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Ideas, Institutions, Intervention, and Ethnic Conflict: A
Constructivist Analysis of Russian Peacekeeping in the
Former Soviet Union

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Introduction

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the fifteen union republics of the former superpower separated into newly independent sovereign states. The largest of these, the Russian Federation, has since emerged as the most capable and politically assertive and has inherited the majority of its predecessor's geopolitical and strategic interests. Though Moscow's interests in its "near-abroad"¹ reflect the implications of its longstanding imperial legacy in the region, Russia entered the post-Soviet period pursuing a confused strategy of disengagement with regards to the new and unstable countries of the Former Soviet Union (FSU). Beginning in mid-1992 and continuing into late-1994, however, Russia began implementing a more assertive and interventionist response strategy to address the region's growing instability. Though these actions were categorized by so-called liberal internationalists in the Russian government as "peacekeeping" operations, they in practice served largely to forward the national interests of the Russian Federation, namely the enforcement of target state membership in the Confederation of Independent States (CIS), the prevention of external interference, and the perpetuation of Russian military presence in the key geopolitical choke points of the former Soviet Union.

My research draws from a combination of constructivism and historical institutionalist theory to demonstrate how, despite the Russian government's early commitment to internationalist norms, fluid institutional preconditions allowed for a series of key structural shifts in the early post-Soviet period to drive administrative inertia away from the weakly institutionalized liberal-pacifist ideals of the Gorbachev era and towards a more muscular, nationalist, and zero-sum foreign policy strategy. In this context, the period from mid-1992

¹ Drawn from the Russian *blizhneye zarubezhye*, the term arose in popularity within Russia following the collapse of the USSR as a common reference to the territories currently comprising the fourteen other former Soviet territories. Though it remains in partial use today, the term developed somewhat of a negative connotation towards the late 1990's as a term borne primarily of Russian imperialism.

through late-1994 saw a rise in Russian intervention in the near abroad as intervening events challenged the orthodoxy of the isolationists in power and legitimized the efforts of revanchist policy entrepreneurs framing the use of force as a justifiable and necessary foreign policy strategy.

To effectively demonstrate this shift, I will be reviewing and assessing the nature of Russia's involvement in the secessionist wars in Moldova and Georgia as case studies for assessing the development of Russian foreign policy making in the near abroad. Drawing from sources pertaining to these conflicts I will then present a set of narratives detailing the sources of these conflicts as well as the development of Russia's interventionist strategy as they pertain to this observed shift in the foreign policy calculation of the Russian Federation. Ultimately, this project will contribute to the debate within international relations over the specific mechanisms that shape actor preferences and lead states to pursue foreign intervention.

I have limited my set of cases to a small handful of ethnic conflicts in the near abroad in order to focus specifically on the coercive strategy Russian policymakers develop in the context of conflict resolution in the near abroad. I have therefore excluded discussion of Russia's peacekeeping intervention in Tajikistan as it is both geographically removed from my focus area of the greater Black Sea and lacks the same coercive elements present in other instances of intervention. I also eschew focus on the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh given that the proposed Russian peacekeeping mission was never deployed and that evidence for Russia's indirect interference is comparatively less abundant. I have also excluded coverage of Russia's intervention into Chechnya given that it occurs beyond the chronological scope of my project and also technically qualifies as a domestic conflict. Lastly, I have chosen not to include discussion of Crimea and the war in

Eastern Ukraine given similar time frame issues, alongside the fact that their ongoing status limits access to reliable information regarding the conflict and its combatants. Furthermore, a comparison of cases, as opposed to a singular case study, will aid in demonstrating the gradual evolution of consensus in regarding policy towards the near abroad.

At this point it is necessary to effectively operationalize my use of the term “intervention” within the context of my argument. To do so, I rely on James Rosenau’s definition of the term as “any action whereby one state has an impact upon the affairs of another,” qualified as such through its *convention-breaking* behavior - the degree to which an intervention breaks from formerly established behavior - and its *authority-orientated* nature - whether intervention is aimed at maintaining or altering the authority structure of the target nation.² Although the degree to which Russian interventionist actions constitute convention-breaking behavior is tempered by Moscow’s history of frequent and direct intervention in these republics during the Soviet period, this project aims to understand the behavior of the Russian Federation and thus recognizes the breakup of the USSR as constituting a sufficient break from former practices. Accepting this potential caveat, the scope of convention-breaking and authority-breaking behavior Russia employs in these conflicts is broad, ranging from but not limited to: the provision of financial assistance, military equipment, logistics training and/or direct military aid to a target faction; the deployment of purportedly neutral peacekeeping forces; the weaponization of conflict resolution as a tool of coercive diplomacy.

The structure of this project will proceed as follows. Chapter One will contain a contextual engagement and assessment of the alternative explanations for Russia’s behavior in the near abroad offered by competing schools in international relations followed by a more

² James N. Rosenau, "Intervention as a Scientific Concept," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 13 (June 1969): 153.

in depth summation of my argument and the historical factors supporting it. In Chapter Two I will provide a short section on foreign policy debate in the early Russian Federation alongside an overview of the country's institutional structure as well as the key actors and organizations that initially helped shape Russia's foreign policy decision making. Chapter Three will include a brief but critical overview of Soviet Nationalities policy as it pertains to the conflict spirals that developed. Chapters Four and Five will detail my two separate case studies, Moldova and Georgia, respectively, with emphasis on the development, implementation, and implications of Russia's intervention strategy. The final section will be a conclusion in which I reassert and defend my argument that a constructivist understanding of the structural, institutional, and domestic shifts that influenced Russian policy best explains the incidence and nature of early Russian intervention in the near abroad.

Chapter One - Alternative Explanations & Argument Summary

Structural Theories

In order to assess the development of Russia's interventionist strategy from the perspective of international relations theory, it is first crucial to review and assess the competing explanations for state behavior posed by other theories and paradigms. The mainstream structural theories that traditionally prevail in international relations discourse, neo-realism and liberal institutionalism, present differing, though fundamentally similar frameworks for understanding the behavior of states. Both rely on assumptions regarding the implications of international anarchy and the relative preference stability of individual level agents that such structural forces induce.

Neo-realists, also known as structural realists, generally hold that the the lack of an international arbiter with a global monopoly on the use of force breeds anarchy, forcing states to compete for power with one another on a zero-sum basis.³ They also assert broadly that states constitute the primary actor in international affairs and are generally assumed to be rational actors committed to their continued security as ensured by "self-help" strategies, namely the maintenance and projection of political, economic, and military power.⁴ The argument thus follows that states pursue intervention to either expand their influence or to respond to threats from potential rivals. Under these circumstances, neorealist theories would assert that Russia's interests and behavior are determined by its geography and position in the international system and that such interests are fundamentally inescapable.

³ Andrew Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition? The Rise, Fall, and Reprise of Soviet-Russian Military Interventionism, 1973-1996*, MIT Press, BCSIA Studies in International Security, Cambridge, 1999, 6.

⁴ Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 118. Waltz, however, has emphasized that, while states are of course not unitary actors, the unitary state assumption can remain implicit in his argument since the pressures and conditions of the international system are still the primary forces that shape elites' behavior and preferences once they hold positions of power. For more see: Kenneth N. Waltz, "Response to My Critics," in Keohane, *Neorealism and Its Critics*, pp. 338-39.

As many have noted, however, this pessimistic understanding of statecraft is belied by the considerable degree of international cooperation characteristic of the post-WWII era. This position is championed by liberal institutionalists, who highlight the ways in which international institutions can mitigate the negative implications of anarchy by helping to enforce inter-state commitments, lowering transaction costs, and providing incentive structures for states to encourage cooperation and discourage delinquency.⁵ Therefore liberal institutionalists largely frame intervention as a tool for the stabilization of the international system to the degree that they can strengthen these economic, institutional, and normative ties between states.⁶ While this situation remains more or less consistent amongst the world's industrialized democracies, some liberal theorists recognize that such cooperation is hindered where countries lack common values and norms, strong interweaving economic linkages, and a history of mutual engagement through international organizations.⁷

The latter circumstance aptly describes the initial state of affairs in Russia and the states of the former Soviet Union, in the process highlighting the marginal usefulness of structural logic towards understanding Russia's foreign policy in the region. Liberal Russian policy makers might hope to portray the CIS as an effective international institution with a strong bureaucratic infrastructure designed to preserve stability and help its members integrate economically with the West on the basis of their common commitment to market economies and pluralist democracy. In reality most observers note that, while ostensibly useful as a means of coordinating policy between its members, the CIS grew to function as an

⁵ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition*, 6.

⁶ See John G. Ikenberry, "Why Export Democracy?: The 'Hidden Grand Strategy' of American Foreign Policy" *The Wilson Quarterly* (Vol. 23, no.2 (Spring 1999) 2; Roland Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict*. Cambridge, U.K.: (Cambridge UP, 2004).

⁷ See James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, "A Tale of Two Worlds: Core and Periphery in the Post-cold War Era." *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 467-91.

instrument for exerting Russian hegemony in the states of the former Soviet Union.⁸

Moreover, the overwhelming evidence available suggests that, while there is a certain degree of truth to the liberal argument that Russian “peacekeeping” interventions in the near abroad were designed to stabilize Russia’s turbulent periphery, the Russian government’s later insistence on maintaining Russian dominated missions that excluded potentially more capable actors, such as the United Nations (UN) and Council for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) as well as Romania and Ukraine, suggests a more sober and strategic line of decision making focused on the balance of power in these geopolitically significant regions.

The strategic goals that underlie Russia’s interventions in the near abroad appear to fulfill structural realist expectations regarding the incentives that anarchy creates for Moscow to act forcefully and decisively to retain or restore hegemony in areas of its former preeminence. The language of nominally liberal Russian politicians also appears to support this position, as President Boris Yeltsin has frequently emphasized that “geopolitics” force Russia to preserve a powerful presence in Eurasia.⁹ Even Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, the quintessential voice of liberal internationalism within the Russian government, noted by late 1993 that Russia’s refusal to intervene in conflicts in the near abroad would allow its “neighbors in Asia” to fill the vacuum and thus “force Russia out of the region and restrict its influence.”¹⁰ This perspective aptly characterizes the rationale Russia ultimately championed as it pursued various “peacekeeping” interventions in Moldova and Georgia, states which

⁸ Robert H. Donaldson, and Joseph L. Noguee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia : Changing Systems, Enduring Interests* / Robert H. Donaldson, Joseph L. Noguee. 2nd ed. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2002. 178.

⁹ Jeffrey Checkel, “Structure, Institutions, and Process: Russia’s Changing Foreign Policy,” in Adeed Dawisha & Karen Dawisha (eds), *The Making of Foreign Policy in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* (Armonk, NY, M.E. Sharpe, 1995) 48.

¹⁰ Quotations drawn from Kozyrev’s interview in *Izvestiya*, 8 October 1993. cited in: Fiona Hill and Pamela Jewett, *“Back in the USSR”: Russia’s Intervention in the Internal Affairs of the Former Soviet Republics and the Implications United States Policy Toward Russia*, Cambridge, MA: *Strengthening Democratic Institutions Project*, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 1994, 9.

initially declined membership in the CIS, thus threatening to escape Moscow's direct sphere of influence.

Though convincing, the neorealist analysis has difficulty answering one key question: what, then, explains the lack of interventionist appetite in the period directly preceding and following the fall of the Soviet Union? For example, Kozyrev's rhetoric in early 1992 rejecting the use of force in the near abroad paints a far different picture than beliefs he expressed even just a year later. Most realist theories admit that state (and by association, elite) interests can change in response to the changing structure of the international system though they underscore the fact that long-term elite preferences are stable, rational, and generally unaffected by sub-state factors such as domestic or bureaucratic constraints.¹¹

For example, realists such as Allen Lynch point to crucial structural turning points such as the muted Western response to Russian intervention in Moldova (covered in more detail in Section three) as demonstrating to Russian moderates that the unsanctioned use of force to reign in the near abroad might not compromise the primary objective for liberals at this time: the accession of Western financial aid.¹² In reality this is merely an isolated, though important, part of the greater picture. While this certainly was a crucial moment in the course of events that followed, it is not necessarily as transformative as Lynch asserts. As will be explored later, Yeltsin and Kozyrev both expressed lasting commitment to the liberal norms of non interference for months after events in Moldova transpired. It was only after significant domestic pressure from the anti-liberal nationalist political opposition and a series of independent actions taken by the military that by early 1993, Yeltsin began to express

¹¹ See Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*; David Lake, *Power, Protection and Free Trade: International Sources of US Commercial Strategy, 1887-1939* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988); Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise," *International Security* 17 (Spring 1993).

¹² Allen C. Lynch, "The Realism of Russia's Foreign Policy," *Europe-Asia Studies* 53, no. 1 (2001): 14.

more unilateralist views and Russian policy began moving in a pragmatic, traditional “geopolitics” oriented direction.

The Comparative Benefit of an Ideas-Based Approach

There is thus a great deal of precision and specificity lost with the deterministic assumptions of rational and unitary state actors that realism demands. How then can this transition be better explained? To answer this question more substantively, it is necessary to turn to the domestic political, institutional, and ideational factors shaping policy in the early Russian Federation. This emphasis on sub-state level factors, however, should not impinge upon the consideration of forces at the international level as they very often directly serve to shape the incentives and opportunities of domestic actors involved in policy making.¹³ To this end, my work relies heavily on the historical institutionalist approach of Jeffrey Checkel, with particular emphasis on how these external stimuli provide institutional actors opportunities to press the boundaries of foreign policy choice.

At this point it is necessary to specify what is meant by an “institution” in this context. Institutions, broadly defined, constitute both *formal* organizations as well as *informal* sets of norms and rules that are both historically and cognitively constructed and set the parameters for collective action.¹⁴ In the context of political decision making, these “coercive social facts” serve to constrain the activity, regularize the behavior, and shape the preferences of agents, given, or perhaps in spite of the fact that they exist and operate as a product of the normative understandings and ideas held by their constituent parts: in this case, the agents themselves.¹⁵

¹³ Jeffrey T. Checkel, 'Structure, Institutions, and Process: Russia's Changing Foreign Policy', 48.

¹⁴ Jeffrey T. Checkel, *Ideas and International Political Change : Soviet/Russian Behavior and the End of the Cold War*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997, 6. See also, Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics." *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 399.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 399.

To mitigate the chaos that multiple competing normative understandings of ideal conduct might have on the smooth institutional operations of, for example, a state, most organizations formulate broad “operational philosophies” that help to orient their behavior.¹⁶ Applied to foreign policy, these operational philosophies are often expressed as national ideas - the broad concepts and beliefs held by foreign policy elites regarding ideal policy prescriptions. National ideas offer agents specific frameworks through which to define state interests, frame threats, and proscribe ideal policy solutions.¹⁷ They also provide a benchmark against which policy success is assessed and can prevent or propel the implementation of alternative strategies that stand to reshape the prevailing status quo assumptions.¹⁸ In this sense, ideational commitments can prove incredibly influential on political outcomes.

As Checkel notes, within centralized states, potential carriers of new ideas such as individual “policy entrepreneurs,”¹⁹ NGO’s or other transnational interest coalitions often have limited access to top decision makers, allowing the “organizational ideologies” of the center to remain relatively insulated from unwanted ideational static.²⁰ The foreign policy making apparatus of the former USSR, for example, was dominated by the operational philosophies of the Communist Party which included, namely, a class based understanding of the international system and a zero-sum approach to international politics.²¹ The highly centralized nature of this infrastructure allowed for these national ideas to dominate Soviet

¹⁶ Jeff Legro, “What China Will Want: The Future Intentions of a Rising Power,” *Perspectives on Politics* Vol. 5, No. 3, September 2007, 522.

¹⁷ Andrew Flitner, “The Road to Baghdad: Ideas and Intellectuals in Explanations of the Iraq War,” *Security Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2006, 310.

¹⁸ Legro, “What China Will Want: The Future Intentions of a Rising Power,” 516.

¹⁹ As Checkel defines them, policy entrepreneurs are “purveyors of new concepts and ideologies” seeking to influence policy outcomes in order to maximize their individual and group interests; Checkel, “Ideas, Institutions, and the Gorbachev Foreign Policy Revolution,” *World Politics*, Vol. 45 (2), 273

²⁰ Checkel, *Ideas and International Political Change*, 9.

²¹ Although Stalin’s death and Khrushchev’s “thaw” certainly signalled a reorientation of the CPSU’s operational philosophies, the party retained in large part their emphasis on class conflict and zero-sum interactions as the forces which structure the workings of the international system.

foreign policy making until their increasingly evident failure to achieve desired outcomes compelled the country's political leadership to seek new ideas and expertise in the mid-1980's.²² Taking the form of Gorbachev's "new thinking," these new national ideas remained en vogue among the Soviet political elite into the early 1990's even as centrifugal forces of anti-center irredentism and ethnic conflict, themselves a partially product of new thinking, conspired to destabilize and ultimately dissolve the union.

While these forces bred a degree of conservative backlash within the Soviet Union, the state's centralized structure allowed for the Gorbachevian buzzwords of "interdependence" and "mutual security" to persist into the early post fall period.²³ By contrast, structurally decentralized states, such as Russia post-collapse, are much more susceptible to the ideational uncertainty brought on by rapid structural changes or schemata altering political shocks, such as the sudden collapse of a multi-continental empire.

Decentralized states are also subject to greater competition between domestic and bureaucratic interest groups vying for ideational influence over the policy making process. The seemingly disorganized and often contradictory foreign policy of the early Russian Federation reflects this sort of ideationally driven bureaucratic competition. Particularly from early-1992 to mid-1993, individual heads of certain influential power ministries (mainly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defence) possessed considerable freedom to declare and pursue their opposing agendas with limited executive oversight. As the literature on the so-called "first image"²⁴ would suggest, the weakness and disorganization of Russia's early institutions and the fluid circumstances following the breakup of the USSR atop

²² Checkel, "Structure, Institutions, and Process: Russia's Changing Foreign Policy," 44.

²³ Ibid., 43.

²⁴ The three "images" of international relations refer to the three traditional levels of analysis, the individual, the state, and the international system, respectively. For full discussion of the three "images," see Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War; a Theoretical Analysis*, Topical Studies in International Relations, New York: Columbia University Press, 1959.

