



START

When Will Russia Use Force in Support of Foreign Policy Objectives? Comparative Evidence from the Ukrainian (2014) and Georgia (2008) Crises

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About This Report

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About START

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Executive Summary

Russia's use of force in South Ossetia (Georgia) and Crimea (Ukraine) share similarities often overlooked by the West. The presence of domestic crises in non-EU and non-NATO countries within Russia's sphere of interest creates vulnerabilities for those regimes when Russia has motivation and potential to prevent the rise or consolidation of anti-Russian regimes. The main goal of Russia's national security strategy is to foster multipolar alternatives to an American-dominated international order and prevent US/EU encirclement of Russia. Thus, domestic crises coupled with international polarization concerning the foreign alignment of the regime experiencing crisis drive Russia's appetite in militarized disputes. How Russia uses introduces armed actors into militarized disputes stems from both the institutional institutions in which the country experiencing a domestic crisis is embedded as well as the domestic institutions and practices governing regional autonomy.

Increased international polarization is analyzed in this report as it presents key challenges and opportunity in explaining Russia's involvement in the Georgian and Ukrainian crises. The findings in respect to Russia's challenge, illustrates the Kremlin's view of NATO and the EU's expansion eastward. Russian discomfort with the expansion militarized both the Georgian conflict in 2008 and the aftermath of the coup in Ukraine as it sees the expansion as a threat.

Explaining the choice of militarized involvement, however, is only one dimension of forecasting the Russian calculation to use force outside of its borders; this report also accounts for the *form* that the militarized involvement can take. Specifically, the report argues that integration into international institutions determines whether Russia will use covert or direct force and that the presence of regional autonomy shapes whether Russia can annex territory. Russia's coercive strategies in these two international crises generate three militarized outcomes that the report explains through a generalized decision model. The first militarized outcome is the Russian decision to *annex* territory (the Crimea) from Ukraine. The second use-of-force case is that Russian decision to *covertly* involve itself in the Ukrainian internationalized civil war to punish a new non-pro-Russian government. The third armed violence scenario this report explains is the Russian decision to directly involve its armed forces, serving under Russian banners, against Georgia in 2008.

This report, using historical analysis, identifies major domestic crises that made Ukraine and Georgia susceptible to Russia's military activities in both countries. In Ukraine, the financial crisis of 2008 cornered then-President Viktor Yushchenko to ponder which competing economic bloc his country should side with, either the European Union or Russia, ramping up existing pro- and anti-Russian sentiments domestically. The Georgian crisis was born out of the policies then-President Mikheil Saakashvili introduced to re-incorporate two separatist regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Following this initiative, the closure of Ergenti Market, an economic center of South Ossetia, set in motion Georgia's domestic crisis. Saakashvili's mistaken hope that South Ossetia would seek Georgia's help opened the door for Russia to step in and provide the necessary economic support while criticizing Georgia's leadership.

Introduction

EUCOM tasked the project team to address several questions and themes about Russian foreign policy behavior, namely:

1. Where does Russia see the line between peace and war?
2. When will Russia deploy forces covertly (as in Ukraine), annex territory (Crimea) or deploy forces directly/overtly (Georgia)?
3. What are the dynamics of escalation and de-escalation of Russian actions in EUCOM AOR?
4. How does Russia see its great power status in the 21st century?

This report answers these questions through a comparative historical analysis of two militarized international crises: the Russian-Georgian War in 2008 and the Russian-Ukraine crisis beginning in 2014. Importantly, although Russia decided to use force in both cases, this report comparatively interrogates the differences and similarities between three distinct trajectories of armed violence occurring within these crises.¹ The first is the Russian decision to *annex* territory (the Crimea) from Ukraine. Annexation of territory violates one of the core norms of the modern international system—the norm against territorial conquest.² The second use-of-force case is that Russian decision to *covertly* involve itself in the Ukrainian internationalized civil war to determine the composition and alignment of the next Ukrainian government. The decision to employ forces covertly against a government from whom territory was also captured through annexation is an especially puzzling feature of Russian-sponsored violence in Ukraine. The third armed violence scenario this report seeks to explain is the Russian decision to directly involve its armed forces, serving under Russian banners, against Georgia in 2008.

