladden et al., "Russian Strategy in the Middle East," Perspectives (RAND Corporation, 2017), 2–3, https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE236.html.

harvest great power status.[522] Yet, the existence of the small Russian naval base in Tartus and ongoing arms trade relations with Syria pertained to the historical legacy of the bilateral relations rather than Russia's geopolitical investment in Syria.[523]

Until the eruption of the Syrian civil war, Syria did not play a pivotal role in Russia's material interest calculations either. The economic aspect of Russia-Syria relations has hardly been very critical for Russia. Although Russian interests in Syria are considered to include arms sales and ensuring that the loans given to Assad would return,[524] Syria was never an essential part of Russia's external trade balance despite the growing arms sales.[525] Within the Russian arms deliveries abroad, the Syrian exports only make up 5% of the total.[526] Furthermore, Syria had been unable to pay already existing contracts, let alone prospects for purchasing advanced weapons. Even if the Syrian civil war reached a conclusion, Syria would hardly be a major arms trade partner worth having intervened for.[527]

However, it is worth noting that the intervention became a very efficient advertisement campaign for Russian weapons. Spending 4 million dollars per day for the intervention, Russia increased its arms sales by 5% by 2016.[528] Russia's nonpartisan approach to the Middle East also enabled it to be a major arms provider to various actors as the US arms sale in the region has been barred with a conditional approach regarding human rights.[529] Relatedly, Mark Katz defined Russia's MENA policy as "the art of making friends with everybody."[530]

Still, if Russia had economic interests in Syria, it was not about trade relations. According to the World Bank statistics of 2016, Russia's non-military exports to the MENA

[522] Mira Milosevich, "The 2010s: 'Grand Strategy' or Tactical Opportunism?," in *The Role of Russia in the Middle East and North Africa Region. Strategy or Opportunism?*, ed. V. Talbot and C. Lovotti (European Institute of the Mediterranean, 2019), 33.
[523] Charap et al., "Russia's Military Interventions," 100.
[524] Anna Borshchevskaya, "Russia's Many Interests in Syria," The Washington Institute, 2013, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/russias-many-interests-syria.
[525] Moritz Pieper, "'Rising Power' Status and the Evolution of International Order: Conceptualising Russia's Syria Policies," *Europe-Asia Studies* 71, no. 3 (2019): 370–71, https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2019.1575950.
[526] Roland Dannreuther, "Russia and the Arab Spring: Supporting the Counter-Revolution," *Journal of European Integration* 37, no. 1 (2014): 88, https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2014.975990.
[527] Roy Allison, "Russia and Syria: Explaining Alignment with a Regime in Crisis," *International Affairs* 89, no. 4 (2013): 805–6, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12046.
[528] Milosevich, "The 2010s: 'Grand Strategy' or Tactical Opportunism?," 37.
[529] Sladden et al., "Russian Strategy in the Middle East," 8.
[530] Irina Zvyagelskaya, "Russia, the New Protagonist in the Middle East," in *Putin's Russia: Really Back?*, ed. Aldo Ferrari (Milano: ISPI, 2016), 84.

region, with the exception of Turkey, corresponded to 6% of its overall trade volume, and imports made up 1.4% of Russia's trade.[531] Therefore, the Middle East cannot be considered critical in terms of Russian exports and trade relations. Russia's economic interest in the region was more than profit; it was regional influence.[532] To put it differently, Syria became crucial for Russia due to wider geopolitical drives and factors other than trade interests.

The heavy US influence in the Middle East did not let Russia engage in the Middle East without engaging with the US. From this premise, Casula and Katz contended that the US-Russia competition in the Middle East is also *for* the Middle East.[533] From this perspective, Russia's overall approach to the Middle East conditioned Russia to counter the US in Syria. Leonid Issaev termed Russia's strategy to compete with the US in the Middle East as playing the role of an "honest-broker," which entailed showing Russia's irreplaceability in the resolution of crises by using its veto right in the UNSC and offering third-party mediation to all actors with "equal proximity", which gave Russia an edge to construct dialogue with actors who were disapproved by the US too.[534]

The Syrian crisis presented itself as an opportunity to prove once again that Russia must be a part of the resolutions of international crises and demonstrate that Russia was ready to lead the process when necessary. Thus, no matter Russia's historical relations – the longstanding ties with the Assad family, the presence of a naval and air base, and the good relations during the Soviet era - facilitated the intervention, it was the conjuncture that made Syria crucial as an intervention venue. This conjuncture included the catastrophe in Libya, the overall Western isolating attitude toward Russia after it intervened in Ukraine, and the Western insistence on regime change in Syria.

6.3.2. Russian Justification for the Intervention in Syria

The Russian account of the intervention justified the Russian operation by portraying it as a fight against terrorism for national security concerns; preventing another Libya

[531] Christopher A. Hartwell, "Russian Economic Policy in the MENA Region: A Means to Political Ends," in *The Role of Russia in the Middle East and North Africa Region. Strategy or Opportunism?*, ed. V. Talbot and C. Lovotti (European Institute of the Mediterranean, 2019), 94.
[532] Sladden et al., "Russian Strategy in the Middle East," 7.
[533] Philipp Casula and Mark N. Katz, "The Middle East," in *Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy*, ed. Andrei P. Tsygankov (Routledge, 2018), 295.
[534] Leonid Issaev, "Russia and the Middle East: From 'Honest-Broker' to 'Status-Keeper,'" *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 31, no. 3 (2023): 315.

scenario following state collapse; and correcting the mistakes of the Euro-Atlantic bloc in their dealing with the Arab Spring. Undoubtedly, Russia underlined the legality of the intervention, too. For example, Putin proposed that Russia acted in accordance with the UN Charter, envisaging military assistance only to legitimate governments upon its request or by a UNSC resolution.[535]

Putin reiterated on different platforms that Russian involvement in Syria aimed to prevent the return of the radical Islamists fighting against Assad to Russia after being successful there. Around 50% of these fighters came to fight Syria from CIS countries, and the fact that Russia did not have a strict visa regime with these countries exacerbated the Russian threat perception.[536] Moreover, the fighters themselves directly threatened Russia. In certain parts of the Syrian war zone, the houses were painted over with slogans "Death to Russia" and "Today – Syria, tomorrow – Russia." One prominent Chechen commander also declared they would "liberate the Caucasus."[537] Only a few weeks after the Russian airstrikes in Syria began, Putin and Assad met in Moscow. President Putin commented:

> The attempts by international terrorists to bring whole swathes of territory in the Middle East under their control and destabilize the situation in the region raise legitimate concerns in many countries around the world. This is a matter of concern for Russia, too, given that sadly, people from the former Soviet Union, around 4,000 people at least, have taken up arms and are fighting on Syrian territory against the government forces. Of course, we cannot let these people gain combat experience and go through ideological indoctrination and then return to Russia.[538]

Russia's concern over the terrorist threat was legitimate, but the fact that the intervention, especially in the early stage, targeted the Syrian opposition rather than ISIS confused many observers about the real intentions of the operation. The perception was that Russia used the ISIS threat as a pretext to crush the opposition and strengthen the regime. Foreign Minister Lavrov would defend their position, stating, "If it looks like a terrorist, if it acts like a terrorist, if it walks like a terrorist, if it fights like a terrorist, it's a terrorist,

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[535] Vladimir Putin, "Interview to American TV Channel CBS and PBS," President of Russia, October 6, 2015, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50380.

[536] Vladimir Putin, "Interview to Mir Broadcasting Company," President of Russia, 2017, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/54271; Vladimir Putin, "Interview with Al Arabiya, Sky News Arabia and RT Arabic," President of Russia, October 18, 2019, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/61792.

[537] Kozhanov, *Russia and the Syrian Conflict*, 2017, 64.