Yeltsin's general tendency towards poor leadership and indecision meant that circumstances were ripe for lower level individuals to play a leading role in influencing policy outcomes.²⁵

Such situations appear well suited for Graham Allison's bureaucratic politics model, a prominent organizational framework that links individuals' interests to the organizational positions they hold, often encapsulated by the phrase "where you stand depends on where you sit."²⁶ Put simply, bureaucrats will often prefer policies that materially benefit themselves or their organization, meaning a defense minister will likely advocate for an arms buildup as a means to increase his state's defence budget. While helpful for understanding the political implications of bureaucratic infighting, the model often overestimates the degree to which bureaucrats' interests actually reflect their positions. Foreign Minister Kozyrev, for example, even after the unseating of key nationalist policy adversaries after Yeltsin disbanded the parliament in fall 1993, later began espousing decidedly nationalist policy positions, suggesting a change in thinking divorced from bureaucratic interest.²⁷

In this sense, the approach I adopt here bears a great deal in common with learning theory, a model drawn from social psychology which examines how actors modify their preferences as they acquire more knowledge.²⁸ Learning theory also emphasizes actors' cognitive *perceptions* of material power and the translation of these perceptions into outcomes as well as how outside events generate perceptions of failure or success that can influence the legitimacy of political coalitions and the power of those perceived responsible for policy outcomes.²⁹ As Andrew Bennett asserts in his exhaustive application of learning

²⁵Daniel Byman and Kenneth Pollack, "Let Us Now Praise Great Men," *International Security* 25, no. 4 (2001): 140-143.

²⁶ Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), 176.

²⁷ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition*, 65.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

²⁹ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition*, 71. For similar application of the learning-coalitional model, see also Jack L. Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition / Jack Snyder*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991.

theory to Russo-Soviet interventionism, ruling coalitions often lose legitimacy and can be removed from power when their ideas become associated with failed policy outcomes.³⁰ This highlights the fact that while material resources can and often do determine the relative strength and influence of constituent bureaucracies, lessons learned by perceived failures and successes are in some cases even more crucial towards maintaining policy legitimacy.

Checkel furthers this claim, arguing that even if policy crisis does not cause coalitional change to occur immediately, such situations nonetheless serve to benefit select ideational camps by creating “policy windows” through which aspiring policy entrepreneurs forwarding a set of replacement ideas might jump.³¹ These windows often occur during periods of flux that allow ideas to play key role in determining the relative influence of domestic interest groups competing for policy leverage. As Jeff Legro argues, the opening of a policy window following the “delegitimation” of previously dominant ideas might not always lead to immediate policy change, as there must be sufficient consensus surrounding a potential replacement.³² In fact, if there exists a multitude of replacement ideas poised to unseat the status quo, continuity should prove more likely than change. If, however, there exists a singular set of replacement ideas and those ideas generate perceivably desirable results, then long term change becomes likely.³³

In the context of the late Soviet and Early Russian period, this process of policy crisis, delegitimation, policy window opening, and idea reconsideration occurred in three major stages: the first was Gorbachev’s pursuit of “new thinking” following the policy window opened by the evident failures of a zero-sum foreign policy in Afghanistan and the stagnation

³⁰Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition*, 79.

³¹ Jeffery T. Checkel, “Ideas, Institutions, and the Gorbachev Foreign Policy Revolution.” *World Politics*, vol. 45, no. 02, 1993, 273; cited in: Cashman, Greg, and Leonard C Robinson, *An Introduction to the Causes of War: Patterns of Interstate Conflict from World War I to Iraq*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007, 356.

³² Legro, “What China Will Want: The Future Intentions of a Rising Power,” 524.

³³ *Ibid.*, 523-524.

of the autarkic Soviet planned economy in the mid-1980's. In this case, the traditionalist ideas of the CPSU, delegitimated by the crises they caused, were traded in exchange for more liberal internationalist orientations towards foreign and economic policy. The second stage was the initial preservation of these liberal internationalist ideas following the collapse of the USSR and attempts by bureaucratic actors to demonstrate the value of these integrationist ideas by implementing them to achieve desirable results. The third stage was the eventual delegitimation of these liberal ideas by intervening structural, domestic, and institutional factors and events that signalled a collapse of the liberal platform, opening a policy window for revanchist policy entrepreneurs seeking a partial return to the zero-sum policy of the Cold War era. It is to this third stage of developments that the thrust of my argument and scope of this project is devoted. The following section will involve a closer examination of the third stage as well as the aforementioned factors and events involved in shaping the development of Russian foreign policy.

Chapter Two - The Foreign Policy Debate in the Early Russian Federation

In the early post-Soviet period, the struggle between Russian foreign policy elites to formulate a unitary approach to peacekeeping and intervention in the near abroad can be viewed in the context of their broader search for a reliable and comprehensive foreign policy strategy. Factors that affect and influence this debate largely concern the defense of Russia's so-called national interests which, though varied and circumstantial, traditionally include ensuring domestic stability and territorial integrity, retaining the largely inherited geopolitical position of the Soviet Union, and preventing the emergence of expansionist regional hegemony in Europe, South Asia, and the Far East that might encroach upon regions of traditional Russian influence.³⁴ In this context, the emergent ethnic conflicts throughout Russia's near abroad become the litmus test for Russia's ability to actively defend these interests in the face of perceived anti-Russian adversity.

Russia's responses to these interests are, however, by no means universal or prescribed. Particularly in the years 1992-1994, domestic resolve on questions of national security and, more specifically, policy towards the "near abroad," was determined at least partially by the orientation of the ruling coalition that became dominant within the country's political elite hierarchy. During this period of time, three main groups are seen as vying for power within the Russian Federation's political field: liberal internationalists (isolationists), centrist nationalists (pragmatists), and radical nationalists (neo-imperialists).³⁵ Though these

³⁴ Bruce Parrott, *State Building and Military Power in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* / Editor, Bruce Parrott, *The International Politics of Eurasia* ; v. 5. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1995, 84.

³⁵ These classifications and their parenthetical counterparts represent a conglomeration of a handful of different authors' typologies for distinguishing between factions and coalitions within the Russian parliament and foreign policy making apparatus. They are consolidated and slightly modified here for the sake of clarity. For alternative frameworks for examining these schools of thought, see: Malcom et. al., *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy*, Oxford, England ; New York: Published for the Royal Institute of International Affairs by Oxford University Press, 1996; Parrott, *State Building and Military Power in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, 84-85; Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition*, 305-309; Dov Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: the Cases of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan*, St. Martin's Press in Association with the Royal Institute of

groups lack definite homogeneity and contain members who proved prone to abrupt or unexpected reversals of position, this framework provides a useful benchmark for classifying the schools of thought characterizing the foreign policy debate in the early years of the Russian Federation. The individual prescriptions of each major grouping are compiled below.

Liberal Internationalists

Commonly classified as “liberal isolationists” or “liberal confederationists,” members of this group often viewed the weakness of Russia and the other post-Soviet states as a result of incompletely implemented democratic and free market reforms.³⁶ They thus prioritized further integration with the West by demonstrating a shared regard for international law, democratic norms, and neoliberal economic institutions based on both pragmatic aims to secure western financial aid and new normative understandings of international relations following the conclusion of the Cold War.³⁷ Likewise, members of this group saw Russia’s continued provision of centralized subsidies to the constellation of economically weak and increasingly conflict stricken states in the “near abroad” as not only an obstacle to this objective, but a tremendous economic burden that Russia could not afford to maintain.³⁸

Nevertheless, they more or less assumed that the countries of the near abroad would remain close to Russia and offered little by way of a security strategy in the region beyond insisting that the international community recognize Russia’s “special interests” in these areas.³⁹ Absent this recognition, the liberal internationalists still rejected outright the use of

International Affairs, Russia and Eurasia Programme, 2000, 42-45; Alexander Pikayev, *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, Edited by Lena Jonson and Clive Archer, Westview Press, 1996. 51-66.

³⁶ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition*, 306-307.

³⁷ Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 43.

³⁸ Pikayev, *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, 51; Estimations of subsidies paid to CIS member states in 1991 amounted to nearly \$17 billion. Accounting for purchasing power parity given the weakness of the ruble in comparison to the dollar at the time, these transfers comprised approximately 10 percent of Russia’s gross domestic product (GDP).

³⁹ Donaldson and Noguee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia*, 190. This assertion was not made by Kozyrev but rather by his first deputy foreign minister, Fedor Shelov-Kovediaev in a report entitled “Strategy and Tactics of Russian Foreign Policy in the New Abroad.” In the early days of 1992, Shelov-Kovediaev was the individual to whom chief responsibility for contact with the near abroad within the Foreign Ministry was initially entrusted.

force as a viable instrument of policy in the near abroad on the grounds that it would compromise Russia's integration into the club of G-7 powers, on which Russia remained deeply dependent financially well into the late 1990's.⁴⁰ The liberal internationalist view was thus that diplomatic conflict resolution could constitute a positive-sum interaction wherein cooperation with international institutions might generate outcomes that could prove mutually beneficial to both Russia and the West.⁴¹ Prominent liberal internationalists included Deputy Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar, Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, and President Boris Yeltsin, the latter two of whom shifted steadily to more centrist nationalist views by 1994.

Centrist Nationalists

The centrist nationalists - or "pragmatists," as they are sometimes called - subscribed to views on Russian Foreign policy broadly compatible with Western notions of "defensive realism," viewing stability in the "near abroad" as crucial to Russia's internal security and revitalization.⁴² Rejecting the overly optimistic views of the liberal internationalists as "romantic wishful thinking," the pragmatists argued that excessive focus on normative goals over national interests would risk sacrificing the latter to potentially disastrous effect.⁴³ They therefore proposed a strategy of limited engagement in the near abroad, concerned for both the defence of Russians and Russian speakers as a practical matter of limiting migration from the FSU and for maintaining Russia's key economic and security interests there.⁴⁴ To this end, they sought limited yet pragmatic cooperation with Western powers and institutions in order to gain international recognition as a "peacekeeper" in the near abroad and also limit blowback from the West and potential anti-Russian balancing in the near abroad. They

⁴⁰ Lynch, "The Realism of Russia's Foreign Policy," 7.

⁴¹ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition*, 307.

⁴² Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 44.

⁴³ 'Die außenpolitische Debatte in Rußland: Rußland un der Unstrukturierte postsowjetische Raum', in *International Politik und Gesellschaft*, no.4, 1995, 263; cited in Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers, A Study of Ethno-political Conflict in the Caucasus*, UK:Curzon Press, 2001, 336.

⁴⁴ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition*, 307.

ultimately believed, that Russia's retention of Great Power status relied on its ability to preserve uncontested preeminence in the former Soviet space and thus were hesitant to allow international institutions a broad mandate to determine the terms of conflict resolution at the expense of Russian geostrategic interests.⁴⁵ Key members included State Counsellor Sergei Stankevich, Presidential Council member Andranik Migranyan, as well as various members of the Supreme Soviet.

Radical Nationalists

Members of this diverse group of communists and hardline neo-imperialists widely lamented the Soviet collapse and were openly skeptical of, if not hostile towards, Western aid programs, which they viewed as a conspiracy aimed at weakening the Russian economy.⁴⁶ They urged the defence of ethnic Russians and wished to aggressively assert Russia's preeminence in the FSU, demonstrating a ready willingness to use force to prevent a domino effect of anti-Russian regimes spreading throughout the near abroad.⁴⁷ They in turn strongly opposed joint peacekeeping operations with non-CIS powers or international organizations, fueled by concerns that Western powers might use their considerable influence within these organizations to secure their victory in the Cold War by establishing a Western sphere of influence in the FSU that would pose a direct threat to Russian security interests.⁴⁸ Notable members included Vice President Alexander Rutskoi, Defence Minister Pavel Grachev, as well as the coalition between communists and extreme nationalists in parliament, often referred to as the Red-Brown coalition, which dominated the opposition against Yeltsin throughout much of 1992 and 1993.

⁴⁵ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition*, 307.

⁴⁶ Donaldson and Noguee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia*, 127.

⁴⁷ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition*, 308.

⁴⁸ Pikayev, *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, 64.

Domestic and Institutional Sources of Russian Foreign Policy Making

Though varied, the primary sources of foreign policy making during these years remained largely contingent on the actions of an array of decentralized and competing ministries with limited horizontal coordination. As such, the President retained, for the most part, a large deal of central authority, much of which was bolstered in the realm of foreign policy making through Yeltsin's creation of the Security Council and dismemberment of the Supreme Soviet in the spring and fall of 1993. Nevertheless, the official position of the Kremlin during this period is often difficult to ascertain if not downright contradictory. President Yeltsin exhibited varying adherence to each of the various schools of thought, a circumstance owing at least partially to aspects of his personality. Often relying on contradictory information from competing sources, Yeltsin often gathered information in a characteristically informal fashion and displayed a strong propensity for emotionally charged and impulsive decision making.⁴⁹ This personal inconsistency coupled with the institutional decentralization of the early Russian state intensely politicized the foreign policy making process and fostered a great deal of competition among opposing bureaucratic institutions and foreign policy elites for influence over the president and his inner circle, particularly in the first few years after he assumed office.

Yeltsin was thus at first a very strong proponent of the liberal internationalist agenda forwarded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the primary instrument of Russian foreign policy making in the early months of 1992. Largely a hold over from the Soviet-era Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Russian MFA possessed a less formalized operational philosophy and was less ideologically insulated than other more conservative Russian decision making bodies, leaving it more receptive to new ideas, particularly the brand of

⁴⁹ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition*, 302.

liberal internationalism heralded by Foreign Minister Kozyrev.⁵⁰ Kozyrev helped bolster the flow of liberal ideas into the Foreign Ministry by creating a deputy staff drawn more from academia than the staffs of the Soviet period and by actively seeking advice and expertise from German and American research universities.⁵¹ Though this helped stimulate the flow of ideas and expertise designed to smooth Russia's integration into the capitalist world community, the MFA conspicuously lacked information on the near abroad. Though the ministry had an array of area specialists on, say, Japan or India, they all but lacked experts on Kazakhstan or Armenia, for example, for the sole reason that, until December 1991, these places were not foreign countries.⁵² This partially explains the MFA's initial mismanagement and benign neglect of relations with the near abroad that partially led to the liberals' eventual delegitimation.

As the MFA waned in influence and prominence towards late 1992 and early 1993, the initially weakened Ministry of Defense (MoD) and its concomitant intelligence agencies increasingly consolidated power from the immediate post-Soviet period into 1994.⁵³ This rise to prominence was strengthened by Yeltsin's strategic alliance with the key members of the Russian military. In contrast to the Foreign Ministry, the military and Defence Ministry remained insulated from the liberalizing effects of "new thinking" and possessed organizational ideologies largely indistinguishable from those held by their predecessors.⁵⁴ Thus, the general policy preference among the military preference within the military at the time was firmly in favor of the nationalists.⁵⁵ Furthermore, as Yeltsin's popularity waned in

⁵⁰ Checkel, "Structure, Institutions, and Process: Russia's Changing Foreign Policy," 51-52.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵² Thomas De Waal, *Black Garden : Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War / Thomas De Waal*, 10th-year Anniversary Edition, Revised and Updated.. ed. 2013, 244.

⁵³ Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 49.

⁵⁴ Checkel, Jeffrey T. *Ideas and International Political Change*, 112.

⁵⁵ Donaldson and Noguee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia*, 157. A January 1992 survey of the military's officer core demonstrated 71% in favor of the restoration of the Union 1993.

response to the emergent failures of the liberal internationalist position in late 1992, he began granting the MoD a more or less unilateral hand in directing military reform, determining military doctrine, and dictating security policy towards the near abroad.⁵⁶ This alliance would ultimately bear fruit for Yeltsin following the constitutional crisis of October 1993, when his military-backed attack on parliament allowed him to neutralize key members of his opposition in parliament and dissolve the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation.⁵⁷

Alongside the military's rise was the reorganization of several former branches of the KGB into a new array of intelligence organizations. In a manner much akin to his alliance with the military, Yeltsin sought to co-opt the support of these intelligence organizations in order to bolster his domestic political control and aid in his struggle against political opponents.⁵⁸ Primary among these was the Foreign Intelligence Service (FIS) which, under the fiery leadership of Yevgeni Primakov, became a crucial rival to the MFA as a driver of policy and a source of intelligence on the near abroad.⁵⁹ Another important body was the Federal Counterintelligence Service (FSK), which was reported to have acted as the primary director of Russian covert operations in the near abroad, specifically in supplying arms to combatants in Abkhazia as well as in Chechnya.⁶⁰ Among others, the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) reportedly supported two separate coup attempts in Azerbaijan while the Federal Border Guards Service (FPS) had, by 1994, troops deployed in Moldova, Tajikistan, and Abkhazia.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 10.

⁵⁷ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition*, 303.

⁵⁸ Donaldson and Noguee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia*, 157.

⁵⁹ Lynch, "The Realism of Russia's Foreign Policy," 4; Primakov would in fact eventually succeed Kozyrev as Foreign Minister in 1996, signalling what many viewed as a shift from a Western-oriented to a more Eurasia-oriented foreign policy.

⁶⁰ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition*, 303-4

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 304.

Although ultimately dissolved by Yeltsin in October 1993, the Supreme Soviet, under the influence of speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov and the anti-Yeltsin Red-Brown coalition, exercised a considerable deal of influence over foreign affairs under the pre-1993 constitution.⁶² The parliamentary Committees on Security and Defence and on International Affairs and Foreign Economic Relations, though generally more moderate than the general membership, were nonetheless sharply critical of the liberal international ambitions of the President and MFA which they saw as betraying Russia's national interests.⁶³ While somewhat limited in their executive decision making capacity, the nationalists in the Supreme Soviet proved successful in stoking popular opposition to Yeltsin and in a number of cases used their legislative power to overtly obstruct attempts by Yeltsin to resolve issues, such as the withdrawal of troops from conflict zones, through strictly executive means. Their assertiveness demonstrated further the degree of political decentralization that the new Russian Federation was prone to in the early years of its existence that contributed to the confusion in policy articulation.

Another key source of influence, though their direct bearing on policy making is admittedly limited, is the Russian public. Particularly regarding relations with the near abroad, many ethnic Russians were disillusioned with the geopolitical realities left by the breakup of the USSR and remained so for a number of reasons. First, and perhaps most importantly, following the union's collapse, some twenty-five million people of self-proclaimed Russian descent found themselves living outside their country's borders.⁶⁴ Moreover, many Russians simply refuse to regard these newly internationalized borders as legitimate, given the common tendency for Soviet citizens and industrial planners to view the

⁶² Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 40.