Specifically, this report asks: *How and why were Russian militarized activities in Georgia and Ukraine different? Why did these conflicts militarize when they did whereas at other times less militarized conflict management responses obtained?* With regards to the Ukrainian portion of the analysis, the report answers the questions: *In what ways is Russia militarily involved in the current Ukrainian crisis, and what are the conditions that led to the Russian decision to annex Crimea?* With respect to Georgian analysis, the

¹ On the methodology of comparative historical analysis, please see: Mahoney, James, and Dietrich Rueschemeyer. "Comparative historical analysis." *Comparative historical analysis in the social sciences* (2003): 3-38.

² The territorial integrity norm was most succinctly articulated by Zacher 2001 and Anstis et al. 2010 as the basic idea that internationally-recognized borders are fixed and most states at various levels of capability are deeply invested in perpetrating existing borders. This systemic equilibrium functions as a "norm" about concerning the inter-state use of force: states after 1945 rarely ever use force to change the territorial status quo. This normative equilibrium obtains, Brooks 2007 argues, because territorial expansion no longer confers economic benefit to the conquering state. Kornprobst refines the territorial norm to show that how elites follow the norm is embedded in sub-regional social contexts of conflict management. Kornprobst contrasts the sub-conflict regional management sub-cultures of West Africa and the Horn of Africa—border disputes escalate in the Horn of Africa but not in West Africa—in service of this point. See: Zacher, Mark W. "The territorial integrity norm: International boundaries and the use of force." *International Organization* 55, no. 02 (2001): 215-250. St. J Anstis, Sebastian C., and Mark W. Zacher. "The normative bases of the global territorial order." *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 21, no. 2 (2010): 306-323. Brooks, Stephen G. *Producing security: Multinational corporations, globalization, and the changing calculus of conflict*. Princeton University Press, 2007. Kornprobst, Markus. "The management of border disputes in African regional sub-systems: comparing West Africa and the Horn of Africa." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 40, no. 03 (2002): 369-393.

report asks: *In what ways was Russia militarily involved in the Georgia War?* This report will inductively theorize *divergent* trajectories of Russian military involvement to inform the statistical model selection on conflict and cooperation in the next report.

The answers to these questions emphasize the importance of four factors, which combine to cause Russia to *seek militarized solutions* to ongoing international crises. These factors are:

1. The presence of a **domestic crisis** in a country within Russia's orbit and/or sphere of interest³;
2. **International polarization**, often involving NATO expansion, regarding the foreign policy alignment of the country;
3. The degree to which the country is **integrated** into international institutions sponsored by the United States and its allies; and
4. The presence of domestic practices and institutions supporting **regional autonomy** and electoral mobilization.

These four factors structure how and where Russia will use force. Importantly, explaining the choice of militarized involvement, however, is only one dimension of forecasting the Russian calculation to use force outside of its borders; this report also accounts for the *form* that the militarized involvement can take. Specifically, the report argues that integration into international institutions determines whether Russia will use covert or direct force and that the presence of regional autonomy shapes whether Russia can annex territory. The report expands on the evidence for these states in detail in the following sections, but here I offer a brief summary. Domestic crises within countries within the Russian spheres of influence and civilization along with significant international polarization are jointly sufficient in creating conditions of militarized interstate crises. International polarization, particularly if it involves the potential for NATO expansion, increases the salience of the crisis within Russian decision-making circles. This increase salience creates a militarized response on Russia's part to increase the cost to the target country of aligning with major powers outside of Russia's orbit.

Applying this comparative historical framework to Ukraine is relatively straightforward: The framework needs to explain how the choices for annexation and covert intervention got made. A domestic crisis is a central critical antecedent in this narrative.⁴ Russia had a close, cooperative relationship with Ukraine from 2010 until 2013. After the Ukrainian government was toppled in a popular uprising, the relationship turned openly hostile. Russia then invaded Ukraine, seized the Crimean peninsula, and supports antigovernment fighters in Eastern Ukraine. There would be no militarized crisis without the beleaguered Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, who fled the country in the aftermath of a massive economic crisis. Likewise, the domestic economic and political crises would not have been as combustible

³ On why Russia cares about domestic crises near its borders, please see: Stevenson, John. "The Influence of Nationalism on Russian Security Policy: The Logics of Order and Terrorism in the Shift from Nation-State to Nation-Civilization," College Park, MD: START, 2015; and Stevenson, John, and Garrett Tippin. "Russian Military Transfers and Arms Sales," College Park, MD: START, 2015.