[538] "Meeting with President of Syria Bashar Assad," President of Russia, October 21, 2015, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50533.

right?"[539] This approach was in line with Russia's distinguishing between "the healthy opposition" and the terrorist organizations in Syria. Putin argued before the intervention that "There is no other way to settle the Syrian conflict other than by strengthening the existing legitimate government agencies, support them in their fight against terrorism and, of course, at the same time encourage them to start a positive dialogue with the "healthy" part of the opposition and launch political transformations."[540]

Since the opposition groups with radical Islamist agendas gained prominence, Russia had criticized the Western countries for empowering them against Assad and trying to topple Assad at all costs. The criticism culminated two days before the intervention. Speaking at the UN General Assembly on 28 September 2015, Putin drew attention to the dire situation in Syria and asked: "Do you realize what you have done?"[541] For Putin, the Western actions in Iraq, Libya, and Syria and the consequential rise of ISIS pointed to the fact that the Western actors constantly misevaluated the ramifications of overthrowing authoritarian leaders in the region.[542]

Putin argued that Russia supported the Assad regime to prevent Syria from following the footsteps of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Sudan and seek ways to cooperate with the Western partners "to change Syrian society, to modernize the regime and make it more viable and humane."[543] In other words, Russia did not want Syria to become another failed state from which destabilizing factors emanate. As soon as a power vacuum emerged in the Middle East, it was instantly filled with terrorists like what happened in Iraq and Libya; thus, Russia aimed to prevent a vacuum from occurring in Syria.[544]

[539] Don Melvin, Susannah Cullinane, and Mohammed Tawfeeq, "Russia's Lavrov on Syria Targets: 'If It Looks like a Terrorist, Walks like a Terrorist …,'" CNN, October 1, 2015, https://www.cnn.com/2015/10/01/middleeast/russia-syria/index.html.
[540] Putin, "Interview to American TV Channel CBS and PBS."
[541] Putin, "Read Putin's U.N. General Assembly Speech."
[542] Angela Stent, "Putin's Power Play in Syria," *Foreign Affairs*, 2016.
[543] Putin, "Vladimir Putin's Interview with Radio Europe 1 and TF1 TV Channel."
[544] Putin, "Interview to American TV Channel CBS and PBS."

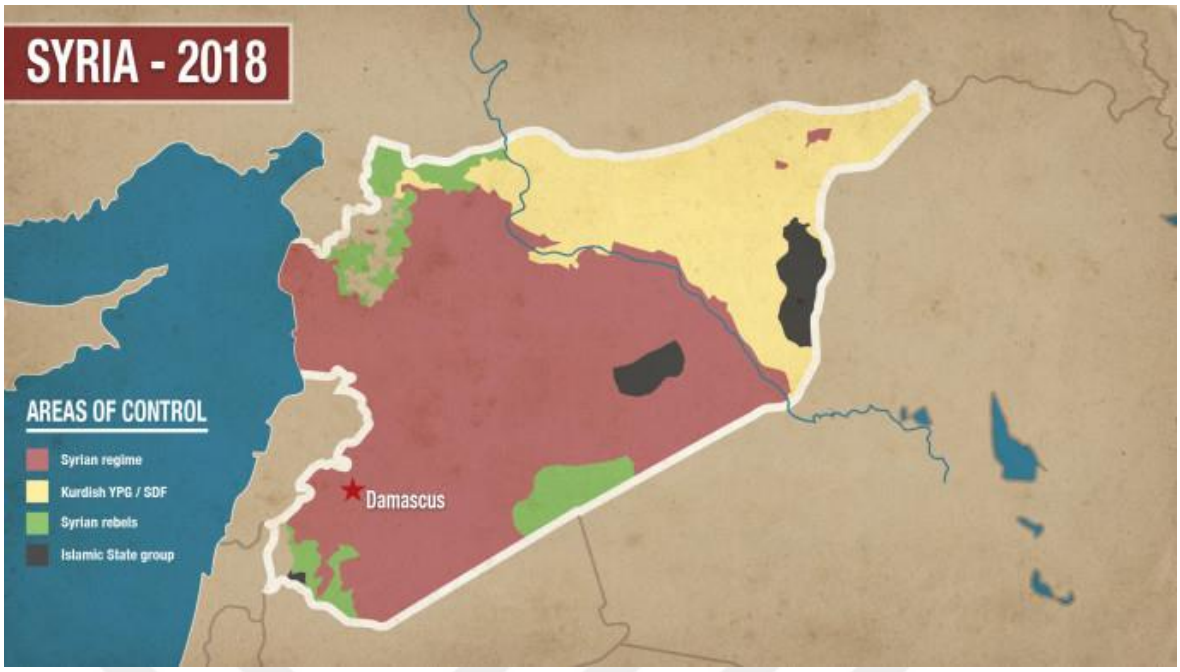


Figure 8. Situation in Syria by March 2018[545]

The fact that Russia undertook this as a duty and committed its efforts to this objective cannot be explained by national security calculations per se, as the corpus of the Russian account on Syria indicates a broader dynamic through which Russian resoluteness in taking action in Syria emerged. This dynamic included Russia's longstanding opposition to Western support for regime change and an opportunity for Russia to demonstrate that it could propose an alternative to the Western ways of dealing with international crises. In other words, the Syria crisis materialized as a locale for Russian foreign policy to conduct great power voice and harness the emergence of a multipolar world order.

6.4. Russian Status-Seeking in Syria

Russian intervention in Syria occurred in a context where the Euro-Atlantic bloc almost collectively sanctioned the Russian economy for Russian intervention in Ukraine. This hardly deterred Russia in Ukraine, complying with the study proposing that sanctions do not work 66% of the time in general and fail even more in 79% of the cases when they aim to hinder military aspirations.[546] Although the functionality of the sanctions was in question, Russia had definitely suffered from isolation since 2014. It was removed from G8

[545] McLoughlin, "In Maps."
[546] Emma Ashford, "Not-So-Smart Sanctions: The Failure of Western Restrictions Against Russia," *Foreign Affairs*, 2016.

and several mechanisms regarding relations between Russia and the Western actors.[547] At the G20 summit in Australia in 2014, Putin had a very chilling reception, bombarded by criticisms over Russia's activities in Ukraine, and decided to leave the summit earlier than planned.[548]

In addition to prestige loss, this isolation hindered the Russian economy and led Russia to seek new economic ties with emerging markets and economic powers.[549] It was predicted that the sanctions would significantly decrease the Russian gas supply to Europe.[550] This newly emerging need for the Russian economy was interpreted as an impetus for Russian intervention in Syria. According to this view, Russia aimed to protect Russian investors' interests in the Middle East, especially in the energy sector.

Maher and Pieper examined the propositions that Russia intervened in Syria to materialize the Iran-Iraq-Syria pipeline and open up space for Russian investors. They contended that the primary motivation of the intervention was not bound to such concerns. Reviewing the distribution of Russian air strikes, Maher and Pieper argued that the strikes aimed at impairing the capabilities of the opposition forces rather than securing the trajectory of the pipeline project and creating buffer zones around it. This practice, they proposed, was contrary to the conventional measures taken by energy actors during conflicts.[551] While this is the case, they also argued that Russian regime consolidation efforts went hand in hand with economic interests due to the underpinning dual logic in the intervention. The main tenet of this argument is the growing interest of the Russian energy sector in Syria as the regime considerably stabilized its rule. Russian energy companies sought in Syria to rebuild the energy infrastructure of the country, and Russia was able to carve out profitable deals with Syria, granting the extraction rights of oil and gas in Syria for the next 49 years.[552] In this line, then-deputy prime minister Rogozin stated that it was Russia's "moral right" to

[547] Charap et al., "Russia's Military Interventions," 122.
[548] Patrick Wintour and Ben Doherty, "Vladimir Putin Leaves G20 after Leaders Line up to Browbeat Him over Ukraine," *The Guardian*, November 16, 2014, sec. World news, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/16/vladimir-putin-leaves-g20-after-leaders-line-up-to-browbeat-him-over-ukraine.
[549] Hartwell, "Russian Economic Policy in the MENA Region: A Means to Political Ends," 90–114.
[550] Ashford, "Not-So-Smart Sanctions: The Failure of Western Restrictions Against Russia."
[551] David Maher and Moritz Pieper, "Russian Intervention in Syria: Exploring the Nexus between Regime Consolidation and Energy Transnationalisation," *Political Studies* 69, no. 4 (2021): 948–49, https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321720934637.
[552] Maher and Pieper, 955.

expect that the intervention in Syria would financially pay off Russia in exchange for Russia's liberation of the country from the terrorists.[553]

Whether such benefits were the real impetus for the intervention or Russian investors found an opportunity as the regime largely stabilized its rule is still vague. But another actor, Iran, also sought to deepen its economic relations with Syria after the regime was stabilized by Russian intervention.[554] Thus, it is possible to assume that such policies were pragmatic responses to the developments rather than the overarching motivation to support the Assad regime. It is important to note, at this point, that even Putin thought that Russia accomplished more in Syria than his expectations.[555] The intervention definitely reinforced Russia's leading role in regional energy politics by stabilizing Syria, but this is expected to pay off only in the long term.[556] Although the emphasis on the Russian economy's need for a remedy in the face of Western sanctions is not without merit, this view disregards the Russian stance on Syria prior to the Ukraine crisis. Considering continuous Russian opposition to regime change in Syria via Western interference, especially after the fall of Qaddafi in Libya, Russian intervention in Syria can be interpreted as the culmination of Russian efforts to prevent the same scenario rather than an instant solution to find a way out of the pressure of the sanctions. Russia indeed intended to circumvent the isolation and sanctions following its intervention in Ukraine, but it did so by demonstrating its impact on the ground and its indispensability in the solution of international problems.[557] In this way, Russia materialized its multipolarity agenda.