⁶³ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition*, 304.

⁶⁴ Malcom et. al., *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy*, 6.

Soviet Union's borders as internal and largely arbitrary. For this reason, many Russians tended to view Moscow's relations with the near abroad as issues of domestic rather than foreign policy.⁶⁵ These factors, alongside the increasingly disastrous impact of Gaidar's economic "shock therapy" on public welfare, facilitated strong public support for nationalist positions, as evinced by the overwhelming victory of radical nationalists such as Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) in the December 1993 parliamentary elections.

Ultimately, the debate over policy towards the near abroad fundamentally regards contentious questions of identity, national sovereignty, and the nature of the new Russian Federation's relationship with the former Russian Empire and Soviet republics. Though the relevant schools of thought diverged greatly in their broader policy prescriptions they remained united in their conviction that Russia is an erstwhile great power with a responsibility to contain the spread of conflict throughout Russia's strategic border region. As the following historical narratives will attest, a constructivist analysis of Russian intervention from 1992-1994 demonstrates that while the incidence of Russian intervention often occurred spontaneously, the onset of structural, domestic, and institutional pressures helped ideologically driven policy entrepreneurs build a national consensus framing intervention as an instrument of coercive diplomacy and empowering pragmatic nationalist views on Russia's role as an active peacekeeper in the near abroad.

⁶⁵ Donaldson and Noguee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia*, 176.

Chapter Three - Soviet Nationalities Policy

Before turning to the conflicts themselves, it is first crucial to understand how the politics of ethnicity in the Soviet Union were formalized and institutionalized and how the breakdown of these arrangements in the late 1980's created ideal conditions for the nationalist irredentism and civil conflict that ultimately warranted outside intervention. A system that originally began as a response to the so called "Nationalities Question," Soviet nationalities policy has its roots in pre-revolutionary Russia. Until its collapse in 1917, the Russian Empire was essentially a massive and contiguous land empire which traditionally relied on brute force to maintain order on its multi-ethnic southern and eastern peripheries. The leaders of the Bolshevik movement thus understood well that popular fervor for the principle of "national self-determination" rendered nationalism a powerful weapon against the increasingly frail imperial center.⁶⁶ Although Marxism generally rejects the fundamental assumptions of nationalism by holding that economic class, rather than the nation, constitutes the primary cleavage between human societies, the Bolsheviks were extremely successful in harnessing the inertia of the preexisting nationalist movements throughout Russia's periphery to weaken the power of the Tsar and Provisional Government and generate support for socialism.

Following the success of the revolution, however, the impending disintegration of the Russian Empire necessitated a new, more formalized answer to the nationalities question that could satiate popular demands for self-determination while also maintaining the cohesiveness of the state. Soviet decision makers thus decided upon a federative system according to the "national-territorial principle," providing each major nationality with a territorial homeland,

⁶⁶ Victor Zaslavsky, "Success and Collapse: Traditional Soviet Nationality Policy," in Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras, eds., *Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, 30.

whether in one of the fifteen union republics, twenty autonomous republics, eight autonomous oblasts, or eight autonomous *okrugs*.⁶⁷ Thus, when the first All-Union-Treaty was ratified in 1922, the organizational structure of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics constituted a voluntary federative union of semi-autonomous ethno-states. At least initially, these nationality units were granted considerable freedom under Lenin's policy of "indigenization" (*korenizatsiya*), retaining the right to practice their traditional religions, speak their indigenous languages, and enjoy a considerable degree of local autonomy. The implicit assumption remained, however, that national attachments and loyalties would eventually dissipate in favor of a supranational Soviet identity, facilitated by the eventual construction of a fully integrated political and economic community.⁶⁸

Such cohesiveness being unforthcoming in the Soviet Union's early years, Stalin's rise to power signalled a much more forceful push towards centralization and Sovietization which would radically alter the future course and tenor of Soviet nationalities policy. Various republics and autonomous regions were either administratively demoted or underwent arbitrary territorial alterations and a vast array of minority ethnic groups suffered systematic persecution and forcible resettlement through the period during and after World War II.⁶⁹ In place of Lenin's platform of "indigenization" came a forcible Russification campaign aimed at culturally and linguistically uniting the disparate populations of the USSR while also discouraging irredentist sentiment at the national unit level. In principle, these policies aimed to institute a *divide et impera* approach to mitigating ethnic unrest and mobilizing the whole of the Soviet populace towards industrialization, modernization, and the building of socialism. In practice, however, they served to stoke and suppress deep inter-ethnic

⁶⁷ Philip G Roeder, "Soviet Federalism and Ethnic Mobilization," *World Politics*, 43, 2 (Jan. 1991): 203-204. Italics theirs.

⁶⁸ Gail W. Lapidus, "Gorbachev's Nationalities Problem," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 64, No. 4 (Fall 1989), 432-433.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 433.

grievances, fuel resentment for central authority, and ultimately set the stage for future ethnic conflict. The latter of these was accomplished in large part by institutionalization of nationality as an inescapable aspect of identity for Soviet citizens.

Beginning with the introduction of the Soviet passport system in 1932, the bureaucratic registration of ethnicity became the centerpiece of Soviet ethnopolitics and would grow to define citizen-state relationships in the decades following. Citizens were initially given the option to nationally self identify but were soon denied that right, leaving the determination of one's official nationality to the entries of their parents, rendering ascriptive and immutable a phenomenon widely regarded as a product of conscious self-identification.⁷⁰ The Soviet leadership justified this decision on the basis of guaranteeing special rights to ethnic minorities residing in their ethnic homelands through a system of institutionalized affirmative action policies. This system was designed to provide preferential treatment to these "titular nationalities" by granting them elevated access to opportunities in higher education and professional employment within their homelands.⁷¹

It also functioned as a form of ensuring centralized control over otherwise potentially restive territorially based nationalities. Since roughly the 1950's, each ethnic homeland was ruled by indigenous ethnic cadre drawn from the ranks of that region's titular nationality that was granted a monopoly over the republic's mobilizational resources.⁷² An institutionalized incentive structure then served to deter indigenous cadres from pursuing potentially destabilizing primordial ethnic agendas, while the ethnically distinct institutional stratification system functionally excluded external ethnic entrepreneurs.⁷³ All of these factors

⁷⁰ Zaslavsky, "Success and Collapse: Traditional Soviet Nationality Policy," 34.

⁷¹ Roeder, "Soviet Federalism and Ethnic Mobilization," 207.

⁷² Ibid., 203. Mobilizational resources in this case refer to the instruments of political control: i.e., management of public spaces, influence over local media and news outlets, authority over local legislative bodies.

⁷³ Ibid., "Soviet Federalism and Ethnic Mobilization," 203.

served to foster the construction of an educated national elite within each republic that was inherently and inextricably bound to the Soviet center, an arrangement which, under conditions of steady economic development, ensured considerable stability.

Though Stalin's death in 1953 and the resulting, albeit brief, period of reformism under Khrushchev saw Moscow grant limited reparations to formerly persecuted minorities, the fundamental design of the Soviet ethno-political infrastructure remained intact through the Brezhnev era. It was not until the deepening of the Soviet Union's economic crises in the 1980's and subsequent introduction of social and economic reforms under Mikhail Gorbachev that the system's safeguards began to unravel. While Gorbachev himself admitted to the influence of *perestroika* in "explod[ing] the illusory peace and harmony which reigned during the years of stagnation," it was *glasnost* that truly brought the nationalities problem to the forefront of politics in the Soviet Union.⁷⁴

Roughly translatable to "openness" or "transparency," *glasnost* was a political slogan referring to an array of policy programs broadly associated with the loosening of censorship restrictions, allowing the Soviet public, media, and intelligentsia to discuss and investigate issues previously considered taboo.⁷⁵ Though Gorbachev justified this new openness as a means to create a less restricted civil society and more invigorated national dialogue, the leadership's virulent condemnation and reexamination of the horrors of Stalinism allowed previously submerged ethnic grievances to reemerge, particularly among the educated ethnic elites of the Union Republics.

These seeds of instability were given a chance to grow with the introduction of "democratization," the program of political liberalization that quickly became the centerpiece

⁷⁴ From Gorbachev's 29 November 1988 address to Supreme Soviet; cited in Richard Sakwa, *Gorbachev and his Reforms: 1985-1990*, New York: Prentice Hall, 1990, 257.

⁷⁵ Lapidus, "Gorbachev's Nationalities Problem," 434.

of the *glasnost* reform platform in 1988. As preexisting restrictions against mass public demonstrations and unofficially operated organizations were lifted and the center began encouraging a freer and more independent press, a vast array of popular movements were initiated, many of which revolved around issues of ethnic identity and shared grievances.⁷⁶ Particularly in the union republics, these movements functioned as quasi political parties and local authorities often began developing close ties with the so called “Popular Fronts” that appeared in republics such as Moldova, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and the Baltic States.

Ultimately, these political changes, alongside the exacerbation of economic issues that began to culminate in the late 1980’s disrupted the chain of authority between Moscow and its ethnic cadres in the union republics, allowing the latter to pursue popular programs without fear of reprisal from the center. Absent the repressiveness of traditional Soviet rule and its limited affordance of political rights, open channels of communication, and mobility within and between its ethnic provinces, the leaders of these newly formed popular movements, particularly those within ethnically heterogeneous Soviet SSRs, were finally given the opportunity to address preexisting grievances and petition for change. As the following case studies will attest, understanding the development of these movements proves crucial towards understanding the conflicts they bred and the responses those conflicts eventually garnered from Moscow.

⁷⁶ Lapidus, "Gorbachev's Nationalities Problem," 435.

Chapter Four - Moldova: Transnistria

The brief civil war that erupted in the Republic of Moldova constitutes the first active deployment of Russian troops in the near abroad in the post-Soviet period. It also retains significance as among the first foreign policy decisions made unilaterally by the newly created Russian military to which the civilian government was compelled to acquiesce. Despite the absence of the central Russian government from the decision making process, the outcome of the war was crucial both in securing key Russian interests and shaping domestic resolve on Russia's role in ethnic conflicts on its periphery and ultimately its approach to the near abroad writ large.

Historical Background

Situated on the banks of the Dniester river, the area currently known as the Republic of Moldova has a limited history of territorial sovereignty. In its original formation, the medieval principality of Moldavia stretched from the Carpathian mountains to the east bank of the Dniester, representing the bulk of Romania's current territory. The advance of the Ottoman empire in the sixteenth century subjected the majority Romanian speaking peasant population to centuries of Turkish occupation and established the Dniester as the natural border with Russia, which began a military occupation of the river's east bank in 1792.⁷⁷ The portion of Moldova located east of the Dniester river and west of the Prut, more recently referred to as Bessarabia, remained under Ottoman control until it was annexed by Russia in 1812.⁷⁸ Forced internal migration radically changed the population of Bessarabia to reflect a

⁷⁷ Stuart J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds : The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* / Stuart J. Kaufman, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. Ithaca [NY]: Cornell University Press, 2001, 131. The conquest of Transnistria is today commemorated by a statue of the Russian Count Aleksandr Suvorov in the modern day Transnistrian capital of Tiraspol, a physical reminder of the longstanding Russian influence in the east bank region.

⁷⁸ Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds*, 131.

newly diverse ethnic makeup consisting of Jews, Ukrainians, and Russians in the cities and townships of the region, dwarfing demographically the ethnic Moldovans, who were concentrated heavily in the countryside.

Meanwhile, as the *Gubernia* of Bessarabia grew more Russified, the remainder of old Moldavia joined with Wallachia in 1859 to form the first Romanian state. Though the Romanian-speaking populations in Romania and Bessarabia developed their modern ethnic identities under distinctly different cultural conditions, the chaos of the Russian civil war provided Romania with the opportunity to lay claim on its Romanian speaking neighbor to the east. The 1918 territorial transferral declaring that Bessarabia belonged “historically and territorially to Romania,” recognized by the Western powers at the Paris Peace conference in 1920, began the two-decade long period of Romanian rule over Bessarabia.⁷⁹ The strip of land along the western bank of the Dniester has by contrast, no history of territorial union with Romania, aside from a brief wartime occupation from 1941-1944. In what ultimately constituted a response to Bessarabia’s merger with Romania, Stalin reorganized the east bank region into the “Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic,” which functioned from 1924-1940 as an administrative subunit of the Ukrainian SSR before being incorporated into the newly created Moldavian SSR, created during the Soviet occupation of Bessarabia following the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with Nazi Germany.⁸⁰

Moldova and Transnistria under the Soviet Union

Though forestalled temporarily by Nazi invasion in 1941 and subsequent Romanian occupation, the reincorporation of Bessarabia into the MSSR allowed for the full Sovietization of the Dniester-Prut region. Transnistria, however, already having undergone

⁷⁹ Stuart J. Kaufman, "Spiraling to Ethnic War: Elites, Masses, and Moscow in Moldova's Civil War," *International Security* 21, no. 2 (1996): 120.

⁸⁰ Kaufman, "Spiraling to Ethnic War: Elites, Masses, and Moscow in Moldova's Civil War," 120.

the transformative effects of collectivization and Stalin's five-year-plans during the 1920's and 1930's, maintained privileged status within the post-war MSSR, far exceeding the west bank region in its industrial productivity and close party-based affiliations with Moscow. Although it only accounted for twelve percent of the Republic's territory, Transnistria became a crucial base for the Soviet defense and heavy industry sectors, employing nearly 80 percent of its population in the industrial, construction, and service sectors in the years following the second world war.⁸¹ Communist party members hailing from the MASSR also retained dominance in Moldova's post-war power apparatus practically throughout the Soviet period, fueling tensions between the "Moscow communists," often times ethnic Russians and Ukrainians, and the "home communists," leaders from the Bessarabian communist underground deemed politically suspect by Moscow.⁸² Thus, by the 1960's, two thirds of Moldova's Communist party members were either Russian or Ukrainian.⁸³

As an important industrial powerhouse ruled by an increasingly urbanized and centre-loyal party elite, Transnistria was home to a far more demographically diverse population than the remainder of Moldova. According to the 1989 census, Moldovans represented 39.9 percent of Transnistria's 546,000 inhabitants, Ukrainians following with 28.3 percent and Russians, 25.5 percent.⁸⁴ These figures appear to suggest the demographic dominance of ethnic Moldovans, although they worked mainly in agriculture and comprised only a small fraction of Transnistria's urban population which itself was considerably more Russophone. Russians remained a minority in Transnistria's industrial cities, whereas Russian speakers comprised nearly 75 percent of the urban population, in comparison with

⁸¹ Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2000, 183.

⁸² King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, 183.

⁸³ Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds*, 135.

⁸⁴ Theodor Tudoroiu, "The European Union, Russia, and the Future of the Transnistrian Frozen Conflict," *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Feb 2012): 130.

the 35 percent of Moldova's population they represented as a whole.⁸⁵ This Russophone population was thus deeply and quintessentially Soviet and maintained practically inseverable ties with the Soviet center, the Communist Party, and, above all, the military, whose heavy presence in Transnistria via the Soviet Fourteenth Army was central to the economic and social life of the region.⁸⁶

The remainder of Moldova, however, though reaping partially the benefits of Transnistria's industrial productivity, remained largely rural and underdeveloped. Disproportionately consolidated in the poorer agricultural sector, ethnic Moldovans were vastly underrepresented in administrative and industry related professions. In fact, by 1977, non-Moldovans constituted roughly 54 percent of the industrial workforce, 57 percent of state leadership positions, and 68 percent of those employed in the sciences.⁸⁷ The stagnation of the Soviet economy during the 1980's exacerbated Moldova's already dire economic situation, particularly following Gorbachev's anti-alcohol campaign, a central planning error which proved disastrous for Moldova's agricultural industry given its heavy reliance on the production of wine as a staple export.⁸⁸ Thus, by the late 1980's, ethnic Moldovans were progressively forced into competition with non-Moldovans for an increasingly limited pool of state issued jobs and benefits.

Political Mobilization Under Glasnost

In light of these worsening economic circumstances, alongside grim realities of ethnic favoritism ingrained in the social fabric of the republic, *glasnost's* "opening" of the political arena to non-centrally-sanctioned organizations was a driving force behind the

⁸⁵ Jeff Chinn, *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, Edited by Lena Jonson and Clive Archer, Westview Press, 1996, 105.

⁸⁶ King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, 184.

⁸⁷ Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds*, 136.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 136.

conflict spiral that unfurled between Chisinau and Tiraspol. The emergence of a strong nationalist popular front successfully framed the republic's socio-economic ills in explicitly ethnic terms, garnering considerable support in the process. Despite its beginnings in early 1988 as the Communist Party affiliated and initially pro-Gorbachev Democratic Movement in Support of Perestroika, the organization known as the Moldovan Popular Front by mid-1989 proved successful in mobilizing multiple hundred thousand person crowds, gathered with the intention of forwarding an ethnic Moldovan agenda.⁸⁹ Among the primary demands of the MPF was the institutionalization of Moldovan as the state language.⁹⁰

This demand was politically charged as it stood to disenfranchise the whole of the Russophone population from their traditionally dominant position in Moldovan society. The implications were considerable; place names and public signage were to be changed, Moldovan would replace Russian as the language of government and industry, and, perhaps most importantly, all political leaders, managers, and service workers were given five years to obtain full bilingualism.⁹¹ While certain provisions for exemption were afforded to Russophone concentrated areas, the language law nonetheless inspired mass opposition as Russian speakers from cities throughout both Transnistria and Bessarabia mobilized in protest. It was the Transnistrian elites, however, whom these laws most acutely threatened.

The goal of the Transnistrian elites was primarily to create a security dilemma for both sides in order to preserve and increase their own power. In Transnistria, these elites were largely composed of the *raion* executive committees and the coordinating committees of industrial concerns who coalesced around the leader of the opposition movement, Igor

⁸⁹ Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds*, 139.

⁹⁰Ibid., 135. The history of the Moldovan language is contested. Although grammatically and lexically a dialect of Romanian, the Moldovan that was standardized after WWII was strongly positioned by the Soviet leadership as a separate language, noticeably distinct from Romanian in its use of the Cyrillic alphabet and inclusion of various Russian loanwords. These claims, however, are denied by pro-Romanian Moldovan intellectuals that consider them part of a greater Soviet campaign to isolate Moldovans from their ethnic brethren.

⁹¹ Ibid., 146.

Smirnov.⁹² A recent emigre to Moldova from Ukraine, Smirnov used his position as an industrial manager to ride the tide of anti-Moldovan sentiment in his city of Tiraspol and in August 1989 was elected to the chair of the United Council of Work Collectives (OSTK in the Russian acronym), the body in charge of organizing workers' strikes.⁹³ The OSTK was extremely influential in mobilizing on-the-ground support for the Russophone agenda, organizing the January 1990 referendum on Transnistrian autonomy in which nearly 96 percent of respondents voted in favor of greater Transnistrian autonomy and, if necessary, the establishment of an entirely independent Transnistrian Republic.⁹⁴ This was but the first among a series of increasingly provocative actions taken by the east bank leadership in response to increasing chauvinism in the west.

Escalation of Hostilities and the Outbreak of Violence

Tensions between Chisinau and Tiraspol were solidified following the 25 February 1990 parliamentary elections, as a result of which various nationalist representatives from the Popular Front gained a majority in Parliament.⁹⁵ This victory occurred amidst increasingly frequent calls in Chisinau for closer ties between Moldova and Romania and open consideration of a full territorial merger. Though such plans were widely opposed by pro-Moldovan-independence factions, including President Mircea Snegur, the pro-Romanian factions in parliament succeeded in exacerbating fears amongst the Russophone population of Transnistria of being forcibly reincorporated into Romania.⁹⁶ Such fears fueled the 2 September 1990 decision by a local council of Transnistrian authorities to declare a separate

⁹² King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, 187-188.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁹⁵ Irina F. Selivanova, *US and Russian Policymaking with Respect to the Use of Force*, Edited by Jeremy R. Azrael, Rand, 1996, 59.

⁹⁶ Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds*, 142.

Pridnestrovian Moldovan Republic, thus formally rejecting Moldovan legal authority east of the Dniester.⁹⁷

Though reneged by Chisinau, this decision ultimately proved decisive in precipitating the first round of armed confrontations that would ensue between Transnistrian and Moldova-backed groups. The first of these broke out on 2 November 1990 in the west bank city of Dubossary, where Moldovan police attempting to liberate the town's district council, courthouse, and attorney's office which were being held by members of the predominantly Russophone population, opened fire on the crowds and killed three people.⁹⁸ These events occurred the same day as clashes between Moldovan volunteer detachments and Transnistrian forces in the west bank city of Bendery, situated directly across the Dniester from Tiraspol.⁹⁹ Almost immediately, Transnistrian elites began using their control over the local news media to invoke the "victims of Dubossary" and stoke anti-Moldovan sentiment amongst the Russophone population in the east bank, prompting mirrored responses from Chisinau and thus deepening the security dilemma.¹⁰⁰

Although the presence of Soviet Interior Ministry troops in Moldova was initially effective in preventing the outbreak of open hostilities, minor clashes between Moldovan and Transnistrian irregulars grew increasingly frequent over the course of 1990 and 1991. The failure of the August 1991 coup proved instrumental in disrupting this equilibrium. Given the Moldovan Communist party's opposition to the coup alongside their weakness, the August putsch prompted parliament to declare Moldova an independent republic days later on 27 August 1991, simultaneously seizing all Soviet and party assets on Moldovan territory.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, 189.

⁹⁸ Selivanova, *US and Russian Policymaking with Respect to the Use of Force*, 61. Other sources cite a higher death toll; for example, Kaufman's account lists 6 casualties.

⁹⁹ Kaufman, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, 144.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁰¹ King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, 191.

Chisinau also oversaw the abduction and extradition of Igor Smirnov from Kiev, using his support for the illegal coup attempt as justification. The Transnistrian leadership's response was to blockade the rail lines to Moldova while threatening to cut off Moldova's access to Transnistrian gas and electricity until Smirnov's release.¹⁰² Upon his eventual release, Smirnov hurriedly organized a referendum on Transnistrian independence from Moldova.

While the ultimate objective of "independence within the USSR" was impossible without the signing of a new all-Union treaty, key legislative actions had unfolded in Moscow which empowered the aims of secessionist groups throughout the union. In April 1991 Politburo member Anatolii Lukyanov, an avid and vocal supporter of the Transnistrian cause as a base from which to prevent Moldova's drift from Soviet influence, petitioned for the inclusion of a clause in the new Union treaty draft stating:

"that in the event that any republic refuses to sign the Union Treaty, and autonomous republics and regions, as well as territories with compactly settled national groups express themselves against such a refusal, they then have the right to enter the USSR as independent subjects of the federation, with an appropriate status ..."¹⁰³

Moreover, the pro-independence outcome of the referendum succeeded in confirming the popular mandate behind the Transnistrian authorities' Russophone agenda and validated their attempts to secure their region's autonomy by any means necessary against anticipated Moldovan incursions.¹⁰⁴ Riding the tide of the successful referendum and his subsequent election to the presidency of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR) in December

¹⁰² King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, 191

¹⁰³ Pavel Anokhin, "Istochnik voiny v Pridnestrov'e no iskat' v Moskve", *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, 5 April 1994, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ Kaufman, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, 150-151.

1991, Smirnov began his “creeping putsch” armed campaign to use the recently mobilized Dnester Guard forces to establish de facto control over the whole of Transnistria, targeting primarily cities and townships harboring pro-Moldovan police forces.¹⁰⁵ Dubossary proved the site of yet another escalation in hostilities when Moldovan police attempted to disarm Transnistrian regulars that entered the city on 18 December 1991, constituting the first of in series of major armed confrontations in and around the west bank cities of Dubossary and Bendery that escalated through the spring and summer of 1992.¹⁰⁶

Early Russian Involvement: Conflict Management or Conflict Promotion?

Particularly given its weakness in the immediate post-Soviet period, Moscow remained initially ambivalent regarding the strategy it aimed to implement in regards to Transnistria. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991 merely served to deepen divisions within Moscow over the Transnistrian issue as bloodshed between Chisinau and Tiraspol intensified into 1992. Seeking to avoid the escalation of such bloody ethnic conflict as was already underway in Nagorno-Karabakh while also hoping to retain Russian influence in the region and protect the status of the Transnistrian Russophones who remained loyal to Moscow, authorities in the newly formed Russian Federation were split on how best to broker a peace settlement that would grant concessions to Moldova but not threaten the Transnistrians. In light of other more pressing issues, namely the establishment of joint CIS directives and the managed implementation of economic “shock therapy,” Yeltsin maintained almost complete silence on the conflict until early spring.

Amidst official indecision in Moscow, the former Soviet Fourteenth Army, headquartered in Tiraspol, proved instrumental in driving Russian support for the breakaway republic from beneath, as their forces coordinated closely with Transnistrian efforts to

¹⁰⁵ Kaufman, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, 151.

¹⁰⁶ King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, 192.

mobilize and consolidate control over the east bank territories. Reported collaboration between the Fourteenth Army and Transnistria dates back to as early March 1991 but reached a critical point following the August Putsch and subsequent creation of a Transnistrian militia force the following September.¹⁰⁷ Alongside training and logistics support, the Fourteenth Army also reportedly oversaw the transfer of as many as 20,000 firearms to the Transnistrian forces.¹⁰⁸ Collaboration between the two factions was so close that the notoriously corruptible Commander of the Fourteenth Army Genadii Yakovlev was appointed Transnistrian Minister of Defence by Smirnov himself in December 1991.¹⁰⁹

Transnistrian forces were also abetted by incoming Cossack revivalists sponsored by pro-Cossack, Russian-based enterprises in Sochi and Rostov arriving with the intention of defending “Russia.”¹¹⁰ These Cossacks,¹¹¹ alongside the mass defections from the Fourteenth Army, were granted considerable moral support from voices within Russia, namely Russian Vice President Alexander Rutskoi and the Nationalist newspapers *Den’* and *Krasnaya Zvezda*, the later of which began actively signalling its recognition of the Transnistrian “republic,” despite its illegality, as early as 1990.¹¹² This demonstration of clear favoritism for the Transnistrian cause in Moscow, alongside Gorbachev’s prior weaponization of the

¹⁰⁷ King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, 191.

¹⁰⁸ Chinn, *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, 108.

¹⁰⁹ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition*, 313.

¹¹⁰ Kaufman, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, 151.

¹¹¹ The term “Cossack” in this case refers to members of the Slavic warrior clans historically subordinated to the Russian Tsars in pre-revolutionary times. These clans were traditionally granted tax-free land ownership and local administrative autonomy in exchange for providing the Imperial Army with a steady stream of “shock troops” tasked with leading the Russian Empire’s expansionary eastward charge. Although presumably phased out by the Soviet period, Cossackdom (*kazachestvo*) underwent a rapid revival in the years leading up to the collapse of the USSR and by June 1990 the Union of Cossacks (*Soyuz Kazakov*) constituted nearly two million members. Given the primarily ethnic Russian makeup of its membership, most Cossacks in the post-Soviet period have sought to redefine themselves as Russian nationalists tasked with the redefinition of Russia’s national interests and revitalization of the Russian state. Their participation in the conflict in Moldova on the side of the Transnistrians was the first among many high-profile efforts to reestablish the legitimacy of their order and mission. For more on the Russian Cossack revival, see: Barbera Skinner, “Identity Formation in the Russian Cossack Revival,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 46, no. 6, 1994, 1017-037.

¹¹² Kaufman, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, 154.

Transnistria issue to coerce President Snegur into signing the new Union treaty throughout 1990 and 1991, had poisoned relations between Moscow and Chisinau and rendered the securing of an equitable peace arrangement upon the flare in hostilities in early 1992 considerably difficult for Yeltsin.

Despite active and vocal support for the Transnistrian cause in Moscow, Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev led the liberal internationalist attempt to genuinely reestablish Russia's neutrality in a multilateral conflict mediation process. During a session of the OSCE in March 1992, Kozyrev proposed a settlement that would enlist the support of both Romania and Ukraine and provide Transnistria a legal path to independence in the event of Moldova's merger with Romania.¹¹³ On 1 April, Yeltsin sought to bolster this progress by announcing the transferral of the Fourteenth Army to formal Russian jurisdiction. Hoping to quell the rapid flow of defectors and weapons to the Transnistrian militia, Yeltsin also sought to reestablish the Fourteenth Army as a neutral military presence capable of contributing a functional role to the process as a peacekeeping force. Though in light of the fact that nearly all the Fourteenth Army's roughly 6,000 troops and the majority of its officers were permanent Transnistrian residents, their proposed use as a peacekeeping force was both politically unacceptable to Moldova and practically untenable given their intrinsically pro-Transnistrian bias.¹¹⁴

The precariousness of the liberal internationalist minimal intervention platform was further compromised by Vice President Rutskoi, whose mounting opposition to Yeltsin's and Kozyrev's attempts to retain Russia's neutrality in the conflict culminated in his unsanctioned April visit to Tiraspol. Mirroring positions forwarded by the anti-Yeltsin nationalist bloc in the Russian parliament, Rutskoi called for Moscow to recognize the sovereignty and

¹¹³ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition*, 313; *Izvestiya*, 25 March 1992.

¹¹⁴ Selivanova, *US and Russian Policymaking with Respect to the Use of Force*, 64.

independence of the PMR and established humanitarian justifications for Russian intervention which hinged on their responsibility to “defend Russians and other citizens,” referring to the Sovietized Russophones of the east bank.¹¹⁵ Rutskoi’s stance was typical of conservative nationalists in parliament and in the Russian armed forces, many of whom viewed the possibility of Romanian involvement in the conflict mediation process as a grave geopolitical misstep that would compromise Russia’s traditionally dominant position in the “near abroad.”¹¹⁶

In light of Yeltsin’s ambivalence on the course of action in March-April 1992, however, Moldova perceived Rutskoi’s line to represent the official policy of Russia on Transnistria. Thus, calls from Chisinau calling on Russia to cease its support for pro-PMR Cossack and Fourteenth Army military detachments grew increasingly frequent in May and June. Invoking the fact that international law rendered the deployment of the Fourteenth Army in Moldova an illegal occupation of sovereign territory by a foreign army, President Snegur demanded on 12 May that Yeltsin order the withdrawal of the Army from Moldova.¹¹⁷ Similar calls further intensified following orders from the Fourteenth Army leadership to “answer fire with fire” on 19 May in response to increasing attacks on Russian army units by Moldovan artillery units.¹¹⁸

Meanwhile, the nationalist-dominated Ministry of Defence firmly emphasized that retaliatory actions were taken only in response to attacks against Russian military installations or compounds, attempts to seize Russian weapons, or credible threats to army

¹¹⁵ Chinn, *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, 108-109.

¹¹⁶ Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 114; Furthermore, allegations had been forwarded by the Russian Defence Minister Alexander Grachev that Moldovan forces were being armed and coordinated actively by the Romanian military. While King’s account holds that certain Moldovans admitted that they received some military hardware from Moldova, it is likely that they received the majority of their arms from other Fourteenth Army stores located elsewhere in the Republic, see King, 192.

¹¹⁷ Brian G. Taylor, “*Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union: Russian and American Perspectives*,” edited by Alexei G. Arbatov and Abram Chayes, The MIT Press, 1997, 181.

¹¹⁸ *Izvestiya*, 20 May 1992.

personnel.¹¹⁹ The MoD also expressed the official view that the Fourteenth Army maintained its neutrality throughout the conflict and that any allegations holding that it had participated in aggressive actions against Moldova were entirely lacking in credibility.¹²⁰ The newly inaugurated Minister of Defence, Pavel Grachev, however, expressly rejected the inclusion of Romania in the peace negotiations, echoing Ruskoi's call for the protection of "the rights of Russian citizens and of persons who identify themselves with Russia ethnically and culturally."¹²¹

Russian Intervention and Subsequent "Peacekeeping" Efforts

Though Yeltsin's decision to nationalize the Fourteenth Army had done little to limit the flow of arms and personnel to the Transnistrian guard, he was simultaneously aware that any attempt by Russia to reassert direct control over the Army's stores might spark mutiny within its ranks and risk the wholesale defection of the Fourteenth Army to Transnistria. Nonetheless, Yeltsin formally ceded to pressure from Snegur and the liberal internationalists seeking to limit Russian entanglement in the conflict and to whom Yeltsin owed a large degree of his popular support in those early months, leading him to announce the withdrawal of the Fourteenth Army from Moldova in late May 1992.¹²² Unfortunately, this announcement was never officiated and merely served to intensify the struggle between both sides to gain access to the Army's vast weapons stores.

This decision also in part facilitated the rapid intensification of fighting that occurred in June over the west bank city of Bendery. Though recently incorporated into the PMR via local referendum, Bendery was home to a sizeable pro-Moldovan police force that had frequently struggled with the pro-Tiraspol militia that presumed control over the township.

¹¹⁹ Taylor, *Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union: Russian and American Perspectives*, 181.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹²¹ Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 115.

¹²² Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition*, 314.

Chisinau invoked a call from the city for the defense of this municipal police force from Transnistrian harassment as the pretext for their 19 June 1992 armed advance on Bendery aimed at the “restoration of the legal organs of power” in the city.¹²³ Following Chisinau’s initial armed advance, PMR forces, with considerable personnel and artillery support from the Fourteenth Army, quickly retaliated and overpowered the ill-equipped Moldovan military, allowing the Dnester Guards to successfully retake the city by 21 June.¹²⁴

The Ministry of Defence conceded that the PMR defence of Bendery constituted the first active assault against Moldovan forces in the course of the conflict involving Fourteenth Army personnel.¹²⁵ It is difficult, however, to determine the degree to which Moscow ordered this ultimate decision to intervene. Yeltsin had only days earlier expressed his commitment to using Russia’s influence to “stop the bloodshed” in Transnistria, but by summer 1992, communication between Moscow and the Fourteenth Army had largely broken down.¹²⁶ Furthermore, there is no accessible evidence of any advanced planning by either the Kremlin or MoD for the use of the Fourteenth Army in the conflict.¹²⁷ Therefore, many believe that the Fourteenth Army acted unilaterally in its support of Transnistrian forces, though there is debate surrounding who can be realistically held accountable for the Army’s actions.

Some have held that the Fourteenth Army’s commander, Lieutenant-General Iurii Netkachev, made the decision to intervene himself.¹²⁸ Such claims, however, ignore the fact that Netkachev was widely unpopular in the army’s ranks and proved largely ineffectual during his short term in command.¹²⁹ Appointed with the express purpose of limiting

¹²³ Selivanova, *US and Russian Policymaking with Respect to the Use of Force*, 66.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹²⁵ Taylor, “*Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union: Russian and American Perspectives*,” 181. The MoD, however, emphasized that any participation of the Fourteenth Army was undertaken by Russian soldiers acting as private individuals. See: Ozhiganov, 181.

¹²⁶ King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, 195.

¹²⁷ Selivanova, *US and Russian Policymaking with Respect to the Use of Force*, 67.

¹²⁸ King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, 195.

¹²⁹ Kaufman, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*, 158.

Fourteenth Army engagements with Moldovan forces and stemming the flow of arms to the PMR militia, Netkachev gradually lost the confidence of his troops by hamfistedly seeking to fulfil the CIS directive ordering the Fourteenth Army to turn over its arms to the Moldovan government, an untenable demand given that the demobilization process following the fall of the Soviet Union had left the Army increasingly concentrated in Transnistria.¹³⁰

In fact, most sources point out that, on the eve of the crisis in Bendery, Netkachev had been functionally replaced as commander of the Fourteenth Army by former Afghan war hero, Russian General Alexander Lebed.¹³¹ A Yeltsin supporter during the 1991 coup but a close associate of Grachev's by mid-1992, Lebed had been sent to Transnistria to assess the involvement of the Fourteenth Army and verify information regarding the theft and transferral of weapons. However, shortly following the outbreak of the crisis, Lebed assumed operational control of the Fourteenth Army and personally oversaw the defeat of Moldovan forces, as the majority of the scholarly literature will emphasize.

As circumstantial evidence points out, however, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that the Fourteenth's Army's counterattack was directly coordinated by the defence ministry. The Russian newspaper *Rossiiskie Vesti* in February 1994 wrote, "only now, summing up the facts have we come to understand: every step of the Army's commander [Lebed] was authorized by the hierarchy of Russia's Ministry of Defence," confirming the prior admissions of State Council member Sergei Stankevich to similar effect.¹³² The timing of the attack also raises suspicions regarding the degree to which entire engagement may have been staged by the military. Less than a day before the initial Moldovan advance, Yeltsin had given a forceful speech to US congress highlighting Russia's newborn friendship

¹³⁰ Taylor, "Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union: Russian and American Perspectives," 182.