6.4.1. Materializing Multipolarity

Russian intervention in Syria was coherent with Russia's overall policy to pursue an independent foreign policy to represent one of the gravitational centers of the emerging multipolar order. Chapter 3 delineated that this policy formulation was prescribed by the Russian great power identity. Russia's involvement in the Syrian conflict before the

[553] Maher and Pieper, 955.
[554] Bayram Sinkaya, "The Role of Iran in the Syrian Conflict," in *Turkey, Russia and Iran in the Middle East: Establishing a New Regional Order*, ed. Bayram Balci and Nicolas Monceau, Sciences Po Series in International Relations and Political Economy (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 96–114.
[555] Vladimir Putin, "Interview with The Financial Times," President of Russia, June 28, 2019, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60836.
[556] Maher and Pieper, "Russian Intervention in Syria: Exploring the Nexus between Regime Consolidation and Energy Transnationalisation," 957–58.
[557] Hanna Smith, "Military Might as a Basis for Russian Great Power Identity," in *Routledge Handbook of Russian Security*, ed. Roger E. Kanet (Routledge, 2019), 54.

intervention on 30 September 2015 revolved around similar dynamics, and the intervention can be viewed as the culmination of Russia's efforts to assert its status in resolving the conflict.

Earlier in 2012, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov stated his belief that the choices made for the resolution of the Syrian crisis would have a definitive and precedent character for the future of conflict resolution.[558] That is why it was imperative that Russia created this precedent instead of the Western humanitarian intervention taking effect as a panacea. For Lavrov, the Russian struggle in Syria was more about principles than anything else. He also stated in 2013 that Russia would teach Americans a lesson that Russia must be considered and treated in Syria "on the basis of equality, balance of interests and mutual respect."[559] Similarly, Putin proposed that Russia did not act in Syria driven by special interests. Rather, it fought to preserve the principles of international law, and this responsibility was equally shared by Russia's partners in dealing with Syria.[560]

The opportunity presented itself for Russia to bend the will of the Western decision-makers and enforce cooperation when reports about the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons against the opposition emerged. While the US was preparing for another unilateral intervention in the face of the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons, Putin penned an article for the New York Times discouraging a US intervention without UNSC authorization and embracing the idea of cooperation in dismantling Syria's chemical arsenal.[561] In the face of Russian encouragement[562] and the American consideration of military response otherwise, Syria agreed to get rid of its chemical weapons and joined the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The UNSC resolution 2118 also committed the organization to monitor the destruction.

It was essential for Russia that this resolution, too, would not be an excuse for the Western actors to intervene in Syria. Lavrov warned, for example, that the resolution authorized the UN action only upon Syria's further use of chemical weapons. This clause

[558] Dannreuther, "Russia and the Arab Spring: Supporting the Counter-Revolution," 84.
[559] Kozhanov, *Russia and the Syrian Conflict*, 2017, 45.
[560] Putin, "Vladimir Putin Meets with Members the Valdai International Discussion Club. Transcript of the Speech and the Meeting."
[561] Vladimir V. Putin, "A Plea for Caution From Russia," *The New York Times*, September 12, 2013, sec. Opinion, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/12/opinion/putin-plea-for-caution-from-russia-on-syria.html.
[562] Julian Borger and Patrick Wintour, "Russia Calls on Syria to Hand over Chemical Weapons," *The Guardian*, September 9, 2013, sec. World news, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/09/russia-syria-hand-over-chemical-weapons.

prevented any Western attempt to politicize the matter and to use it as a pretext for intervention.[563] After the US-led intervention in Libya, Russia vetoed all UNSC resolution drafts so that the Euro-Atlantic bloc would not manipulate it for their objectives. In his analysis of the Russian arguments for constantly blocking the UNSC resolutions, Seven identifies several characteristics that the Russian position revolved around. Russian arguments in the UNSC coalesced in rejection of unilateral intervention and regime change; protests over Russia's interests being ignored; emphasis on Russia's constructive role as opposed to the US failure in Iraq and Libya; committing Russia to prevention of Euro-Atlantic bloc's manipulative use of UN mechanism; and the spillover effects of the Syrian conflict.[564]

The fact that resolution 2118 did not foresee regime change and opened space for Russia's constructive role with precautions for unilateral Western intervention rendered the resolution a crucial achievement for Russia. In his 2013 Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, Putin cherished the success of taking Syria's chemical weapons under international control as reaffirming the UN's central role in global politics (a longstanding Russian objective) and prevailing of collective responsible action and common sense over engaging in actions eroding the foundations of international order.[565] By preventing Western intervention and partaking in the resolution of the chemical attack crisis, Russia reaffirmed its role within great power management.

When the Assad regime was on the verge of defeat, this role was jeopardized. It should be noted that as early as 2011, Russia's concern was more about preventing Western intervention in Syria and a political solution imposed by the Euro-Atlantic bloc. Medvedev famously stated that Assad would face a "sad faith" in the face of his hindrance of reform and dialogue with the opposition.[566] As long as there was no regime change enforced by the Western actors, Russia would accept a political solution without Assad but including the regime's elements as foreseen in the Geneva communiqué.[567] It should be noted, however, that Medvedev and Putin considerably differed in their views of conflict resolution during the Arab Spring. While Prime Minister Putin harshly criticized the UNSC resolution

[563] Averre, "Russia, the Middle East, and the Conflict in Syria," 402.
[564] Ümit Seven, "Russia's Foreign Policy Actions and the Syrian Civil War in the United Nations Security Council," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 24, no. 6 (2022): 896–911, https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2022.2037966.
[565] Putin, "Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly," 2013.
[566] Charap et al., "Russia's Military Interventions," 100.
[567] Charap et al., 108.

authorizing intervention in Libya, resembling it to the crusade calls of the medieval age[568], Medvedev found this description "unacceptable" and held Muammar Qaddafi responsible for the situation in Libya.[569] Still, Kozhanov argues that Russia never completely trusted Assad due to his unhelpful attitude toward Russia earlier in dealing with the Chechen fighters who fled to Syria during the Chechen wars. Putin had also stated that he would not make the same mistake in Syria as the Soviet Union did by entrusting Anwar Sadat fully in the 1970s.[570]

Still, a failure to prevent the Assad regime's collapse would render earlier Russian efforts, thereby, its status, futile. When the regime asked for Russian military aid – or when Russia offered its help – the cooperative mood between Russia and the US had already withered due to Russian intervention in Ukraine. Facing isolation and sanctions, Russia found another opportunity to assert its status by intervening in Syria militarily with a creative strategy, including portraying itself as correcting the Western errors in the Middle East; imposing cooperation with Russia on the US; proposing an alternative leadership in the region; and demonstrating military prowess.

6.4.1.1. Correcting the Western errors in the Middle East

Before the uprising in Syria commenced in 2011, Russia assumed a pragmatic approach to Arab Spring and expressed its willingness to work with the newly established governments in Tunisia and Egypt.[571] By 2012, Putin's earlier support for the Arab Spring was replaced with a skeptical approach that assessed the undergoing uprisings as deviating from a "civilized scenario." The earlier democratic mood was abandoned by protesters who opted for coup d'états and violence to dominate their country's politics rather than opening up democratic space. For Putin, even if the West did not cause this, they facilitated it via interventionist policies.[572]

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[568] "Medvedev Rejects Putin 'crusade' Remark over Libya," *BBC News*, March 21, 2011, sec. Europe, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-12810566.
[569] Jill Dougherty, "Putin and Medvedev Spar over Libya," CNN, March 23, 2011, http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/europe/03/21/russia.leaders.libya/index.html.
[570] Kozhanov, *Russia and the Syrian Conflict*, 2017, 48.
[571] Seven, "Russia's Foreign Policy Actions and the Syrian Civil War in the United Nations Security Council," 5.
[572] Dannreuther, "Russia and the Arab Spring: Supporting the Counter-Revolution," 83.