¹³¹ Chinn, *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, 109.

¹³² Sergei Stankevich, *Rossiskaya Gazeta*, 23 June 1992; cited in Lynch, "The Realism of Russia's Foreign Policy," 19.

with the West and commitment to liberal norms and values, a moment which came to represent the high point of the liberal internationalist model.¹³³ Considering the course of events on the ground and Yeltsin's temporary absence from direct policy making given his being abroad, there remains a degree of likelihood that not only was the decision to intervene undertaken unilaterally by the MoD, or at least strategically executed by the Dnester Guards, that it was likely carried out with the express intention of deligitimating the government's diplomatic and reformist platform.

Intervention as Developing Domestic Consensus on the Use of Force

Regardless of the degree of their preordainment, the events in Bendery had a series of important implications for the course of later developments. Firstly, the Russian government and public perceived the Fourteenth Army's victory as a military and political success. Though the battle resulted in casualties approaching 500,¹³⁴ General Lebed's decisive leadership had demonstrated the vastly superior firepower of the Russia-backed PMR forces and had reestablished the "neutrality" of the Fourteenth Army by returning it to its barracks and preventing the further theft of its weaponry.¹³⁵ And while the loss of Bendery had weakened Chisinau's position to demand concessions from Tiraspol, Snegur saw Lebed as a legitimate mediating figure whose success in stemming the unrestricted flow of arms to Transnistrian forces considerably mitigated the security dilemma that had plagued the earlier stages of the conflict.¹³⁶

Perhaps most important were the implications that this victory had on the position of the liberal internationalists. A great deal of this has to do with the general absence of Western

¹³³ Jeffrey Checkel, "Structure, Institutions, and Process: Russia's Changing Foreign Policy," 54.

¹³⁴ The Russian newspaper, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* lists the total death toll as 484, including 72 MIA and over 1000 wounded. Though other sources differ, most list PMR casualties as outnumbering Moldovan losses roughly by a factor of three. See: Selinova, 66; *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* 29 June 1992; *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 29 June 1992.

¹³⁵ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition*, 314.

¹³⁶ Chinn, *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, 111.

response to the actions of the Fourteenth Army and the degree to which it discredited the basis upon which most liberal internationalists opposed the use of force, namely that to defy the Western code of “good conduct” would jeopardize Russia’s attempts to integrate economically with the wealthy G-7 states.¹³⁷ This also notified the Russian elite establishment of the degree of latitude they possessed in pursuing similar actions throughout the near abroad. As former foreign policy advisor to Yeltsin Andranik Migranyan notes, “the West feared that any strong response to Russia over the 14th Army's actions ... might overburden the ruling democrats, and therefore refrained from any serious demarches against Russia.”¹³⁸

Unfortunately, their inaction ultimately bore the opposite effect; despite their initial condemnation of Fourteenth Army actions, Yeltsin and Kozyrev were forced to fall in line with the events that unfolded on the ground and begin campaigning more forcefully for Russia’s responsibility in managing the conflict directly. In late June Yeltsin claimed that that Russia needed to demonstrate to Snegur that Russia has the “force” to “protect people and stop bloodshed” in Moldova, as Kozyrev responded to Moldova’s 8 July request for a CSCE peacekeeping operation by saying “this is, after all, our zone of responsibility, and it is we who should find the forces to play the disengagement role.”¹³⁹ Again, hesitance on the part of the CSCE to involve itself in the peacekeeping process strengthened the resolve of nationalists in Moscow and ultimately forced Chisinau to the bargaining table. After being forced to sue for a Moscow-dominated peace, Snegur eventually agreed to talks with Russia, setting the groundwork for the Yeltsin-Snegur agreement of 21 July 1992. Alongside a separate statute declaring Transnistria’s “special status” in Moldova, the agreement officiated the eventual deployment of a joint Russian-Moldovan-Dnestr peacekeeping force on 29 July.

¹³⁷ Lynch, "The Realism of Russia's Foreign Policy," 14.

¹³⁸ Andranik Migranyan, 'Rossiya i Blizhnee Zarubezh'e', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 18 January 1994, 8.

¹³⁹ “Russia” TV program, Moscow 10 July 1992, SU/1431, C1/3; cited in Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 117.

While liberals such as Kozyrev still opposed direct intervention, the events in Bendery and their international and domestic reception had consolidated consensus around Russia's right to use of force as a peacekeeper in the near abroad. With time, peacekeeping became used increasingly as a tool to achieve exclusive Russian interests in the near abroad. The record in Moldova helps to support this case. For example, Moldova's repeated requests for UN and CSCE participation in talks over the withdrawal of the Fourteenth Army were repeatedly forestalled by parliament until the reformation of the army's units into the Operational Group of Russian Forces in Moldova, currently deployed in the northern Transnistrian town of Cobasna.¹⁴⁰ Moscow also repeatedly levied the threat of disbanding the Fourteenth Army (with the implicit assumption being the *de facto* transferral of the force to Transnistrian control) and the imposition of a heavy tariff structure against Moldova as an initially non-CIS state in order to coerce Chisinau into reconsidering its anti-Moscow position. These combined pressures eventually bore fruit and by January 1993 public support in Chisinau for reunification with Romania had sharply deteriorated and in late October the Moldovan parliament voted to formally join the CIS economic union.¹⁴¹

As shall be evident in later case studies, the gradual development of Russia's approach to the conflict in Moldova highlights the increasing influence of the military as a leading actor in future interventions. The MFA's initial pursuit of diplomacy as a form of conflict resolution was ultimately replaced by a more assertive and coercive military strategy aimed at securing long term Russian military presence in Moldova, excluding Romania from the peace process, and ensuring Moldova's membership in the CIS. This chain of events also signals the beginning of the end for liberal influence over Russian foreign policy formulation. This development will be traced further in the following case study on the Georgia.

¹⁴⁰ Selivanova, "U.S. and Russian Policymaking With Respect to the Use of Force", 72.

¹⁴¹ Hill and Jewett, "Back in the USSR," 63-64.

Chapter V - Georgia: South Ossetia and Abkhazia

Introduction

A small and mountainous country nestled between the North and South Caucasus, Georgia emerged from the ashes of the Soviet Union eager to escape its colonial legacies yet remained stunted by its ethnic heterogeneity, economic underdevelopment, and contentious relationship with its paternalistic superpower neighbor, Russia. These weaknesses set the stage for the intense political instability, civil war, and partial territorial dismemberment that swiftly followed Georgia's attainment of independence in April 1991. This section will primarily concern itself with outlining the two distinct yet interrelated conflicts that broke out in the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia with particular emphasis on Russia's role in their respective outcomes and their role as further test cases for the efficacy and palatability of Russian "peacekeeping" interventions.

Though unique in their origins, both conflicts centrally involve the reactionary efforts of marginalized and localized ethnic groups historically native to the Georgian land seeking independence from the newly created Georgian state. Such efforts in both regions were met with militarized resistance from Georgia and resulted in a series of armed conflicts between 1991 and 1994 - none of which have succeeded in officially settling the territorial disputes. Furthermore, despite being internationally recognized as territorial provinces within Georgia, the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have largely retained their de facto independence since 1993 and 1992, respectively.

The case of Georgia remains pertinent to this study for a number of reasons. First, the flow of events in both conflicts, particularly South Ossetia, are noticeably synchronized with those in Moldova, reflecting the degree to which events that unfolded across the FSU and

their reception in Moscow were deeply interlocked at this time. The peacekeeping mission to South Ossetia also stands out as Russia's first successful peacekeeping attempt and provides a crucial template upon which other future Russian-led peacekeeping efforts would be based. Moreover, the war in Abkhazia, particularly given its timing, proves crucial for mapping the gradual shift in Russian foreign policy goals away from Kozyrev's internationalist agenda and towards a more coercive and nationalist approach. The deployment of a Russia-led CIS peacekeeping force in May 1994 represents the culmination of a gradually developing intervention strategy aimed at leveraging conflict resolution against the Georgian government in order to fulfill the key security interests of the Russian Federation, namely the establishment of exclusive Russian basing rights on Georgian territory, Georgia's entrance into the CIS, the stabilization of the North Caucasus, and the prevention of potentially destabilizing foreign incursions.

Antiquity into the Premodern Period

Though the backdrop to these conflicts rests fundamentally in the development of ethnic frictions and their eventual explosion following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the development of these ethnic frictions stems equally from Soviet policy as it does from conflictual ethnocultural histories that characterize Georgia's regional and demographic fissures. Historical records of Georgia as a discrete polity date back to the eleventh century, when the name *Sakartvelo*, the Georgian word meaning "the place of the Georgians," first appears. Georgian statehood, however, traces much further back into the pre-Christian period, beginning when Parnevazi, the first Georgian monarch, conquered Colchis, the ancient kingdom encompassing the majority of coastal western Georgia, including the current day municipal regions of Abkhazia, Guria, Imeretia, and Svaneti.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Shireen T. Hunter, *The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation Building and Conflict*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1994, 111.

The first pre-modern manifestation of Georgia as a unitary state followed in the eleventh century C.E. when an influential Abkhazian prince ruling over Colchis inherited the majority of the remaining Georgian lands to the east, creating the kingdom of Kartli.¹⁴³ This period is often referred to as the “Golden age” of medieval Georgia, a zenith of Georgian cultural and political achievement that flourished for over two centuries, only to be thwarted by Mongol invasions beginning in the thirteenth century.¹⁴⁴ Though the eventual retreat of the Mongols allowed Georgia to regain its independence, internal conflict beginning in the mid-fifteenth century rendered Georgia geographically divided across its east-west axis, leaving it subject to further fragmentation under foreign rule for much of its pre-modern history.¹⁴⁵ Indirect Safavid rule in Georgia’s eastern provinces and Ottoman control over the western coastal lands began shortly thereafter and continued until the expansion of Russia into the Caucasus towards the end of the sixteenth century.¹⁴⁶ Though Russian rule in the Caucasus was by no means quiescent, the revocation of Abkhazia’s autonomous status in 1864 sparked a series of violent protests in Abkhazia suppressed by Russia with extreme force, sending thousands of Abkhazians into exile in Turkey.¹⁴⁷

When Georgia finally regained independence in 1918 amidst the violence and anarchy of the Russian revolution, Abkhazians, through the pro-Georgian and Menshevik Abkhaz People’s Council, began to press for autonomous regional status within a de facto union with Georgia.¹⁴⁸ Political and diplomatic differences, however, soon soured relations between Georgia and the Abkhaz People’s Council and the two remained engaged in intermittent conflict until the Soviet invasion of Georgia in 1921.¹⁴⁹ Meanwhile, the South Ossetians

¹⁴³ Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds : The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, 88.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁴⁵ Hunter, *The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation Building and Conflict*, 111.

¹⁴⁶ Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds : The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, 88.

¹⁴⁷ Hunter, *The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation Building and Conflict*, 125.

¹⁴⁸ Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds : The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, 88.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.

conducted a series of Bolshevik-backed uprisings against Menshevik Georgian rule, leaving death tolls in the thousands and forcing nearly twenty thousand South Ossetians into North Ossetia to escape reprisal.¹⁵⁰

Georgia Under the Soviet Union

Upon the incorporation of Georgia into the Soviet Union, special territorial arrangements were created for the Ossetians and Abkhaz. Ossetians received a homeland within Georgia in the form of the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast. Although formally isolated from the North Ossetian Autonomous Oblast located in the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic (RSFSR), Ossetians from both regions enjoyed considerable mobility and were largely able to remain cross-border links.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, as a largely mountainous region, South Ossetia was suitable for neither industry nor mass agricultural endeavors and thus was not subject to the demographic restructuring that many other ethnic homelands experienced under Stalin.¹⁵² Therefore, the ethnic situation in South Ossetia throughout much of the Soviet period proved relatively stable.

The situation in Abkhazia proved far more complex. In contrast to South Ossetia, Abkhazia was initially granted status as an ethnic republic territorially and administratively separate from Georgia. Months later, however, Abkhazia signed away certain of its “sovereign” powers in a bilateral treaty with Georgia.¹⁵³ The treaty itself was largely symbolic at the time, particularly given that both republics were subordinate to Moscow as well as party to the short-lived Transcaucasian Republic which then encompassed Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. In 1931, however, Abkhazia was formally stripped of its Union

¹⁵⁰ Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds : The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, 88.

¹⁵¹ Ozhiganov, “*Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union*,” 347.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 347.

¹⁵³ Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds : The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, 88.

Republic status by Stalin, himself an ethnic Georgian, and was demoted to an Autonomous Republic within the Georgian SSR.¹⁵⁴

This betrayal, alongside Stalin's draconian Russification and collectivization policies, devastated Georgia's minority communities. The Abkhazian alphabet was "Georgianized," native language schools were closed throughout Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and Stalin's five-year-plans drew in large numbers of Russian and Mingrelian Georgian agricultural workers to work in Abkhazia, diluting the Abkhazian demographic presence.¹⁵⁵ Though Stalin's death signalled a mild reversal of the more repressive of these centralization policies, Georgian preeminence persisted and reinforced minority demands for increased political and cultural representation. The Abkhaz in particular were extremely vocal and staged over five separate sets of major public demonstrations over fifty years, the last of which explicitly demanded the transferral of Abkhazia to the Russian SSR.¹⁵⁶ Tbilisi responded in 1978 with a series of concessions aimed at rebuilding the infrastructure-poor region while also agreeing to permit a greater degree of Abkhazian cultural expression through the creation of Abkhazian language television broadcasts and the founding of an Abkhaz State University.¹⁵⁷ By 1989, however, the Abkhaz population of Abkhazia comprised only 17.8 percent of the population against 45.7 percent share of Georgians and a disproportionately large settlement of ethnic Russians.¹⁵⁸ Thus Abkhaz fears of gradual Georgianization and potential ethnic extinction persisted despite these largely symbolic concessions, allowing ethnic tensions to ferment well into the 1980's.

¹⁵⁴ Mark Webber, *The International Politics of Russia and the Successor States*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996, 233.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹⁵⁶ Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds : The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, 89.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁵⁸ Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 128.

Glasnost and the Georgian Nationalist Movement

These minority grievances were complicated by Georgians' own troubled self image and sense of ethnic insecurity. Having been subjected to foreign incursions from the north, south and west for centuries, Georgian desires for cultural self-preservation have frequently inhibited their ability to sympathize with the grievances of their minority cohabitants. Thus, with increased mobilizational freedoms afforded by Glasnost, Georgian nationalist demonstrations arose in the mid 1980's and, though initially preoccupied by environmental and subnational issues, eventually grew more radical and chauvinistic in their glorification of Georgian national pride and denunciation of continued Soviet rule, targeting specifically the growth and increased influence of minority groups.¹⁵⁹ Though the Georgian government responded to certain demands of the growing number of extremist nationalist groups, the intensely anti-Soviet tenor of the Georgian primordialists¹⁶⁰ soon eclipsed the movement and spawned considerable instability within the republic.

It was amidst this political atmosphere that the Abkhaz separatists began their secessionist campaign. Beginning with a formal letter sent to the Nineteenth All-Union Party Conference in June 1988 and the formation of an Abkhazian Popular Forum in November, the forum's representatives repeatedly called on Moscow to recognize Abkhazia as a full Union republic throughout the spring of 1989, eschewing the less provocative path of simply pursuing increased sovereignty.¹⁶¹ The April protests of that year proved to be a watershed moment for the Georgian nationalists, whose visceral and vocal opposition to Abkhaz independence soon morphed into explicitly anti-Soviet demonstrations which drew in a

¹⁵⁹ Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds : The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, 100.

¹⁶⁰ Within the context of nationalist studies, primordialist nationalism concerns the conceptualisation of the nation as a substantial, enduring grouping, emphasizing the "deep roots, ancient origins, and emotive power of national attachments;" for more, see: Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the national question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 15-16.

¹⁶¹ Hunter, *The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation Building and Conflict*, 126; Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds : The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, 102.

Soviet military response, leading to the massacre of 19 Georgian citizens.¹⁶² Far from stabilizing the situation, the massacre instead reaffirmed Georgian fears of Moscow's anti-Georgian agenda and intensified their opposition to the Abkhaz independence movement, which was increasingly seen as the primary internal threat to Georgia's pursuit of independence. Especially potent were fears that Moscow might weaponize the plight of the Abkhazians and South Ossetians in order to sabotage the Georgian secessionist movement, fears that soon proved to be rooted more in reality than in paranoia.

Gamsakhurdia and the Conflict in South Ossetia

As irredentist fervor grew in both republics, several major events occurred on the eve of and throughout 1990 which secured Georgia's path to independence. The first of these regards the Georgian parliament's move to annul the 1921-1922 agreement authorizing Soviet control over Georgia.¹⁶³ Though this did not mark Georgia's official departure from the Soviet Union, it constituted a major victory for Georgian opposition forces in that it secured their long term goal of electoral reform, authorized by the Georgian Supreme Soviet in August 1990, and set the terms for open parliamentary elections to be held the following October. The results of these elections signalled the departure of Georgia's communist leadership from power and marked an overwhelming victory for the Round Table for National Liberation, a hardline Georgian nationalist party whose leader, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, a known Soviet dissident and Georgian hyper-nationalist, was appointed speaker of parliament. Among the primary goals of the newly empowered government was to pursue a series of nationalistic legislative efforts centered around the institutionalization of

¹⁶² Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds : The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, 102

¹⁶³ Hunter, *The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation Building and Conflict*, 118.

the Georgian language and redefinition of citizenship along explicitly ethnic Georgian lines.