These interventionist policies were reminiscent of Western policies in post-Soviet space. Russia perceived the Arab Spring as an extension of the color revolutions in which the West instigated the overthrowing of established rulers and replaced them with forces of their liking.[573] The evolution of Russian perspective on the Arab Spring also evolved alongside the Bolotnaya protests- the largest upheaval Russia has witnessed since the 1990s. Being constantly wary of a possible color revolution in Russia, Russian decision-makers started to prefer political stability both in Russia and the Middle East over democratization, and they deemed a regime effective as long as it was stable. Thus, the dictatorial regimes in the Middle East were to be supported in their fight against popular movements.[574]

Thus, Russia opposed regime change through intervention because, unlike Western actors, it did not consider the regime type in the Middle East to be the root cause of all the problems. For example, the foreign minister Lavrov conveyed that his Western counterparts tried to convince him of the application of the Libya approach in Syria as well, but he rejected this proposal, suggesting that they should "stop being obsessed with regime change as a panacea."[575] The message of the intervention to the other regional leaders was that Russia would protect its allies against popular rebellions, unlike the US, who abandoned Mubarak in Egypt.[576] This message, and the intervention itself, was geared towards demonstrating that Russia could be a preferable actor over the US in the region. In this way, Russia would increase its stakes in the project of a multipolar world.

In addition to Russia's categorical rejection of forced regime change, its opposition was also about the outcomes of such attempts. In 2015, Putin criticized the Western support for anti-Asad groups, stating that using such groups as a "battering ram" to overthrow the regimes that the Western actors did not find affinity made fighting terrorism impossible.[577] He had also underlined the same year in the UN General Assembly that as a result of the American actions in Iraq and Libya, the foreign fighters from these countries found places for themselves in the ranks of ISIS in Syria.[578] Especially the Western application of the

[573] Casula and Katz, "The Middle East," 301.
[574] Issaev, "Russia and the Middle East: From 'Honest-Broker' to 'Status-Keeper,'" 323.
[575] "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Interview with Italian Media, Moscow, December 9, 2015," The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2015, https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1519917/#sel=17:13:Z3j,17:64:VD3.
[576] Stent, "Putin's Power Play in Syria."
[577] "Vladimir Putin Meets with Members of the Valdai Discussion Club. Transcript of the Final Plenary Session of the 12th Annual Meeting," Valdai Club, 2015, https://valdaiclub.com/events/posts/articles/vladimir-putin-meets-with-members-of-the-valdai-discussion-club-transcript-of-the-final-plenary-sess/.
[578] Putin, "Read Putin's U.N. General Assembly Speech."

UNSC resolution regarding Libya was paramount in the formation of Russian opposition. Putin considered the overstretching of the resolution's authorization by the Western countries as they "played a trick" against Russia.[579] This was just another manifestation of Western unilateralism that Russia had complained about for a long time, and its later attempts steered the way to prevent any similar scenario in Syria. Thus, the military intervention aimed at a diplomatic settlement of the Syrian conflict in Russia's terms.[580] Russia's success in preventing a settlement in Syria on Western terms would mean that Russia managed to impair Western unilateralism and positioned itself as one of the poles of the multipolar order. Furthermore, achieving this by reversing the outcomes of the Western involvement – eradication of the terrorist threat and stabilizing the regime – in the region would distinguish Russia as an alternative power.

6.4.1.2. Proposing an Alternative Leadership

Russian position in the Syrian case prior to the intervention had already presented Russia as an alternative leader in global politics who did not champion the liberal norms of humanitarian intervention and responsibility to protect.[581] This normative assertion based on regime stability and non-interference, as well as stipulating resistance against liberal agendas and transnationalization of certain norms[582], materialized with the intervention. In his 2016 UN General Assembly speech, Foreign Minister Lavrov connected the emergence of a polycentric world order with Russia's intervention. He underlined the need for changing

> the philosophy governing between states and do away with attempts to interfere in the internal affairs of states and impose development models on countries and nations. Unfortunately, the ideas of mentorship, superiority and exceptionalism, as well as the pursuit of one's own interests at the expense of just and equitable cooperation, have become deeply ingrained among the political elites of a number of Western countries. We can see the results of unilateral reckless solutions, born of a sense of infallibility, in

[579] Putin, "Interview with Al Arabiya, Sky News Arabia and RT Arabic."
[580] Borshchevkaya and Tabler, "Triangular Diplomacy Unpacking Russia's Syria Strategy," 16.
[581] Seven, "Russia's Foreign Policy Actions and the Syrian Civil War in the United Nations Security Council," 13.
[582] Pieper, "'Rising Power' Status and the Evolution of International Order: Conceptualising Russia's Syria Policies," 379.

the bleeding region of the Middle East and North Africa. This erodes the foundations of global stability.[583]

Lavrov continued his speech by cherishing Russian military efforts in Syria that reverted the outcomes of such philosophy and resulted in the establishment of the International Syria Support Group that envisaged an effective and inclusive political process.[584]

Similarly, Putin argued that Russia's policy in Syria represented an alternative to "arrogant and destructive" policies simulating the fight against terrorism instead of really tackling the problem.[585] For Russian decision-makers, this alternative was closely linked to Russia's great power identity. The foreign minister Lavrov stated: "Our responsible and well-thought-out approaches meet with the broadest possible support. Therefore, one can safely say that Russia has reinstated its historically essential role as the guarantor of global stability."[586] Furthermore, the results of the intervention represented Russia's contribution to world politics when it was involved in international processes, in other words, when its status was recognized. For Putin, the Syrian case could serve as a model for an effective risk management system that included cooperation based on the common interests of the involved parties.[587]

Thus, the Russian alternative did not consist of mere confrontation with the West but was also able to produce results on the ground that were compatible with the alternative philosophy underpinning Russian foreign policy. As elaborated in Chapter 3, Russian foreign policy had long asserted a multipolar world order devoid of unilateral actions and based on the strict application of non-interference, at least among great powers. Moreover, Russian decision-makers perceived the norms of humanitarian intervention and

[583] "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Remarks at the 71st Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, September 23, 2016," The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2016, https://mid.ru/en/press_service/photos/meropriyatiya_s_uchastiem_ministra/1534829/#sel=7:80:L61,9:33:2px;10:1:Lrq,10:31:31r.
[584] "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Remarks at the 71st Session of the UN General Assembly, New York, September 23, 2016."
[585] Putin, "Vladimir Putin Meets with Members of the Valdai Discussion Club. Transcript of the Plenary Session of the 14th Annual Meeting."
[586] "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Interview with Interfax News Agency, December 28, 2017," The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2017, https://archive.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3012117.
[587] "Vladimir Putin Meets with Members of the Valdai Discussion Club. Transcript of the Final Plenary Session of the 12th Annual Meeting."

responsibility to protect hollowed by the manipulative use of the Euro-Atlantic bloc. Russia's intervention in Syria ensured that these norms were challenged.

States are both creators and interpreters of international law; therefore, when they deviate from established norms, new norms potentially emerge out of practice.[588] This is especially true for great powers since their interpretations outweigh more than any other actor. In fact, the flexible use of humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect by Western actors resonated with this trend. From this perspective, presenting leadership in defense of different norms via the intervention delivered Russia great power with norm entrepreneurship.

The intervention also portrayed Russia as a responsible actor in the face of international crises. Considering that willingness to participate in the resolution of such problems constitutes one of the tenets of great powerness, taking responsibility in Syria rendered Russia a great power. Russian decision-makers were convinced that their initiative functioned in this line. For example, Lavrov applauded Russia's initiative to form a coalition against the terrorist threat in Syria accordingly:

> Russia acted dynamically and effectively in these conditions, assuming responsibility for these global developments as one of the world's largest countries and a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Russia's diplomatic efforts were aimed at showing leadership in mobilising the international community in the fight against terrorist aggression and at creating a broad anti-terrorist front.[589]

Similar to Lavrov, Vladimir Putin underlined that Russia "has demonstrated its unquestionable leadership, willpower and responsibility" in fighting against terrorism in Syria.[590] This emphasis on responsibility indicated that the Russian way of dealing with international terrorism proved itself to be efficient, unlike the Western methods, which only exacerbated the situation. Still, for the Syrian crisis to play out in Russia's terms, US cooperation was necessary. The military intervention provided precisely that.

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[588] Roy Allison, "Russia and the Post-2014 International Legal Order: Revisionism and Realpolitik," *International Affairs* 93, no. 3 (2017): 541, https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix061.

[589] "Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Interview with the Interfax News Agency, December 28, 2015," The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, December 28, 2015, https://archive.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2002854.

[590] Vladimir Putin, "Meeting with Russian Armed Forces Service Personnel," President of Russia, March 22, 2016, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/51526.

6.4.1.3. Imposing Cooperation with the US

Russia utilized its involvement in Syria as an authority position to encourage cooperation. It both held the US responsible for the emergence of ISIS and invited it to the anti-ISIS coalition.[591] Rather than dismissing the US entirely and trying to transform the international order completely, Russia pursued having a legitimate voice in shaping it.[592] Two days before the intervention, Putin had criticized that Russia's 'honest and frank attitude' in Syria had been used as an excuse to accuse Russia of having an ambitious foreign policy by those who pretended to have no ambitions at all. For Putin, however, Russia's stance was not about ambitions but "the fact that we can no longer tolerate the current state of affairs in the world. What we actually propose is to be guided by common values and common interests rather than by ambitions. Relying on international law, we must join efforts to address the problems that all of us are facing, and create a genuinely broad international coalition against terrorism."[593]

Russia's weariness with 'the current state of affairs in the world' was an oft-repeated concern, as detailed in Chapter 3. Russian decision-makers had not been comfortable with the emerging unipolar order following the collapse of the USSR and had felt uneasy with Russia's undermined status. Offering to be guided by common values and interests was a demand to be included in great power management. For example, Russia's enthusiastic cooperation with the US after the September 11 attacks was more about Russia's ensured status as an indispensable partner, so much so that then-Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov had declared the emergence of a multipolar world order out of shared interests by the US and Russia. During this period, Putin even had stated that Russia was ready to join the coalition against terrorism under US leadership as long as the legal mechanism of the UNSC was activated. Considering together with Russia's constant warnings against the erosion of the UNSC authority, it is possible to conclude that cooperation under the auspices of the Security Council meant for Russia a certain degree of recognition of its status within great power management.

[591] Stent, "Putin's Power Play in Syria."
[592] Pieper, "'Rising Power' Status and the Evolution of International Order: Conceptualising Russia's Syria Policies," 381.
[593] Putin, "Read Putin's U.N. General Assembly Speech."

In the simplest terms, Moscow needed the US to affirm its great power status[594] because, as outlined in Chapter 2, status has an intersubjective nature due to the fact that it is materialized only after the interlocutor of an actor's status recognizes it. Alongside portraying itself as a more efficient power in the Middle East, Russia's status-seeking strategy via military intervention included presenting cooperation with Russia for the US as a fait accompli. In UNSC, Russia had put so much effort into asserting a solution acceptable for both Russia and the US and blocked every resolution that it deemed to be dismissive of Russia's concerns over Western unilateralism. Thus, Russia's attitude about international action in Syria had more to do with how the US power played out than Syria itself.[595] If the US used its capabilities unilaterally, it would mean a grave disregard for Russian status. Getting involved in Syria militarily naturally increased Russia's weight in the US calculations and actually generated a more cooperative mood between Russia and the US. Russia's military capabilities that signaled its resoluteness played an important role in realizing this.

6.4.1.4. Demonstrating Military Capability

It was underlined in Chapter 2 that accumulating and demonstrating extraordinary military capabilities is one of the material practices that status-seeker actors appeal to draw the attention of other great powers. This is because of the compelling aspect of military power and the fact that unusual military capabilities are regarded as characteristic of a great power. In this line, President Putin appeared convinced that exceptional weapons would make Russia's interests heard by other powers. In different platforms, he drew attention to Russia's military capabilities and the fact that Russia would not back down in the face of US initiatives to deploy various missile systems in Russia's surroundings. Addressing the Federal Assembly in 2018, Putin declared Russia's new cutting-edge hypersonic inter-continental missile system and was confident that this reinforced Russia's position of "major nuclear power". He also underlined that Russia's concerns over the US development of a global missile system back in 2004 were not heard: "No, nobody really wanted to talk to us about the core of the problem, and nobody wanted to listen to us. So listen now."[596]

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[594] Dmitri Trenin, *What Is Russia up to in the Middle East?* (Wiley, 2017).
[595] Samuel Charap, "Russia, Syria and the Doctrine of Intervention," *Survival* 55, no. 1 (2013): 37, https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2013.767403.
[596] Vladimir Putin, "Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly," President of Russia, 2018, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56957.

Russia's tendency to demonstrate its military power had played out in Syria as well. For example, Hanna Smith, considering military might as a tenet of Russian great power identity, proposed that Russia's military action in Kosovo in 1999 and Syria in 2015 shared the same objective; asserting a multilateral solution through an unexpected military showcase.[597] Several Western analysts, including former US military members, also commented similarly. An analyst resembled the intervention to being schooled about Russia's military capabilities.[598] By February 2018, Russia had used in Syria more than 200 new weapons it developed.[599] Putin explicitly suggested that the military showcase in Syria signaled Russia's resoluteness to protect its interests:

> It is one thing for the experts to be aware that Russia supposedly has these weapons, and another thing for them to see for the first time that they do really exist, that our defense industry is making them, that they are of high quality and that we have well-trained people who can put them to effective use. … They have seen, too, now that Russia is ready to use them if this is in the interests of our country and our people.[600]

Russia also utilized the intervention to take steps to counter NATO in the Mediterranean; it established its first airbase in the region and geared it with advanced military equipment such as air superiority fighters and long-range surface-to-air missile systems, none of which contributed to the fight against ISIS meaningfully.[601] All in all, Russia instrumentalized its military capabilities not only to crush international terrorism and stabilize the Assad regime but also to demonstrate that it was able to hold the ground with its alternative leadership in the region.[602]

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[597] Smith, "Military Might as a Basis for Russian Great Power Identity," 52.
[598] Steven Lee Myers and Eric Schmitt, "Russian Military Uses Syria as Proving Ground, and West Takes Notice," *The New York Times*, October 15, 2015, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/15/world/middleeast/russian-military-uses-syria-as-proving-ground-and-west-takes-notice.html.
[599] Joseph Daher, "Three Years Later: The Evolution of Russia's Military Intervention in Syria," *Atlantic Council* (blog), September 27, 2018, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/three-years-later-the-evolution-of-russia-s-military-intervention-in-syria/.
[600] Myers and Schmitt, "Russian Military Uses Syria as Proving Ground, and West Takes Notice."
[601] Spaulding, "Russia's False Narrative in Syria," 3.
[602] Incidentally, in addition to signaling Russian capabilities as a great power, the military showcase in Syria also created uneasiness for Russia's allies. Iranian Defense Minister Hossein Dehghan stated Iran's discomfort with Russia's tendency to publicize the raids conducted from Iran's Hamedan airbase and commented that "the Russians are interested to show they are a superpower to guarantee their share in the political future of Syria and, of course, there has been a kind of show-off and ungentlemanly [attitude] in this field". "Russia 'showed-off' over Use of Iran Airbase for Syria Strikes," *BBC News*, August 22, 2016, sec. Middle East, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-37154043.

6.5. Russian Status After the Intervention

The Russian intervention in Syria managed to overshadow the isolation that Russia faced after 2014. Russia-US cooperation considerably increased compared to the situation before September 30, although US Secretary of State John Kerry's visit to Sochi earlier in May with an agenda of "urgent need"[603] for cooperation was considered a diplomatic victory for Putin[604]. The intervention compelled the Obama administration to establish a more concrete dialogue with Russia. Thus, the intervention rendered Russia a non-isolatable actor. For some European decision-makers, even the sanctions against Russia were an obstacle to the emerging cooperation and needed reconsidering.[605] Counterfactually thinking, such an attitude change was not possible without the intervention in Syria.

The intervention further materialized Russia's insistence on a political solution in Syria. Immediately following the intervention, the US and Russia established the International Syria Support Group with the participation of the UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura, the Arab League, the EU, and several regional powers such as Turkey. The Group's establishment was followed by the Ceasefire Task Force with US-Russia co-leadership.[606] Amid expulsion from G8 and fierce reaction from especially Western actors, Russia was back in great power management, enforcing its upheld norms and principles. For some, the intervention even represented Russia's "departure from the post-Cold War system," which had disregarded its interests for three decades.[607]

In 2019, Vladimir Putin confessed that Russia accomplished in Syria more than his expectations and hailed Russia's success in stabilizing the Middle East and establishing regional partnerships with regional powers like Iran and Turkey.[608] By this time, Assad had consolidated its regime, and there was no considerable insurgency against its rule. Furthermore, Russia cemented its presence in the Mediterranean with the new long-term leasing agreements of Tartus Port and Khmeimim Air Base[609], which were reinforced by

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[603] "'Urgent Need' for Russia-US Cooperation, Kerry Says on Sochi Trip," France 24, May 12, 2015, https://www.france24.com/en/20150512-russia-kerry-sochi-talks-putin-ukraine-syria.
[604] David M. Herszenhorn, "A Diplomatic Victory, and Affirmation, for Putin," *The New York Times*, May 15, 2015, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/16/world/europe/a-diplomatic-victory-and-affirmation-for-putin.html.
[605] Pieper, "'Rising Power' Status and the Evolution of International Order: Conceptualising Russia's Syria Policies," 377.
[606] Averre, "Russia, the Middle East, and the Conflict in Syria," 403.
[607] Averre, 404.
[608] Putin, "Interview with The Financial Times."
[609] Charap et al., "Russia's Military Interventions," 106.

high-tech weapons. Putin had made increasing Russia's naval power a tenet of his third presidential term, announcing that developing a strong navy is among its central objectives. Thus, Russia's growing military presence far away from Moscow advanced Russia one step closer to this objective and to being a global power.