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Gamsakhurdia also moved swiftly to reassert control over the restive regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. He responded swiftly to the South Ossetian Popular Front's declaration of secession from the Georgian SSR on 10 November 1989 by reducing the SOAO to a common Georgian administrative unit and reverting the name back to the former feudal Georgian regionym of Samachablo.¹⁶⁵ Following parliament's ruling, skirmishes broke out in the region's capital of Tskhinvali after a group of roughly 30,000 Georgian nationalists - alongside several illegal armed formations - marched on the city in counterprotest to Ossetian picketers.¹⁶⁶ In the bloodshed that lasted intermittently from November 1989 to January 1990, six people died and over five hundred were wounded.¹⁶⁷ The Georgian government quickly moved to declare a state of emergency in the region and initiated a blockade on the shared border. South Ossetia's response was to appeal to Moscow for aid. Given Gorbachev's position of noninterference, based on fears that active involvement would hasten Georgia's drift from Moscow and inspire other national independence movements across the union, the South Ossetians were left to rely on little but aid from North Ossetia, providing the only source of food and fuel for the region following Tbilisi's blockade.

¹⁶⁴ Svante E. Cornell, and Michael Jonsson, eds, *Conflict, Crime, and the State in Postcommunist Eurasia*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014, 102.

¹⁶⁵ Per Gharion, *Georgia: Pawn in the New Great Game*. London; New York, NY: Pluto Press, 2010, 52.

Although the parliament announced that their decision to abolish the autonomy of the SOAO was based on the threat to their territorial integrity, this explanation is incomplete. Popular myths perpetuated by Georgian nationalists portrayed the Ossetians as outsiders and intruders without any legitimate claim to Georgian land and that the 1922 decision by the Soviet hierarchy to grant the Ossetians a homeland in Georgia was a Soviet plot to disrupt Georgia's territorial sovereignty. Such stereotypes and beliefs underscored Gamsakhurdia's hardline response to succession in that region. For more see Hunter, *The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation Building and Conflict*, 123-124.

¹⁶⁶ Ozhiganov, "Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union," 355.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 355.

In January 1991, Gamsakhurdia ordered a detachment of 3,000 Georgian Interior Ministry troops supported by Georgian nationalist irregulars with the intention of suppressing the Ossetian independence movement once and for all. What followed was a bloody battle for Tskhinvali between Georgian militia troops and Ossetian self-defense groups that was followed by a renewed blockade of South Ossetia that deprived the region of water and electricity and halted industrial production for months on end.¹⁶⁸ Within two months, 53 Ossetians had died and over 230 were injured and 20,000 more displaced to Georgia and North Ossetia.

Given the already deeply disruptive effect of Gamsakhurdia's nationalizing policies and his increasingly aggressive stance against regional successionism, the leaders of both South Ossetia and Abkhazia persisted in their appeals to the Soviet center to avoid further Georgianization. Thus, when the USSR held a Union-wide referendum on the preservation of the Union on 17 March 1991 and the Georgian parliament prohibited its citizens from participating, the authorities in Tskhinvali carried on with the decision to hold the referendum. As could have been predicted, the results bore overwhelmingly in favor of the decision to preserve the Union and remain within the USSR.¹⁶⁹

As then-chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR, Yeltsin saw South Ossetia's pro-Union stance as signalling its potentially treacherous pro-communist position, leading him to initially support Gamsakhurdia as a potential ally against Gorbachev.¹⁷⁰ The result of talks on 24 March 1991 between Yeltsin and Gamsakhurdia was a resolution wherein the

¹⁶⁸ Ozhiganov, *Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union*, 356.

¹⁶⁹ Cornell and Jonsson, *Conflict, Crime, and the State in Postcommunist Eurasia*, 105.

¹⁷⁰ Ozhiganov, *Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union*, 358. This tendency persisted throughout the various ethnic conflicts covered in this project and beyond. Yeltsin's team often saw the pro-Union stance of these regions as indicative of their conservatism and pro-communist affiliation which (with the exception of Transnistria, where this characterization is noticeably apt) instead largely reflected the genuine fears of marginalized ethnic communities and their ambitious ethnic elites hoping to develop closer ties with Russia, where their autonomy might be more easily safeguarded.

RSFSR recognized the abolition of the South Ossetian Autonomous Region, thus tacitly granting Gamsakhurdia Russian approval in moving forward with his advance on Tskhinvali. Within less than a week of Gamsakhurdia ordering reinforcements to the South Ossetian capital, Georgian parliament passed a law abolishing the Tskhinvali and Znaur districts of South Ossetia in order to further undermine South Ossetia's territoriality and restore Georgia as "a unitary state with no internal boundaries."¹⁷¹

The response in South Ossetia was calamitous. Border clashes grew into full scale military operations featuring the use of automatic weapons and heavy artillery and Tskhinvali was quickly surrounded by Georgian paramilitary forces nearing 12,000 in number.¹⁷² The only factor preventing a full scale Georgian invasion of the city was the presence of a small dispatch of Soviet Interior Ministry troops stationed in the city to maintain order.¹⁷³ At this point, the Russian Congress of People's Deputies (the precursor to the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation) chose to act against Yeltsin's move by passing a resolution which called for Georgia to restore South Ossetia to the status of an autonomous republic, lift the blockade, and resettle displaced refugees to their homes, threatening potential Soviet intervention if terms were rejected.¹⁷⁴

Though this resolution served to temporarily limit bloodshed throughout the majority of the summer, the course of events was wildly altered by the events following the failed August 1991 coup in Moscow. In the immediate aftermath of the putsch, the Georgian Prosecutor General issued a warrant for the arrest of several leading members of the South Ossetian government accused of "stirring up conflict between the Georgian and Ossetian

¹⁷¹ Ozhiganov, "Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union," 359. Cornell and Jonsson, *Conflict, Crime, and the State in Postcommunist Eurasia*, 105.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 359.

¹⁷³ Webber, *The International Politics of Russia and the Successor States*, 232.

¹⁷⁴ Ozhiganov, "Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union," 359.

peoples,” as well as providing aid to the coup plotters.¹⁷⁵ While these claims remained largely unsubstantiated, they ultimately did not result in the extradition of the accused from Tskhinvali, a fact at least partially explained by Gamsakhurdia’s increasingly tenuous grip on political control.

The Georgian Civil War and the Fall of the Soviet Union

Particularly following the May 1991 presidential elections, Gamsakhurdia’s hyper-nationalistic brand of authoritarianism grew to be increasingly conspicuous. His intolerance of political opposition, alongside allegations of treachery and deception in the days surrounding the failed August putsch in Moscow, fueled widespread opposition against Gamsakhurdia both domestically and internationally.¹⁷⁶ By mid-September, irregular militia forces, including a large portion of the Georgian National Guard in tandem with the notoriously brutal paramilitary force known as the *Mkhedrioni*, began to rally behind Prime Minister Tengiz Sigua and by late December, began active and armed opposition to Gamsakhurdia’s regime.¹⁷⁷ The eventual collapse of the Soviet Union on 21 December 1991, thus effectively fell on deaf ears in Georgia as representatives from the remaining fourteen of the fifteen Soviet Republics met in Almaty, Kazakhstan to officiate the terms of the post-Union order. Georgia, per Gamsakhurdia’s command, was the only Republic not party to this meeting.

This refusal to attend alongside Gamsakhurdia’s general uncooperativeness posed a perceivable threat to Yeltsin’s greater vision of a post-Union order which he hoped the

¹⁷⁵ “The Situation in South Ossetia,” ITAR-TASS, 5 September 1991; cited in Ozhiganov, “*Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union*,” 359.

¹⁷⁶ Webber, *The International Politics of Russia and the Successor States*, 230. Public opinion regarding Gamsakhurdia had turned sharply after he displayed contradictory sentiments towards the coup plotters and had used the chaos to justify his attempt to place the Georgian National Guard, likely the most militarily capable Georgian militia force, under the control of the Georgian Internal Ministry.

¹⁷⁷ Thomas Goltz, *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia* / Cornell, Svante E., and S. Frederick Starr, eds. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2009, 19.

proposed CIS might establish.¹⁷⁸ Gamsakhurdia had also garnered a reputation as a Russophobe and frequently entertained the idea of constructing a “Common Caucasian Home,” signalling a desire to create a unified regional alliance that might compromise Russia’s *de facto* influence in the region.¹⁷⁹ Nevertheless, from a surface level account, Gamsakhurdia’s eventual removal from office was through domestic political means. On 21 December the day after the Almaty summit, the National Guard and *Mkhedrioni* demanded Gamsakhurdia’s unconditional resignation. His refusal prompted the oppositionary forces to begin firing on Parliament and the presidential apparatus building until Gamsakhurdia’s eventual departure from Georgia on 6 January 1992, beginning his years in exile, first in Azerbaijan, then Armenia, and ultimately Chechnya as a guest of General Djohar Dudayev.¹⁸⁰

According to sources within *Mkhedrioni*, however, Russia’s role in financing and supporting the anti-Gamsakhurdia coalition was considerable. The coalition between segments of the National Guard and the outlawed *Mkhedrioni* militia had in fact been brokered by former leaders from Georgia’s exiled communist establishment with communication and patronage chains to the Kremlin.¹⁸¹ Through these networks, Moscow actively supported the oppositionary coalition with financial support and technical assistance in the form of military equipment and logistics training. Former chief of *Mkhedrioni*, Jaba Ioseliani, personally recounts the close relations between National Guard leader Tengiz Kitovani and Russian generals in Georgia at the time.¹⁸²

Complicating the situation was the South Ossetian leadership’s decision to continue its campaign to win the support of the Congress of People’s Deputies of the Russian

¹⁷⁸ Hunter, *The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation Building and Conflict*, 128.

¹⁷⁹ Thornike Gordadze, *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia* / Cornell, Svante E., and S. Frederick Starr, eds., 31.

¹⁸⁰ Goltz, *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*, 20

¹⁸¹ Gordadze, *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*, 31

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 31

Federation. On 19 January 1992, the South Ossetians held a referendum on public support for both independence and whether or not to reunite with the Russia, the latter of which elicited a positive response from a resounding 98.2 percent of respondents.¹⁸³ Yeltsin remained initially silent on the matter, as South Ossetia's demonstration of allegiance to Russia called into question his prior belief in their potential treachery. The Russian parliament, however, headed by nationalist Ruslan Khasbulatov, demonstrated strong support for the South Ossetian cause, at least partially as a tactic to undermine the authority of the president.¹⁸⁴

Eduard Shevardnadze and the South Ossetian Litmus Test for Russian "Peacekeeping"

Having successfully ousted Gamsakhurdia and established the provisional Military Council, its leaders Sigua, Kitovani, and Ioseliani faced the pressure of confirming the legitimacy of their putschist regime. Though the international community had already recognized Georgia's independence, the Russian military continued to assume the role of guarantor of continued peace and stability, particularly given the Military Council's extreme repression of the Zviadist militants concentrated in Gamsakhurdia's former homeland of Mingrelia.¹⁸⁵ The coalition thus sought a charismatic and legitimate figure to lead newly independent Georgia. They settled on former Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party and Recently dismissed Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union, Eduard Shevardnadze.

Despite his impressive credentials and considerable ruling experience, Shevardnadze enjoyed limited support from the Georgian populace, many of whom remained dubious of his conspicuous ties to the Kremlin.¹⁸⁶ Nonetheless, upon his return to Georgia in March 1992, Shevardnadze acceded to the presidency of the so-called State Council, the hastily constructed heir to the disbanded Military Council, and entered office with the stated goal of

¹⁸³ Ozhiganov, *Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union*, 361.

¹⁸⁴ Ozhiganov, *Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union*, 361.

¹⁸⁵ Gordadze, *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*, 31

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 30

“national reconciliation.”¹⁸⁷ Although made in obvious reference to the continued action of Zviadist conspirators throughout the country, this announcement also tacitly insinuated the reincorporation of both Abkhazia and South Ossetia into Georgia proper. For no matter the degree of Russian support and direction he received, Shevardnadze remained committed to preserving Georgian territorial integrity.

This proved a difficult task for a number of reasons, most of which stemmed from his limited domestic support, rivalries within the State Council, and the worsening situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.¹⁸⁸ More crippling, however, was the deep hatred for Shevardnadze held by many within the Russian Military and in parliament, many of whom credited Shevardnadze, former Soviet Foreign Minister under Gorbachev and a strong proponent of “new thinking,” as having been as chief among the actors that helped orchestrate the fall of the Soviet Union.¹⁸⁹ This contributed to the strained relationship that would soon come to mar bilateral relations between the Georgian and Russian leadership.

The first major test for this relationship would arise from residual tensions that remained between Tskhinvali and Tbilisi since the partial settlement of May 1991. Although delegations from South Ossetia, Georgia and the North Ossetian SSR had met on 13 May 1992 to discuss a permanent settlement, large scale hostilities broke out again outside of the South Ossetian capital on 8 June between detachments of the Ossetian Guards and Georgian paramilitary units.¹⁹⁰ It was not until 20 June 1992, however, less than a day after the Moldovan assault on Bendery, that the Shevardnadze regime initiated its full scale assault on Tskhinvali which effectively succeeded in destroying the city. While they were unable to seize the city, Georgian forces shelled and mortared the city throughout the assault, burning

¹⁸⁷ Hunter, *The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation Building and Conflict*, 121

¹⁸⁸ Hunter, *The Transcaucasus in Transition: Nation Building and Conflict*, 130

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 131

¹⁹⁰ Ozhiganov, “*Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union*,” 362.

down or destroying nearly 80 percent of the dwellings and administrative buildings in the city.¹⁹¹ Furthermore, the flow of refugees from South Ossetia also exacerbated the situation in North Ossetia, where tensions between Ingush and Ossetians had been mounting and threatened to further destabilize the already deeply fractured north Caucasus.¹⁹²

Though Shevardnadze initially denying official Georgian involvement in the siege of the city, citing the uncontrollable actions of “detachments out of the control of the Georgian government, the Russian Government later that day issued a statement accusing Georgia of staging a “military action designed to drive the non-Georgian population out of South Ossetia.”¹⁹³ This Russian response, though driven primarily by fears for the potentially disastrous effect of further refugee flows on the stability of the region (particularly given the worsening situation in Chechnya), was also underscored by intense sympathies for the South Ossetians by nationalists in Moscow. Ruskoi labeled the Georgian invasion a genocide against the Ossetian people “conducted not by groups out of the control of the Georgian State Council, but by detachments of the national guard.”¹⁹⁴

Shevardnadze’s recalcitrance was short lived however, likely tempered by the unexpectedly swift and aggressive Russian actions in Moldova over the course of 19-22 June, and he was quickly forced to admit that the Georgian National Guard had indeed led the charge. He also agreed on 24 June 1992 to meet with Yeltsin and representatives of North and South Ossetia in Sochi to sign a cease-fire and discuss a settlement to the conflict, leading to the ratification on the issuance of peacekeeping forces in South Ossetia on 3 July.

¹⁹⁵ The agreement stipulated that the Georgian forces in the region would retreat and permit

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 362.

¹⁹² Ozhiganov, “*Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union*,” 363.

¹⁹³ “Statement of the Russian Government,” ITAR-TASS, 20 June 1992; cited in Ozhiganov, “*Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union*,” 363.

¹⁹⁴ Aleksandr Ruskoi, ITAR-TASS, 20 June 1992; cited in Ozhiganov, “*Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union*,” 367.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 364.

the deployment of a joint Russian, North Ossetian, South Ossetian, and Georgian armed force totalling at roughing 2,000 troops.¹⁹⁶ The participation of North Ossetians also allowed for an effectively Moscow dominated force that has since been able to enforce South Ossetia's *de facto* independence. Russia's commitment to this end has persisted, most notably following the events of the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, wherein Russia intervened to protect Tskhinvali from a Georgian attempt to reintegrate the region by military force.

Particularly given that it was in no way coordinated within the CIS, this peacekeeping mission was the first of its kind and served as a template for future Russian-led missions in Moldova, Abkhazia, Tajikistan and Azerbaijan (though Baku's veto would ultimately prevent the deployment of peacekeepers). Its relative success has also reasonably justified continued Russian troop presence on Georgian soil, and reaffirmed, particularly in the eyes of the Russian military leadership, the indispensability of Russia as a mediating force in the FSU. In the words of Deputy Defence Minister, Colonel General Georgi Kondratev, the primary military authority over Russian peacekeeping forces, the success of the Sochi agreement has demonstrated that Russia alone possesses the capability and will to separate warring factions and induce a negotiated settlement.¹⁹⁷ As he claims, "peacekeeping in Russia has become an issue of government policy, and peacekeeping issues are now part of our national military doctrine," a position that would increasingly grow to define Russia's policy in the near abroad, particularly as hostilities in Abkhazia began to intensify.¹⁹⁸

The War in Abkhazia

Whereas the conflict in South Ossetia was waged and resolved swiftly and relatively bloodlessly, the war in Abkhazia was far more complex and gruesome, involving a much

¹⁹⁶ Gordadze, *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*, 31.

¹⁹⁷ Ozhiganov, "Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union," 368.

¹⁹⁸ ITAR-TASS, March 1994; cited in Ozhiganov, "Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union," 368.

larger scope of violence and drawing in a motley assortment of combatants from around the region. The conflict spiral began amidst the chaos of early 1992, when the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet seized upon the apparent weakness in Tbilisi (and strength in Moscow) by voting on July 23 to restore the Abkhaz Constitution of 1925 under which Abkhazia retained its Union republic status and was not under Georgian administrative control.¹⁹⁹ This decision was made in partial response to the State Council's decision to reinstate Georgia's pre-Soviet constitution of 1921, which did not stipulate the status of Abkhazia's independence, therefore provided no pretext for Abkhazian autonomy.²⁰⁰ The Georgian response, of course, was to annul the decision, though Shevardnadze was hesitant to act upon the more sanguine demands from the more conservative and pro-nationalist factions of Georgian civil society. Domestic pressure from pro-nationalist factions continued to mount, however, particularly in opposition to Shevardnadze's decision to allow Russian peacekeepers into South Ossetia.

Meanwhile, Zviadist militant groups dispersed throughout and around Gamsakhurdia's home region of Mingrelia continued to engage Georgian National Guard forces. Georgian forces had quickly suppressed the attempted Zviadist uprising in March 1992 but this merely spawned a series of guerrilla actions and kidnappings throughout the summer of 1992.²⁰¹ On 11 August, after a declaration of amnesty for former Gamsakhurdia supporters by Shevardnadze, Zviadist groups responded promptly with a second round of hostage-taking, among whom included Georgian Deputy Prime Minister Aleksandr Kavsadze. In response, on 14 August, Shevardnadze dispatched Defense Minister Tengiz Kitovani into the Mingrelian-inhabited region of eastern Abkhazia with a contingent of

¹⁹⁹ Dale, *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, 122. It should also be noted that this declaration occurred less than two days after the Yeltsin-Snegur agreement, likely signifying that Abkhazia anticipated a similar degree of Russian support in their struggle for independence.