Finally, Russia's military intervention effectively undermined the longstanding alliance structure in the Middle East. Unlike the Cold War period, Russia had already maintained a flexible approach to the region. Russia's MENA policy had an edge over the US due to its pragmatic approach to various actors, refraining from aligning with one or more on the basis of ideology or religion.[610] The intervention further reinstated Russia as a crucial broker in regional politics.[611] Earning prestige for its military might and resoluteness, Russia managed to establish better relations with regional actors such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, and Israel[612] as well as it increased its arms sales to MENA countries. The intervention had implications for Russia's allies beyond the Middle East, too, because stabilizing the Assad regime indicated a broader aspect. Putin's repeated emphasis on regime security aimed to muster the CSTO leaders around a common concern and resilience against Western intrusion.[613] Furthermore, it was important for Putin that Russia had a faithful image as an ally to CIS leaders in this endeavor.[614]

6.6. Conclusion

Russian actions in Syria complied with a reformist status-seeker's strategy. When a status-seeker views the system legitimate but its wish to be included in the great power management is denied, it appeals to "a strategy of social creativity," in which its efforts are geared towards "promoting new norms, institutions, and regimes and emphasizing the status seeker's uniqueness."[615] What Russia promoted in Syria was not entirely new norms or institutions, but in Russian decision-makers' view, the old methods were wrongly forsaken

[610] Sladden et al., "Russian Strategy in the Middle East," 3.
[611] Muhammet Koçak, "Deciphering Russia's Geopolitical Playbook: Status-Seeking Motivations Through Intervention to Syria," *Perceptions* 28, no. 2 (2023): 137–54.
[612] Mariya Petkova, "What Has Russia Gained from Five Years of Fighting in Syria?," Al Jazeera, October 1, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/10/1/what-has-russia-gained-from-five-years-of-fighting-in-syria.
[613] Allison, "Russia and the Post-2014 International Legal Order: Revisionism and Realpolitik," 537.
[614] Allison, "Russia and Syria: Explaining Alignment with a Regime in Crisis," 2013, 804.
[615] Deborah Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, *Quest for Status: Chinese and Russian Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019) quoted in Issaev, "Russia and the Middle East: From 'Honest-Broker' to 'Status-Keeper,'" 326-327.

by Western actors. The Western abandonment of the traditional application of non-interference not only disregarded the sovereignty of the interfered actor and the interests of other great powers, but it also led the insecurities to flourish around the world. In Syria, Russia demonstrated that, as one of the poles of the emerging international order, it was capable of bringing about security by safeguarding the traditional norms of international politics and ensuring that great power management functioned.

Perhaps the Syrian case constituted the most materially beneficial intervention among the cases examined within the scope of this study. Stabilizing the Assad regime and considerably exterminating the terrorist threat via a military showcase, Russia also stabilized its economic interests in the Middle East, especially in the energy and arms sectors. However, as the analysis above argued, these benefits were by-products of a broader Russian strategy to materialize a multipolar world order. First, Russia needed to prevent the collapse of the Assad regime to prove that an alternative approach to Arab Spring and regime change attempts was available in the international arena. As discussed in Chapter 3, presenting itself as a counter-balance to the hegemonic powers was a part of Russian great power identity. Second, Russia needed to encounter the international terrorism threat in Syria not only because of its national security calculations but also to perform leadership by building a coalition against terrorism. Inviting the US into this coalition and having concrete results, Russia and the US appeared nothing less than equal partners, sharing equal status.

7. CONCLUSION

This thesis is rooted in the observation that great power identity and status-seeking motivations indicate a pattern in Russian military interventions between 2008 and 2015. Most studies examining Russian military interventions in this period treated these motivations either as a contributing factor or a secondary one. This thesis proposed that great power identity has been the prism through which other factors and interests are defined in Russian foreign policy decision-making. From this perspective, great power identity was not a contributing or a secondary factor but the overarching one. The studies on Russian interventions also distinguished the rationale for intervening in post-Soviet space and the Middle East. Acknowledging that the post-Soviet space is indeed exceptionally formulated in Russian foreign policy, this thesis allocated considerable space to elaborate on this formulation in respective cases; however, it argued that Russian intervention in Syria did not differ from Russian interventions in Georgia and Ukraine in its impetus. Instead, it contended that these three cases indicated in unison a deliberate and resolute increase in Russian assertiveness and the scope of military presence in order to ensure that Russia's great power status is recognized by other powers, especially the US.

Problematizing Russian decision-makers' determination to seek status militarily instead of appealing to non-military methods, this thesis sought to address Russian decision-makers' perception of repeated misrecognition of their great power identity. In this direction, it committed itself to several assumptions: (1) individual leaders are both representatives of the socio-historical background of their country and interpreter of their country's national identity; (2) great power status is more intersubjective than empirical; thus, self-attributed status and perception of misrecognition matter more than objective criteria; (3) a status-seeker actor may appeal to violence if it perceives that non-military methods have not resulted in its interlocutor's recognition of the core of its identity; (4) militarily status-seeking takes places in a venue which is crucial either in status-seeker's identity or recognitive dynamics between status-seeker and its interlocutor, finally (5) militarily status seeking involves material interests from aggression defined by great power identity. Based on these assumptions, this thesis first delved into how great power identity and its misrecognition play out in Vladimir Putin's foreign policy formulation and subsequently drew the contours of recognitive dynamics operating in respective cases.

Since the early years of the newly founded Russian Federation following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian foreign policy conduct, especially with regard to the Euro-Atlantic bloc, has been dominated by a strategy of status-seeking. Having lost large territories and grandeur- despite keeping their seat in the UNSC and remaining a major nuclear power- Russian decision-makers have been very attentive to Russia's status throughout the 90s. They often found that the US and its allies were immersed in triumphalism, considering themselves the victors of the Cold War and having the right to treat Russia as a lesser power. One analyst even argued that the configuration of the post-Cold War system amounted to "a softer version of the Treaty of Versailles" imposed on Russia and naturally created "a form of Weimar syndrome" within the Russian political elite.[616]

Vladimir Putin's rule was marked by the same perception. An overwhelming majority of Putin's addresses and interviews examined for the purpose of this thesis included at least one aspect of recognitive dynamics. For Putin, Russia's inherent attributes destine it to be a great power- an important civilizational and economic center of a multipolar world. Deeming the collapse of the Soviet Union as an anomaly in the course of Russian greatness, Putin thought that Russian foreign policy must convene its efforts to steer Russia back on the correct path. The independence of Russia's foreign policy, in other words, its capability to produce its own definitions and objectives vis-à-vis the US, was crucial at this point. Therefore, Putin's foreign policy entailed a steadfast rejection of incorporating the emerging Western norms and practices, such as democracy promotion, unilateral interventionism, and NATO enlargement.

It was Putin's conviction that the Euro-Atlantic bloc presented these norms and practices as sine qua non for the rest of the world. For him, this unilateral approach infiltrated many issues regarding their relations with Russia. However, when Russia was included as a significant part of these practices, in other words, its status was recognized as part of the great power management, it posed less trouble for Russia. Even if there would be infringements to the international order, they were to be conducted only by coordinating with

[616] Sergei Karaganov, "Time to End the Cold War in Europe," Valdai Club, 2014, https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/time_to_end_the_cold_war_in_europe/.

Russia.[617] Russia's initial endorsement of an American military intervention in Iraq via a UNSC resolution is a proper example of this.

From the Russian perspective, the first decade of the 2000s witnessed the lack of this coordination with Russia. Aggravated by Kosovo's declaration of independence, closer ties between Georgia and NATO, color revolutions, and NATO declaration for Georgia and Ukraine's membership prospects, Russia intentionally responded to the Georgian offensive to South Ossetia in 2008 in an unproportionate manner to penalize Georgia for its pivot to the Euro-Atlantic bloc, and the Euro-Atlantic bloc for swaying Georgia in this direction.

Having its voice heard, Russia managed to convince the US to establish relations with a new mood more inclusive of Russian interests. This positive mood lasted only a few years. Severely resenting the alleged Western involvement in the overthrowing of Ukrainian President Yanukovych by Euromaidan protests, Russia annexed Crimea and instigated a pro-Russian uprising in Ukraine's Russian-speaking cities. The intervention again punished the newly established Ukrainian government for its Western pivot and the Euro-Atlantic bloc for drawing Ukraine away from Russia's influence. The fait accompli annexation of Crimea also contributed to Russia's great power status by ensuring the Black Sea Fleet's deployment in the critical Sevastopol port without any lease constraint.

Contrary to the Georgia case, the intervention did not result in the Euro-Atlantic bloc's granting recognition to Russia. The US and the EU imposed several sanctions on Russia, targeting its economy. Russia was expelled from G8 and faced international isolation. The deteriorating situation for the Assad regime in Syria offered Russia an opportunity to demonstrate that it was an indispensable actor in international politics. Upholding its rejection of regime change by international action, Russia enabled Bashar al-Assad to maintain its power in a military showcase. In accounting for the intervention, Russian decision-makers underlined the difference between the consequences of their legal intervention and the unilateral American ones. Thus, they proposed an alternative leadership both in the region and global politics, which further reinforced Russia's multipolarity project.

[617] Pieper, "'Rising Power' Status and the Evolution of International Order: Conceptualising Russia's Syria Policies," 380.

In fact, Russia's whole status-seeking strategy is geared towards materializing a multipolar world order as envisaged by its great power identity. But how can we explain Russian decision-makers' commitment to hard power in their identity-driven pursuits? Figure 9 summarizes the case-by-case findings of this thesis, and the analysis below provides three conjoining findings for this puzzle. First, Russian decision-makers are confident that their interests have been constantly disregarded by their Western counterparts before and during the developments leading up to each intervention. Second, for Russian decision-makers, intervention has become an end in itself because imitating US actions is one of the means to materialize multipolarity by signaling equal status between Russia and the US. Third, Russian decision-makers utilized Russia's developing military capabilities to demonstrate their resolve to ensure recognition of Russia's great power status.

Repeated Misrecognition or Non-Violent Methods Exhausted

In the three cases examined, Russian accounts of the interventions merge in their expressive resentment toward Western dealings in respective countries. In Georgia, Russia held the Euro-Atlantic bloc responsible for urging and facilitating the Georgian offensive against South Ossetia. Similarly, Russia regarded the overthrowing of Yanukovych occurring as a result of Western interference to spoil Yanukovych's decision to cancel the EU Association Agreement and steer toward firmer economic relations with Russia. The Western actors were again liable for the situation in Syria by their overall Arab Spring policy, endorsing regime change and supporting the opposition groups without paying much attention to the consequences.

For Russians, the Euro-Atlantic bloc was not only the cause of the mayhem in these countries, but they also very often disregarded the caveats Russians expressed regarding the situation there on various platforms. These caveats were about either the relations between Russia and the Western actors, the disputes in respective countries, or the overall unilateral attitude of Western countries undermining international order. Developments such as the NATO bombings in Serbia and Kosovo, the US-led interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, the unilateral cancellation of the ABM treaty by the US, color revolutions in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan, and the Kosovo independence created the backbone of Russian perception that Russia's opinion did not matter for the decision-makers in Washington and Brussels.

The blatant Western support for President Saakashvili in the form of military cooperation and political counseling for pursuing Georgia's incorporation within Western military and political structures, namely, NATO and the EU, consolidated this perspective. Furthermore, Georgia was one of the countries to which Russia attached identity-related importance via the near abroad doctrine, which defined Russia's dealings in post-Soviet space as privileged interests. The fact that Russia had privileged interests in post-Soviet space indicated that Russia was a great power with a sphere of influence. As great powers respect each other's spheres of influence, active Western involvement in Georgia meant disregarding and undermining Russia's great power status. Already feeling misrecognized, Vladimir Putin's direct warnings about Georgia's NATO membership- the last one being in the NATO Bucharest Summit, which ended with the declaration that Georgia and Ukraine would be NATO members one day- went unheeded. It is very possible that Russian decision-makers considered their diplomatic efforts were exhausted, which led them to conduct an intervention in Georgia to punish the misrecognizing parties, signal resolve, and freeze Georgia's NATO prospects.

Similarly, in Ukraine, Russia believed that it was treated in a similar way to the earlier misrecognition moments. Ukraine was the centerpiece of near abroad doctrine and the idea of Russkiy Mir, envisaging a Russian civilizational sphere. The fact that the European actors told Russia that the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement was "none of [Russia's] business"[618] and pushed for the agreement despite Russia's appeal for its inclusion in negotiations consolidated Russian efforts to sway Ukrainian decision-makers from signing the agreement. When Russia succeeded in this, the Euromaidan protests erupted. For Russia, the Western actors, this time, used the momentum of the demonstrations and instigated "a coup" to replace the Ukrainian government with anti-Russian elements. Russians undoubtedly foresaw that their response in Crimea and Donbas would alienate Ukraine from Russia for long. Still, they conducted an intervention because the interlocutor of the action was the Western actors, not Ukraine per se. Following sanctions and isolation served as a self-fulfilling prophecy- they were just another illustration of the Western attitude towards Russia.

For Russia, the constant wave of misrecognition occurred also in the US dealings in the Middle East. The intervention in Libya in 2011 by a misuse of the relevant UNSC

[618] Putin, "Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club," October 29, 2014.

resolution exemplified this and rendered Russian policy as resisting Western-led regime change in the region. Although the Western attitude toward Arab Spring had softened against Russia around 2013, and Russia's inclusion in great power management became possible in the Syrian chemical attack case, Russia felt compelled to intervene in Syria to save the Assad regime from a grave situation of which Russia held the Western actors responsible again.

All in all, Russian interventions arose from the perception of constant misrecognition and exhaustion of diplomatic efforts. Undoubtedly, these interventions were not crude reactions to Western actions, but they were conducted at a moment of opportunity, with certain risks calculated. The likelihood of a severe international reaction and Russian willingness to encounter it, especially in the case of Ukraine, point to the degree to which Russian great power identity plays out in Russian foreign policymaking.

Intervention as an End

One of the main themes of Russian grievances over the American efforts to monopolize the international order is American interventionism, occurring at times under the façade of humanitarian intervention. When this is the case, how come Russia has performed an action it condemned so frequently? Russia's approach to recognitive games between the US and itself was pragmatic in the sense that Russia considered any action that the US conducted was permissible for Russia, too, by virtue of being in equal status. Appealing to mimetic politics- Russia emulated NATO policies in the organization of CSTO and looked forward to cooperation opportunities like the aftermath of September 11 so that Russia would be a part of great power management. In moments of repeated misrecognition, intervention also became a part of this policy of imitation. When faced with criticism, Russian decision-makers frequently underlined Western lack of moral ground to reprimand Russian actions when what they criticized was their routine practice. Especially in the cases of Georgia and Syria, these dynamics became pertinent. In Georgia, the very act of intervention was instrumentalized by Russia as the replication of American dealings in Kosovo. In Russian eyes, Kosovo's declaration of independence was the culmination of unilateral Western efforts, starting from the NATO intervention in 1999 and supporting the declaration in 2008. If the US had the right to do this in Kosovo despite Russian protests, Russia was entitled to carry out a similar project in South Ossetia in a moment of opportunity. In Syria, intervention was the replication of earlier US interventions in the

region, but with a less chaotic outcome. Russia utilized the intervention to imitate US power and present itself as an alternative to it. Being able to conduct such an intervention in itself was an indicator for Russia and was observed as a sign of great powerness.

Signaling Resolve

Russian commitment to realizing its great power identity was epitomized in military interventions. The interventions functioned as military showcases illustrating Russia's might and scenes through which Russia signaled its readiness to take risks to ensure its interests and status are taken into consideration by the Euro-Atlantic bloc. Despite the fact that Russian military weaknesses became visible in Georgia, Russia's unproportionate response to the Georgian offensive to the breakaway region of South Ossetia was geared towards demonstrating its ability to overpower other forces in the post-Soviet space. The annexation of Crimea took place without violence, but Russian troops deployed in Sevastopol blockaded Ukrainian forces and confiscated many Ukrainian military assets after the annexation. More importantly, a controversial fait accompli such as annexation was a bold attempt by Russia to respond to the developments in Ukraine. It would be naïve to assume that Russian decision-makers did not calculate the colossal reaction against territorial gain and irredentism by the international community, especially the Western actors. When this is the case, the annexation's function of risk-proneness becomes prominent in the Russian rationale. Signaling risk-proneness to deter misrecognition of Russia's great power status took the shape of a demonstration of Russian military capabilities in Syria. Russia made use of its advanced weaponry in the fight against ISIS and the Syrian opposition so that its reputation for resolve- its commitment to pursuing its interests as an independent power- was reinforced. In all cases, element of surprised was also instrumentalized by Russia to maintain a reputation for unpredictability when misrecognized.