²⁰⁰ Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds : The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, 118

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 119

Georgian National Guard troops to find the kidnappers and retrieve Kavsadze.²⁰² By as soon as 18 August, Georgian troops had invaded Sukhumi and sacked the Abkhazian parliament building, sending Abkhazian members fleeing to Gudauta providing Kitovani with the resources necessary to establish a pro-Georgian council in the Abkhazian capital²⁰³.

The events that followed and the official Georgian account of its actions in Abkhazia have since been held up to considerable scrutiny. The first issue concerns Georgian justifications for intervention and assault on Sukhumi. The primary impetus for intervention concerned the kidnapping of Kavsadze, whom Shevardnadze and Kitovani hoped to repatriate to Georgia, by force if necessary. A secondary dilemma was compounded by the issue of the recently downed Inguri river railroad bridge, the only operational rail line connecting Georgia and Russia, the destruction of which was linked to Zviadist forces operating in Abkhazia.²⁰⁴ Though the Georgian military underlined the strategic need to defend and monitor the rail station alongside the retrieval of Kavsadze and other hostages as primary justifications for their intervention, circumstantial evidence reveals both to be dubious claims.

Upon their entrance into Abkhazia, the bulk of Georgian troops spent little time searching for hostages and instead continued further West, arresting the mayor of Ochamchira and skirmishing with Abkhazian troops as they marched towards Sukhumi.²⁰⁵ Furthermore, given the scale of armaments donned by the Georgian military and their limited cooperation and open conflagrations with Abkhaz troops, atop the fact that no evidence pointed to the presence of hostages west of Sukhumi, Kitovani's assault more closely resembles a concerted Georgian effort to quickly and decisively assert military control over the breakaway region.

²⁰² Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 129

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 129

²⁰⁴ Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds : The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, 119-120

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

Shevardnadze, likely recognizing the volatility of the situation, made rapid efforts to avoid blame for the ultimately failed invasion, claiming that Kitovani had acted autonomously and against orders by attacking Sukhumi.²⁰⁶ The extent to which the Georgian government supported Kitovani, however, is also contentious, particularly given demands by Prime Minister Tengiz Sigua for an immediate ceasefire and withdrawal of troops upon learning of Kitovani's attack on Sukhumi.²⁰⁷ Regardless of Tblisi's complicity in the decision to divert attention to the siege on Sukhumi, Shevardnadze nonetheless supported the outcome of the invasion, saying "we have done the right thing," and framing the immediate declaration of war by the Abkhaz as a provocation over which he could justify a war of "national defence."²⁰⁸ The war that followed would bear serious consequences for the future stability of Georgia for years to come.

Early Sources of Russian Intervention

The war's outbreak would also offer revanchists in Russia a key window of opportunity to test the limits of the liberal internationalist resolve in Moscow. As mentioned prior, Russia's early foreign policy making apparatus had undergone rapid institutional decentralization, breeding a great deal of confusion, contradiction, and competition where the actual implementation of policy was concerned. Thus, the official Russian position towards the Abkhaz conflict and the Transcaucasus region in general during much of 1992 was similarly disorganized and contradictory. Again, much of this stems from the fact that early 1992 represented the height of power for the liberal internationalist factions in parliament, with whom Yeltsin himself was initially aligned.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ Dale, *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, 122. Shevardnadze confirmed this after the fact, in a Russian broadcast television interview on 27 July 1994 stating that he had not given Kitovani orders to attack Abkhaz soldiers.

²⁰⁷ Dale, *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, 122

²⁰⁸ Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds : The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, 120

²⁰⁹ Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 132.

As such, Yeltsin initially strove to set a cautionary and neutral tone from the early days of the conflict, warning the peoples of the North Caucasus against seeking to destabilize the situation while also personally pledging to take diplomatic steps to resolve the conflict.²¹⁰ He also issued troops to secure the border with Russia and was successful initially in brokering a nominal ceasefire at a joint Georgian-Abkhaz conference in Moscow in early September 1992 aimed at the “restoration of security in the region.”²¹¹ Perhaps most crucially, he strongly emphasized the need to preserve the inviolability of post-Soviet borders, standing in stark contrast to his communist and nationalist opponents in parliament who cited Abkhazia’s strong pro-Russian orientation as cause for incorporating the territory into the Russian Federation.²¹²

Though this was never a reasonably viable strategy, such sentiments were shared by many of these nationalists who occupied key leadership positions in the Supreme Soviet and offered active and vocal support for the Abkhazian separatist movement, which they saw as an exploitable lever that Russia might use to pressure Georgia into accepting CIS membership and accept Russia’s permanent military presence in Georgia.²¹³ The Civic Union, a leading and ostensibly moderate coalition of deputies in parliament, levied criticisms at the president for his “unjustified passivity” and refusal to defend the minority rights of the Abkhaz.²¹⁴ Sergei Baburin, leader of the conservative Russian All-Peoples-Union, went even further stating that upon visiting the conflict zone he was unsure that Abkhazia was even part

²¹⁰ Dale, *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, 125; Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 133.

²¹¹ Kozhokin, *US and Russian Policymaking with Respect to the Use of Force*, Edited by Jeremy R. Azrael, Rand, 1996, 76.

²¹² *USAK Yearbook of International Politics and Law Vol. 1*, Istanbul: International Strategic Research Organization, 2009, 359. Yeltsin’s insistence that post-Soviet borders be preserved was particularly dire given the threats to Russia’s territorial integrity posed by the burgeoning and militarizing independence movements forming in Tatarstan and Chechnya.

²¹³ Kozhokin, *US and Russian Policymaking with Respect to the Use of Force*, 77.

²¹⁴ ITAR-TASS, 26 August, 1992; cited in Dale, *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, 125.

of Georgia.²¹⁵ Though their efforts initially conflicted with those pursued by Yeltsin and the Foreign Ministry, these nationalists helped stir interventionist momentum that would indirectly affect events on the ground in Abkhazia and, particularly given support from elements of the Russian military, proved successful in both delegitimizing the liberal pacifist strategy and shaping Russia's approach to the conflict.

The first major move undertaken by the Supreme Soviet was their adoption of a series of resolutions on 25 September 1992 condemning Georgian actions in Abkhazia and demanding for the full withdrawal of Georgian troops and the subsequent deployment of a Russian peace-keeping force.²¹⁶ The resolutions also called for Yeltsin to broker a new set of negotiations, thus tacitly rejecting the 3 September tripartite agreement. Roughly a week later, on 2 October 1992, Abkhaz forces supported by volunteers from the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus²¹⁷ staged an attack on the Georgian held Abkhaz town of Gagri. This elicited a calamitous response from Tbilisi as Shevardnadze cast the events in Gagri as "the result of a vast plot against Georgia," portraying the Supreme Soviet's resolution as having empowered and encouraged the Abkhaz assault on Georgian troops.²¹⁸ Instances such as this would come to define the course of the conflict, particularly as Russian support for Abkhazia grew more pronounced in 1993, when remarkable Abkhaz victories grew to closely follow demonstrations of tacit support from conservatives in Moscow.

The Bureaucratic Struggle for Power

²¹⁵ *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, 25 August 1992, p. 1; cited in Dale, *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, 125.

²¹⁶ Kozhokin, *US and Russian Policymaking with Respect to the Use of Force*, 78.

²¹⁷ The CMPC (KGNK in Russian) was a paramilitary organization active shortly before and after fall of the Soviet Union closely tied with Chechen military formations. In fact, it is reported that at the time of the outbreak of hostilities in Abkhazia, the CMPC's commander was Shamil Basayev, future leader of the Chechen insurgent movement. See "Shamil Basayev: *Vrag Rossii Nomer Odin*" BBCRussian.com, 1 November 2002. Archived from the original on 8 July 2011. Retrieved 16 April 2018.

²¹⁸ Ozhiganov, *Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union*, 383.

Though the September ceasefire demonstrated a seemingly sincere effort on Yeltsin's part towards localizing the conflict, its apparent inability to influence the events unfolding in Abkhazia fueled Yeltsin's retreat from the issue, symbolizing his fading commitment to the prescriptions of liberal internationalism. In his absence, deliberation over Russian policy in Abkhazia at the executive level grew into a power struggle between The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Ministry of Defence (MoD). Though both ministries possessed deeply differing positions on the current administration in Georgia and the method of securing Russian interests in the region, they agreed on a handful of "first principles" regarding Russia's diplomatic approach. These included the refusal to restore bilateral relations with Georgia until the resolution of the Abkhazia war as well as a commitment to a Russia dominated conflict resolution process free from external manipulation by international organizations.²¹⁹ Both also agreed on the need to maintain Georgian territorial integrity to prevent a wave of secessionist movements across the already unstable North Caucasus.²²⁰

The ministries differed, however, in their opinions on how best to apply these principles to the broader pursuit of a lasting settlement. To begin with, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was staffed by a handful of bureaucrats whom Shevardnadze had himself promoted when he served as minister, chief of which included Kozyrev himself.²²¹ Owing to this as well as other more pragmatic factors, the MFA took a more conciliatory approach concerning relations with Shevardnadze, whom they saw as crucial for the perpetuation of a stable and friendly Georgia.²²² Therefore, the MFA had initially sought to normalize relations between Russia and Georgia and coordinated with the MoD in the early months of 1992 to

²¹⁹ Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 135.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 135.

²²¹ Gordadze, *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*, 32.

²²² Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 135.

official transfers of military equipment from Russian to Georgian troops that began in June and continued into August.²²³

Upon the outbreak of hostilities, Kozyrev strove, as he had in Moldova, to pursue a peaceful resolution to the conflict. In August 1992 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a report on the near abroad which, though it advocated for a leading Russian role in the region, still rejected the use of force as a tool of policy.²²⁴ The effects of the MFA failure in managing Russian interests in Transnistria, however, grew increasingly evident through Kozyrev's general absence from the key decision making process in Abkhazia until roughly spring of 1993. By that time, Kozyrev's perspectives on multilateralism had already undergone a sea change. Although the MFA did express interest in cooperating with the UN, likely to secure financial support for the costly task of peacekeeping, Kozyrev also reportedly told the Under Secretary General for Political Affairs, Marrack Goulding, that the Russian government had considerable reservations regarding a UN peace conference and that it would ideally seek a regional peacekeeping effort in line with the September 1992 Moscow agreement.²²⁵

The waning influence of the MFA allowed the military to assume a more prominent role in determining the thrust of Russian policy in the region. As the war's events will attest, Yeltsin granted the military an increasingly significant degree of latitude in shaping security policy, particularly towards the end of 1992 and beginning of 1993 as Yeltsin's liberal technocrat allies drew criticism for their failing policies agendas. Issues surrounding the illicit nationalisation of Soviet military equipment had been a long standing point of contention between Russia and Georgia, as it had been throughout the conflict ridden Caucasus.

²²³ Ibid., 134.

²²⁴ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition*, 324.

²²⁵ Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 136.

Although Defence Minister Pavel Grachev had initially agreed to the peaceful transfer of military equipment from Georgia beginning in May 1992 and had linked this issue with Georgia's entrance into the CIS, the outbreak of fighting following the invasion of Abkhazia was followed by a wholesale halt in military transfers that continued until late 1993.²²⁶

The ideational elements of the MoD's approach revolved around the desire to maintain a strategic Russian troop presence in Georgia. At the time of the war's outbreak, Russia had five active Russian military bases in Georgia at the time. The largest of these was located in the coastal Abkhaz city of Gudauta, where the Abkhazian government-in-exile, led by former Communist boss Vladislav Ardzinba, had fled following the fall of Sukhumi.²²⁷ Stressing the strategic value of these military positions, Grachev in a 23 February visit to Gudauta openly stated the Russian military's strategic intention to remain in Abkhazia so as not to "lose the exit to the Black Sea."²²⁸ This demonstration of naked ambition was received warmly by nationalists and key figures within the Russian military establishment, many of whom were deeply opposed to Yeltsin's approach, arguing that the Russian military had the will and means to defend Abkhazia if granted the right to do so.²²⁹

Covert Intervention Strategies

Interventionist arguments were strengthened through 1992 and early 1993 as bilateral relations between Georgia and Russia steadily deteriorated. Threats to Russian military deployments began to emerge as early as 16 August when a Russian airborne division was issued to the base at Gudauta for assistance in evacuating stranded Russian vacationers from

²²⁶ Ibid., 132.

²²⁷ Goltz, *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*, 24.

²²⁸ Kozhokin, *US and Russian Policymaking with Respect to the Use of Force*, Edited by Jeremy R. Azrael, Rand, 1996, 77.

²²⁹ *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 15 September, 16 October 1992, as cited in Catherine Dale, "Turmoil in Abkhazia: Russian Responses," *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 2, No. 34, (27 August 1993): 48-56, 55.

the conflict zone and drew fire from Georgian military formations.²³⁰ The series of more direct attacks on Russian troops that followed soon after, however, proved instrumental towards mobilizing Russian military and government officials to demand a more assertive stance from Moscow on the conflict. On 14 December 1992, a surface-to-air missile fired from Georgian occupied territory shot down a Russian military helicopter airlifting refugees from the conflict zone, killing all aboard - mostly women and children.²³¹ This was followed soon after by the 18 January downing of a Russian Mi-8 helicopter and a subsequent raid by Georgian irregular units on the Russian Fourth Supply Base in Tbilisi.²³²

These factors, alongside encouragement from the Supreme Soviet and the Defence Ministry hierarchy, allowed the Russian military and its supporters in Moscow to further justify a position of increasingly direct support for Abkhazian forces. In spite of Yeltsin's liberal platitudes emphasizing Russia's regard for Georgian territorial integrity, a closer examination of the events on the ground in Abkhazia crucially supports the notion that, even before these events, agents within the Russian ground forces and military lobbies were already engaged in both moral and material support of Abkhazian forces throughout the course of their engagements with the Georgian military.

Although evidence for direct military support was not immediately forthcoming, the series of impressive Abkhazian military victories against the purportedly better equipped Georgian forces that occurred throughout late 1992 and into 1993 heightened speculation regarding the possibility of covert Russian support. Various eyewitness accounts report the presence of Russian military equipment and active dutymen fighting amongst the ranks of Abkhazian forces. While evidence is limited in large part to personal testimonies, a handful

²³⁰ Dale, *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, 124; Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds : The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, 121.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 126.

²³² Dale, *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, 126.

of cases point almost undeniably to Russia's decidedly impartial role. Even Kozyrev himself admitted in November 1993 that "the Abkhaz demanded military aid," though he refused to comment on whether or not the Russian military ever rendered such aid.²³³

Georgian accounts of Russian air support for Abkhazian troops against Georgian positions were ultimately corroborated after the downing of a Russian SU-27 on 19 March 1993 over Sukhumi.²³⁴ The Russian newspaper *Izvestia* reports that its pilot was Russian Major Vatslav Shipko and lists it as one among a number of Russian aircraft shot down in Georgia, flying in the face of claims by Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev that such planes were piloted by Georgians bombing their own troops to ferment an anti-Russian disinformation campaign.²³⁵ Other personal testimonies support these claims, such as those from Mikhail Demianov, a businessman from St. Petersburg taken prisoner by the Georgians who detailed his involvement in selling arms to the Abkhaz through illicit channels and confirmed the presence of active Russian armed support of Abkhazian units.²³⁶ Reports of support for Abkhazian separatists also coincided with a sudden halt of military transfers from Russia to Georgia officiated by the Russian Ministry of Defence beginning in August 1992, following the outbreak of violence in the region.²³⁷

While sources detailing the active participation of conscripted Russian soldiers remain subject to scrutiny, irrefutable evidence stands linking the participation of potential Russian proxies the conflict zone. From the early days of the conflict the Abkhaz received support from a variety of sources, including fighters from the Confederation of Mountain Peoples, Chechen militants, as well as members of the Grand United Circle of Cossacks, many of

²³³ *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 24 November, 1993; cited in Hill and Jewett, "Back in the USSR," 44.

²³⁴ Dale, *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, 126.

²³⁵ Guga Polivshili, "Kak Rossiya Ispytyvala v Abkhazii Novyy Boevoy Samolet," Gruzija Online, 28 July 2008, accessed 18 April 2018, <http://www.apsny.ge/analytics/1217264517.php>; Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 137.

²³⁶ Dale *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, 126.

²³⁷ Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 134.

whom were themselves Russian citizens, although likely operating without direct orders from Moscow.²³⁸ Although Yeltsin had personally warned freelance fighters and rogue troops in the region from participating in the conflict, Russia made no significant steps to quell the flow of fighters from Russian territory into Abkhazia.²³⁹

This directly contradicts Yeltsin's stated commitment to preserving Georgian territorial integrity in his "Appeal From the President to the Leadership of Georgia and Abkhazia," wherein he promised that Russia would do all within its power to prevent the spread of arms and fighters from Russia into Abkhazia.²⁴⁰ It should be noted, however, that the dissonance between Yeltsin's rhetoric regarding Russia's role and the events on the ground speaks less to Yeltsin's hidden or deceptive motives than it does to his tenuous control over Russian ground troops and the increasingly independent will of the Russian military.

Spring 1993 and the Formulation of a Foreign Policy Consensus

Regardless of the degree of initial coordination, by early 1993, the Russian government appeared to have developed a workable *modus operandi* for Abkhazia and for its broader approach to managing conflicts in the near abroad. Yeltsin's infamous 28 February 1993 speech to the Civic Union calling for UN recognition of Russia's indispensable position as guarantor of peace and stability in the FSU represents the first of many statements made by the president that reveal his developing centrist nationalist views on foreign policy. This shift also reflects Yeltsin's increasingly open willingness to allow the military establishment a freer hand in directing Russia's foreign policy in the near abroad, noticeable particularly in light of Grachev's comments earlier that week declaring Abkhazia "a strategically important

²³⁸ Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds : The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, 121.

²³⁹ Dale *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, 127.

²⁴⁰ Dale, *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, 127.

area for the Russian Army,” before an unsanctioned trip to Gudauta on 30 February to, as ITAR-TASS reported, “support the troops.”²⁴¹

Although bombings in Sukhumi intensified considerably shortly after his arrival, Grachev continued to deny circumstantial evidence of direct Russian aid to Abkhazia. He even went so far as to suggest that bombing raids supposedly carried out by recognizably Russian aircraft were in fact executed by Georgian planes with Russian flags painted on ostensibly because “a real war is being waged in Georgia by the government against its own people.”²⁴² Even after evidence of Russian interference was made public following the downing of Major Shipko’s aircraft the next day, Grachev did not adjust his assessment or face reprisal from Moscow for his now blatant deception. Rather, Grachev was appointed by Yeltsin to head the ceasefire negotiations the following July.²⁴³ This all suggests what many within Russia already presumed, that Yeltsin had effectively relinquished control over military policy in Abkhazia to the Ministry of Defence. Statements from the Russian press at the time confirm this, with *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* reporting on 20 March of growing “bewilderment” in Tbilisi regarding “Yeltsin’s silence with regards to the Abkhaz conflict” leaving both Georgians and the Russian people wondering whether he intends to “leave Shevardnadze one on one with the Russian military” or “chose to interfere in the events.”²⁴⁴

Much of this indecision can be explained by Yeltsin’s increasingly tenuous grip on political power at the beginning of 1993. Yeltsin had already begun to bend to parliamentary pressure for his weak support for the rights of Russians and other minorities in the near abroad, as he began to levy similar criticism against the Foreign Ministry in October 1992.²⁴⁵

²⁴¹ Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 137. Hill and Jewett, *Back in the USSR*, 51.

²⁴² ITAR-TASS, 19 March 1993; cited in Hill and Jewett, *Back in the USSR*, 52.

²⁴³ Foreign Broadcast Intelligence Service-Soviet Union/Central Asian Division, 93-064; cited in Hill and Jewett, *Back in the USSR*, 52.

²⁴⁴ Hill and Jewett, *Back in the USSR*, 52.

²⁴⁵ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* 324.

By January 1993, significant changes had occurred within Yeltsin's government, particularly the replacement of former Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar, the face of Russia's ambitious and controversial "shock therapy" program, with the ex-director of Gazprom, Viktor Chernomyrdin, signalling a shift away from the liberal economic policy heralded by the Westernizers in Moscow. Furthermore, by late 1992, it had become clear that previously entertained proposals for Western financial aid packages were unlikely to gain the necessary parliamentary and administrative support in Washington and Brussels, thereby wholly discounting the liberal argument that Russia should contain its military actions in the near abroad in order to protect hopes of Western aid.²⁴⁶ Donaldson and Noguee report this gradual realization as having been crucial towards ending the "Romantic" period of Russian foreign policy and signalling a shift by the liberals towards more "pragmatic nationalist" views.²⁴⁷

By this point, the Foreign Ministry began to adapt to these major domestic and structural shifts and thus grew to develop a harder position on the Abkhaz issue and on Russia's foreign policy options in general. Beginning in late 1992, the MFA grew harshly critical of the Georgian military's actions in Abkhazia, labelling the 14 December downing of a Russian refugee helicopter a "gross provocation."²⁴⁸ Deputy Foreign Minister Boris Pastukhov joined in roughly a week later, calling Georgia's attack an intentional act of barbarism before later adding, rather ominously, that "We [Russia] will not let you win this war."²⁴⁹ As mentioned before, spring and summer of 1993 saw Kozyrev himself begin to reorient the Foreign Ministry towards support for Russian unilateralism in the conflict resolution process. He also began to endorse more "traditional" conceptions of Russia's foreign policy goals in the region, stressing in July 1993 "the strategic and economic

²⁴⁶ Bennett, *Condemned to Repetition?* 324.

²⁴⁷ Donaldson and Noguee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia*, 127.

²⁴⁸ Dale, *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, 126.

²⁴⁹ *Moscow News*, 9 March 1993; cited in Hill and Jewett, "Back in the USSR," 53.

importance Russia attaches to the Northern Caucasus and to its southern areas as a whole,” as well as Russia’s need for a stable and friendly Georgia.²⁵⁰ This shift began to signal a new era in Russian Foreign policy making that was decidedly centrist nationalist in character.

Foreign Policy Consensus in Action: Peacekeeping as a Tool of Coercion

This coalescence of foreign policy consensus in Moscow gave life to an ostensible strategy for Russia’s ongoing manipulation of the Abkhaz crisis. Beginning in mid-1993, Russian policy in Georgia aimed to secure Georgia’s position in CIS, establish a legal framework for a continued and indefinite Russian military presence in Georgia, and achieve an international mandate for the deployment of Russian peacekeeping troops in the near abroad. As these goals became achievable in the fall of 1993 following a series of key events in Abkhazia over the summer, the Russian position grew increasingly more forceful and coherent.

Against seemingly insurmountable odds, the so-called “Abkhaz separatists” had by July 1993 succeeded in securing a series of key victories against Georgian forces. Owing largely to Abkhazian advances, as well as increasing pressure from Grachev and newly appointed special envoy to Abkhazia, Boris Pastukhov, Shevardnadze was induced to sign a ceasefire agreement with Abkhazia in Sochi on 27 July 1993 wherein Georgia agreed to substantial concessions, including the restoration of the Abkhazian government and the withdrawal of both Abkhazian and Georgian troops from the conflict zone.²⁵¹ Though the treaty succeeded in restoring Russian-Georgian bilateral relations, definitive negotiations were stalled in part due to Georgia’s refusal to accept Russian basing rights in Georgia or

²⁵⁰ Dale, *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, 127.

²⁵¹ Hill and Jewett, “*Back in the USSR*,” 54.

endorse a Russian peacekeeping mission, even going so far as to request a UN sponsored mission in its place.²⁵²

Mere weeks later, on 15 September, Abkhazian forces broke the ceasefire agreement and launched a massive and well-organized offensive to retake Sukhumi. The Russian response was seemingly mixed as officials in Moscow imposed limited economic sanctions against Abkhazia and condemned their unsanctioned use of force. Closer inspection reveals a number of inconsistencies with the Russian position. First of all, Shevardnadze's request for Russian troops to enforce the separation of warring forces was initially rejected based on the thinly veiled excuse that "riots" in Sukhumi prevented the safe deployment of Russian forces in the conflict zone.²⁵³ Serious questions also arose regarding the Abkhazian forces' possession of heavy artillery and rocket launchers at the time of the attacks, the breechblocks for which the Russian military was supposed to have confiscated according to the Sochi agreement.²⁵⁴ This evidence, alongside the surprisingly impressive combat performance of the Abkhazian forces against the only partially withdrawn Georgian forces, strongly suggests Russia's benign underestimation of, if not direct coordination with, the Abkhaz separatists.

Shortly before and after the assault, Grachev had also pressed Georgian Defense Ministry officials to accept a treaty confirming the legal status of Russian troops on Georgian soil, repeatedly linking the issue to the signing of a treaty of friendship and treaty as well as to "the restoration of lasting peace in Abkhazia."²⁵⁵ Similar, if not more forceful, demands were presented by Russian Vice Premier Alexander Shokhin in the days following Abkhazia's attack, wherein he reinforced the fact that under current circumstances, Moscow

²⁵² *Interfax*, 20 September 1993; cited in Hill and Jewett, "Back in the USSR," 54, 56-57.

²⁵³ Kozhokin, *US and Russian Policymaking with Respect to the Use of Force*, 80.

²⁵⁴ Hill and Jewett, "Back in the USSR," 55.

²⁵⁵ ITAR-TASS, 25 September 1993; cited in Dale, *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, 128.

would not interfere to enforce the ceasefire or prevent Georgia's defeat in Abkhazia.²⁵⁶

Accordingly, Russian aid was unforthcoming and the Abkhazians were able to retake Sukhumi and secure the border with Georgia within a matter of weeks.

The abject failure of Georgian forces to repel the Abkhaz offensive signalled the unceremonious return of Gamsakhurdia, whose "Zviadist" forces quickly occupied the majority of western Georgia, cutting off major supply lines to the capital and pushing the government in Tbilisi nearly to the point of collapse. Still unable to secure outside aid and facing imminent and forceful removal from power, Shevardnadze travelled to Moscow on 8 October 1993 to reach a compromise agreement with Russia. In a series of talks that would continue into the following year, Shevardnadze, in exchange for Russia's aid in repelling Gamsakhurdia's forces and preventing the "full dismemberment" of the Georgian state, agreed to accept CIS membership on Georgia's behalf, lease the Black Sea port of Poti to Russia, and allow Russian troops to remain in Georgia indefinitely.²⁵⁷ In exchange, Russian troops were deployed to Georgia to stabilize the situation and, though dispatched with the declared intention securing key rail and telecommunications networks, helped crucially aid Georgian forces in the forcible expulsion of Zviadist forces from the country.²⁵⁸ Russia also engaged in a series of talks with Tbilisi beginning in November 1993 and culminating in the 1994 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation which, alongside finalizing Russia's basing rights in Georgia also formalized a UN sponsored return of Georgian refugees to Abkhazia.²⁵⁹ Particularly as events in Chechnya worsened, Russia also proceeded to crack down on Abkhazia, condemning harshly its brutal treatment of Georgians denying it any prospects of achieving independence from Georgia.

²⁵⁶ *Interfax*, 17 September 1993; cited in Hill and Jewett, "Back in the USSR," 55.

²⁵⁷ Hill and Jewett, "Back in the USSR," 58.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

²⁵⁹ Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 143.

The results of these talks as a whole, however, in light of Yeltsin's victory against his chief nationalist opponents in the Supreme Soviet, demonstrate the degree to which Yeltsin's influence as president and views on intervention had evolved in the roughly two years since he took office. This was also crucially shaped by the Western response (or rather lack thereof) to Russia's actions in Abkhazia. Given the relative absence of international observers and the fact that much of Russia's purported interference remains either unconfirmed or subject to scrutiny, the international community was largely silent on the course of events in Abkhazia, a circumstance amplified by the worsening crisis in Yugoslavia to which Western governments were much more inclined to direct their attention.

Nonetheless, Shevardnadze hoped that Georgia might be able to secure a multilateral peacekeeping mission that might limit Russia's ability to unilaterally dictate the terms of settlement. In spite of his popularity in the West, Shevardnadze watched in disappointment as Britain, France, and the United States all expressed deep hesitation towards participating in a United Nations peacekeeping operation, ultimately forcing the Georgian prime minister little choice but to request Russian aid for the enforcement of a permanent peace settlement.²⁶⁰ Though the eventual Russian mission lacked a UN mandate, it received support from then UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali who in May 1994 recommended that the UN endorse a Russia-led peacekeeping force, given the fact that the conditions for a UN operation remained unfulfilled at the time.²⁶¹

Bill Clinton even expressed his own somewhat confused endorsement of Russian actions in the near abroad, noting in a 14 January 1994 speech to a Russian TV audience that Russia's forays into its "near abroad" are not unlike the United States interventions in Grenada and Panama, themselves having been subject to intense scrutiny from the UN

²⁶⁰ Kozhokin, *US and Russian Policymaking with Respect to the Use of Force*, 81..

²⁶¹ Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS*, 140.

Security Council, and shakily compared Russia's actions in the region to those the US has traditionally pursued under its Monroe Doctrine.²⁶² With the apparent, albeit weak and at times begrudging acquiescence of the West, Russia was more or less granted a free hand to secure its strategic victories in the region. Thus on 10 May 1994, Shevardnadze agreed to the deployment of a Russia-sponsored CIS peacekeeping force of 3,000 troops to be deployed along both sides of the Inguri river, the natural land divide between Abkhazia and Georgia.²⁶³

Ultimately, the results of the Abkhaz war and the conflict in South Ossetia were formative to the degree that they further crystalized a consensus amongst Russian foreign policy elites on the efficacy and necessity of unilateral intervention and peacekeeping missions. Resolve amongst the various centers of gravity within Moscow on how best to achieve these goals was, much like in Moldova, at first varied and reflected the mutually conflictual ideational interests of the actors and administrative departments involved. While conflict resolution initially served as a means for localizing both regional wars to prevent conflict spillover and the creation of a power vacuum that might invite the interference of other regional powers, the increasing influence of the military, intervention and peacekeeping were ultimately adopted as a means of ensuring Georgian membership in the CIS and constructing a legal framework to justify continued Russian troop presence. Yeltsin's growing domestic unpopularity and weak responses from the West allowed for this gradual maturation of a more assertive and coercive Russian policy in Georgia. As a result of these changing circumstances, response efforts gradually shifted from confused and slow moving attempts at peaceful reconciliation into a suasive strategy designed to coerce Tbilisi into

²⁶² United States. Congress. House. Committee on International Relations. *The Clinton Foreign Policy Record : An Evaluation : Hearing before the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, One Hundred Fourth Congress, Second Session, 2 May 1996*. Washington: U.S. G.P.O. : For Sale by the U.S. G.P.O., Supt. of Docs., Congressional Sales Office, 1996, 5.

²⁶³ Kozhokin, *US and Russian Policymaking with Respect to the Use of Force*, 81-82.

accepting Moscow's designs for institutionalized and internationally recognized regional hegemony in the Caucasus.

Conclusions

Russia is a country very often regarded as a baseline test case for realist theory. As a traditionally centralized state, Russia is often typecast as an insecure aggressor, equally prone to uncooperativeness on the world stage as it is to expansionism on its fringes. While the tendency to assume that such characteristics are predetermined may be tempting, Russia's ostensibly cooperative and accommodating political character following the collapse of the Soviet Union complicates this seemingly straightforward assumption. Whether the decentralization and "liberalism" of the Russian Federation in the early 1990's represents a historical anomaly for a typically autocratic state is the subject of a different discussion. What matters more is how and why Russia's liberals abandoned their more integrationist views in favor of more "realist" national interests.

When asked the spring of 1994 to explain the noticeable shift in his views on foreign policy, Andrey Kozyrev noted that "as a democrat he felt constrained to take into account public opinion on foreign policy matters."²⁶⁴ This comment might be more facetious than it is

²⁶⁴ See Andrei Kozyrev, interview with *Segodnia*, April 30 1994, as summarized in *RFE/RL Daily Report*, 2 May 1994, cited in Checkel, "Structure, Institutions, and Process: Russia's Changing Foreign Policy," 56.

demonstrative of Kozyrev's serious convictions on the matter, however, the thrust of his statement speaks to a very important assumption that this project seeks to assert: national ideas matter. Whether articulated or acted upon implicitly, national ideas form the basis of political action and set the parameters for failure or success. They can empower domestic political coalitions and they can topple powerful regimes.

As has been previously asserted, the Russian foreign policy establishment's gradual endorsement of interventionist views can be traced directly to the deligitimation of liberal ideas promoting diplomatic approaches to conflict resolution, thus creating ideal circumstances for hawkish policy entrepreneurs to press for a more active interventionist policy in the near abroad. The perceivably successful model for intervention and peacekeeping was first showcased in Moldova, as a result of which Russia was able to ensure Moldova's entrance in the CIS, exclude Romania from the peace process, and maintain a strategic troop presence in Transnistria. This can be seen further through Russia's responses to the conflicts in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia as the progression of events on the ground which repeatedly confirmed the utility of Russian intervention and peacekeeping efforts towards achieving Russia's national interests in the region. The mission to South Ossetia represents a watershed moment for the development of a template for Russian peacekeeping, setting a standard that would help to fuel support for and legitimize later Russian missions. These effects were most noticeable following the Russian military's covert intervention and eventual peacekeeping mission in Abkhazia, which yielded considerable results, namely Georgia's admission into the CIS, the preemption of interference from regional rivals and international organizations, and the international community's *de facto* acceptance of Russia as a reliable peacekeeping force in the near abroad.

This process was made possible by an array of key circumstantial factors that helped weaken the liberal platform and empower those with more assertive and statist foreign policy strategies. In this sense, the decentralized structure of the early Russian Federation was instrumental in that it prevented the initially dominant liberal ideas held by the Foreign Minister, the President, and his entourage from being sufficiently institutionalized. This in turn had consequences at the domestic level, as Yeltsin's enemies in parliament aggressively exploited his leadership weakness and tenuous power base, forcing him to rely increasingly on individuals and factions within the military for political support, thus facilitating the greater autonomy of the armed forces to pursue and initiate intervention. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Western response to Russia's growing assertiveness was decidedly weak and apprehensive, leaving Russia little to lose should it seek to further instrumentalize "peacekeeping" as a gendarme of Russian influence in the near abroad. As a result, once intervening events such as the successful defense of Bendery (and general absence of international repercussions) alongside the failure to secure Western financial aid delegitimated the key assumptions of the liberal camp, centrist and radical nationalist policy entrepreneurs were able to exploit these open policy windows to forward their more aggressive foreign policy ideas. The result was the gradual adoption of more pragmatic centrist nationalist views on foreign policy by actors from across the ideational spectrum.

Although this project deals specifically with the immediate post-Soviet period, the conclusions drawn here are nonetheless helpful towards understanding the current state of foreign policy making in the Russian Federation. Most notably, since current President Vladimir Putin's rise to prominence beginning in 1999, Russia has grown increasingly centralized both institutionally and politically. Putin has successfully co-opted or eliminated key members of the influential industrial oligarch class, silenced the free press, and

established effectively personalized control over the legislative branch, the judicial system, and the armed forces. These factors have allowed the national ideas commonly forwarded by the president to enjoy stable support within the Russian national discourse.

It is also interesting to note that many of the ideas that Putin endorses revolve around conspicuously centrist nationalist positions, namely the restoration of Russia's great power status, limited yet pragmatic rapprochement with the West, and the defence of Russian/Russophone minorities in the near abroad. The president's articulation of these ideas has played a major role in his justifying the implementation of interventionist efforts in recent years, particularly in regards to the August 2008 war in South Ossetia and the March 2014 annexation of Crimea. Despite the remarkably negative and costly responses that such actions have garnered from the international community, Russia's commitment to an assertive foreign policy has persisted.

This is in part due to Putin's personalized control over policy formulation and execution as well as his systematic exclusion of potential rivals from the political process. These roadblocks to significant ideational change in Moscow have troubling implications as they suggest that Russia might again seek to justify similarly interventionist efforts elsewhere within the FSU. Should Putin perceive potential threats to Russian minorities in, for example, the Baltic states, all of which are now members of NATO, the question of whether or not Russia might intervene as a reactionary measure remains uncomfortably ambiguous. Regardless, absent any major shocks to the existing international order, institutional restructuring within Moscow, or any other independently occurring domestic political shakeups, the devil we know may be at least somewhat preferable to the devil we don't.

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