Limitations and Future Research

This thesis made use of mainly translated versions of Vladimir Putin and other Russian officials' addresses and interviews. Therefore, although it is not very likely that they affected the propositions of this thesis, certain nuances, wordplays, or enunciations might be lost in translation. Still, most of the primary sources are derived from the official website of the

Russian presidency. Relying on official translations by the Russian state agencies hardly hindered the thesis objective of focusing on understanding Russian perception.

The propositions of this thesis are based on the specific implications of Russian national identity on Russia's place in international politics. From this aspect, they might not be applied in different contexts. Still, the framework of this thesis provides researchers with possible entry points in the disputes between status quo powers and status-seeker actors by accounting for the status-seeking actor's specific recognition considerations. The Russian invasion of Ukraine starting in 2022 has become especially pertinent in this regard. Although this thesis did not allocate a chapter on the case as it occurred during the time of writing, a considerable number of sources on the invasion emerged from Russian officials' statements since 2022. Russian account of the 'special military intervention' is dominated by similar recognitive dynamics of the cases examined within the scope of this thesis. Furthermore, it is analytically imperative to consider the 2022 invasion as a continuation of the Russia-West confrontation[619] and Russian policies since 2014. Therefore, the specific chapter on Ukraine in this thesis provides the foundation for an analysis of the 2022 invasion.

Many reckon that the international system is currently under transformation, and systemic transformations have mostly included conflicts emanating from status-quo challenging powers and established power's reaction to preserve the status quo. The debates on whether China will turn to revisionism and how the international system will evolve through China-US confrontation occupy many IR scholars' agenda. Despite the tension regarding Taiwan, China's status-seeking policies, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, have been mostly considered a peaceful one. However, the increasing Chinese perception of misrecognition of its status has manifested itself in different areas of Chinese-American relations, including the NATO policies in the Asia-Pacific.[620] Further research tracing the current systemic transformation via this thesis' framework will expectedly reveal the intersubjective nature of disputes that are part of the transformation, delineate how the relevant actors (China, India, etc.) communicate intent, and the watershed moments that could be prevented through insistent diplomacy, and otherwise would lead to conflict. Looking deeper into the processes that include the clashes between challenging and status

[619] Purtaş, "Rusya'nın Dağılma Sendromu ve Batıyla Olan Kavgası."
[620] Matti Puranen, "China's NATO Anxiety," *The Diplomat*, May 15, 2024, https://thediplomat.com/2024/05/chinas-nato-anxiety/, Rohan Mukherjee, "China's Status Anxiety: Beijing Fights to Be Treated as America's Equal on the World Stage," *Foreign Affairs*, July 19, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/united-states-china-status-anxiety.

quo powers in this way has become more significant than ever because only through accounting for the intersubjective dynamics in these disputes can we find ‘intervention’ points to address the interests of all parties involved and ensure a peaceful transformation.

	Georgia	***Ukraine***	***Syria***
Why is the case an intervention?	Unproportionate response Punitive aspect	Annexation Instigating Separatism Punitive Aspect	Invitation
Significance of the Intervention Venue for Russian Great Power Identity	Near Abroad doctrine Caucasian stability	Near Abroad Doctrine Russkiy Mir Irredentism	Long-standing relations Conjunctural MENA as a great power indicator
Russian Justifications for the Intervention	Protection of peacekeepers and Russian-speakers Kosovo precedent	Protection of Russian-speakers Kosovo precedent	Fighting against terrorism Preventing regime collapse
Russian Status-Seeking *via* Intervention	Countering NATO enlargement Countering color revolutions Replicating the Kosovo precedent	Countering Western complicity in the Maidan revolution Countering misrecognition in the Association Agreement negotiations Preserving Black Sea Fleet in Crimea	Correcting the Western errors Alternative leadership Imposing cooperation on the US Demonstrating determination and military capability
Russian Status after the Intervention	Increased: - "Reset" with the US - NATO enlargement toward Georgia effectively halted	Decreased: - Sanctions and isolation	Increased: -Isolation softened -Great power management against ISIS -Increased influence in the Middle East

Figure 9. Findings Per Case

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interviews and Addresses by Vladimir Putin including recognitive dynamics

1999	Russia at the Turn of the Millennium
2000	UN Millenium Summit
2000	First Inauguration Speech
2000	Interview to "BBC Breakfast with Frost"
2000	Interview with the French Newspaper Le Figaro
2001	Interview With the Italian Newspaper "Corriere della Sera"
2001	Interview for the National Public Radio
2001	Interview with the American Broadcasting Company ABC
2001	Interview with the German Magazine Focus
2001	Interview with the Financial Times
2002	Interview with the Wall Street Journal
2003	Second Inauguration
2003	Interview to The New York Times
2003	Interview with American Television Channels
2005	Interview with Television Channel Nederland 1 and Newspaper NRC Handelsblad
2005	Interview with Israeli Television Channel One
2006	Interview with NBC Television Channel (USA)
2007	Munich Security Conference Speech
2007	Interview with Newspaper Journalists from G8 Members
2007	Interview with Time Magazine
2008	CNN Interview with Vladimir Putin
2008	Press Statement and Answers to Journalists' Questions following a Meeting of the NATO-Russia Council
2008	Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin interviewed by the German ARD TV channel
2008	Valdai Discussion Club
2012	Third Inauguration
2012	Federal Assembly Address
2012	Russia muscles up – the challenges we must rise to face
2012	Russia and the changing world
2013	Federal Assembly Address
2013	Valdai Discussion Club
2013	The Syrian Alternative Article
2013	Interview to Channel One and Associated Press News Agency
2014	Valdai Discussion Club
2014	Federal Assembly Address
2014	Vladimir Putin's interview with Radio Europe 1 and TF1 TV channel
2014	Vladimir Putin addressed State Duma deputies, Federation Council members, heads of Russian regions and civil society representatives in the Kremlin
2014	Vladimir Putin answered journalists' questions on the situation in Ukraine
2015	70th session of the UN General Assembly in New York
2015	Valdai Discussion Club

2015	Interview to American TV Channel CBS and PBS
2015	Federal Assembly Address
2015	Interview to Vladimir Solovyov
2015	Russia Calling! Investment Forum
2016	Interview to German Newspaper Bild
2016	Meeting with Russian Armed Forces Service Personnel
2016	Answers to questions from French journalists fromTF1 TV channel
2016	Interview to Bloomberg
2016	Valdai Discussion Club
2017	Vladimir Putin's interview with Le Figaro
2017	Interview to Mir Broadcasting Company
2017	Valdai Discussion Club
2018	Valdai Discussion Club
2018	Interview of the Russian President Vladimir Putin to American TV Channel NBC
2018	Interview with Austrian ORF Television Channel
2018	Fourth Inauguration
2018	Federal Assembly Address
2018	Interview to Fox News Channel
2019	Interview with Oliver Stone
2019	Federal Assembly Address
2019	Interview with The Financial Times
2019	Interview with Italian Newspaper Corriere della Sera
2019	Interview with Al Arabiya, Sky News Arabia and RTArabic
2020	Valdai Discussion Club
2021	Valdai Discussion Club
2021	Interview to NBC
2021	Vladimir Putin answered questions on the article "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians"
2021	Federal Assembly Address
2021	Russia's position at the seventy-sixth session of the UN General Assembly
2022	Address by the President of the Russian Federation (recognition of Donetsk and Lugansk Republics)
2022	Address on Signing of Treaties on Accession of Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics and Zaporozhye and Kherson regions to Russia
2022	Address by the President of the Russian Federation (Announcing Mobilization)
2022	Address by the President of the Russian Federation (Announcing "Special Military Operation")
2022	Valdai Discussion Club
2023	Federal Assembly Address
2023	Valdai Discussion Club
2024	Answers to questions from journalist Pavel Zarubin
2024	Interview to Tucker Carlson

Appendix 2: Interviews and Addresses by Vladimir Putin not including recognitive dynamics

2000	Larry King Interview (CNN)
2001	Answers to Questions during a Joint Interview with German Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder to Russian and German TV channels
2002	Speech at a Meeting of the NATO-Russia Council
2003	Federal Assembly Address
2005	Interview to CBS anchor Mike Wallace
2005	Interview with Leaders magazine (USA)
2006	Interview for Russian and Foreign Channels on the Priorities for Russia's Presidency of the G8
2006	Interview to the Spanish Media
2006	Interview with TF-1 Television Channel (France)
2006	Interview with the German Newspaper SuddeutscheZeitung
2006	Interview with ZDF Television Channel (Germany)
2012	Interview to Russia Today TV Channel
2012	Valdai Discussion Club
2016	Federal Assembly Address
2018	Interview with China Media Group
2018	News conference following talks between the presidents of Russia and the United States
2020	Federal Assembly Address
2024	Federal Assembly Address