⁴ Soifer, Hillel David. "The causal logic of critical junctures." *Comparative Political Studies* 45, no. 12 (2012): 1572-1597.

if the international alignment of the Ukrainian government—pro-West or pro-Russia—was not complicated by intensifying geopolitical competition and polarization.

Ukraine's economic statecraft to navigate crises netted it assistance offers from both Russia and the EU. This meant functionally the Ukrainian government had to choose between aligning with the EU or remaining "politically loyal" to the Russian Federation, trapping Yanukovich between two competing international political blocs, neither of which would make his regime more stable in the long run.⁵ The EU's offer promised larger economic benefits, but at the cost of worsening relations with Russia and vast domestic institutional reforms that may have led to the downfall of his government. Russia's offer promised less economically and would effectively turn Ukraine into a Russian vassal state due to a series of basing agreements that came along with Russian economic support. Once Yanukovich decided to accept Russia's economic assistance, massive protests against his government broke out. Protests started, many people joined, and encounters with police turned the capital city into a warzone.

In effort to stabilize the situation, negotiations were held and Yanukovich was ousted from office after which Russia annexed Crimea. However, the Russian annexation of Crimea cannot be justified solely by a reaction to the protests in Kiev. Crimea's regional autonomy, and in particular the fractured electoral process in Ukraine, made compulsion possible by presenting Russia's redefinition of its borders as a response to democratic and humanitarian impulses. Ukraine's legislation restricting the use of Russian language only strengthened the case that Russia's motives were not intended as aggression.

Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, who came to power due to the so-called Rose Revolution of 2003, is a Western-educated lawyer deeply committed to bringing his country into NATO and challenging Russian hegemony in the southern Caucasus.⁶ Because his government replaced the Russian-leaning regime of Eduard Shevardnadze, and, as a critical part of the official Russian civilization-state discourse concerning Georgia was that "Russia and Georgia are closely related, fraternal peoples," the new regime's pro-European, NATO-friendly foreign policy intensified the international polarization in the region.⁷ Georgia's domestic crisis was self-imposed: Saakashvili decided in the summer of 2008 to reincorporate two separatist regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. While this move was support by a shift in NATO policy, it created an economic collapse in South Ossetia that enabled Russia to sign agreements with these territories as a semi-sovereign designation within a Russian civilization framework. Georgia military activity against the separatist regions provoked a direct military response from Russia, as it was not constrained by Georgian membership in the major rival international institutions (NATO/EU). Russia did not annex the separatist regions because all institutions supporting autonomous regions in Georgia had

⁵ On the importance of political loyalty in Russian foreign policy decision-making, see: Andrei P. Tsygankov, "If not by thanks, then by banks"? The Role of Soft Power in Putin's Foreign Policy" *Europe-Asia Studies* 58: 7 (2006), pp. 1079-1099.

⁶ Kolstø, Pål, and Aleksander Rusetskii. "Power differentials and identity formation: Images of self and other on the Russian-Georgian boundary." *National Identities* 14, no. 2 (2012): 139-155.

⁷ Kolstø, Pål, and Aleksander Rusetskii. "Power differentials and identity formation: Images of self and other on the Russian-Georgian boundary." *National Identities* 14, no. 2 (2012), p. 140.

been destroyed; instead, it signed free passage and free trade agreements, and recognized the regions as independent states.

This report is structured as follows. First, I distinguish between types of coercion. Second, I walk through the two phases of a comparative historical analysis of crisis militarization: (1) explaining the origin of a militarized international crisis with Russia; and then (2) the form of militarization the international crisis takes. This part of the report culminates in a graphical depiction of the decision model. The report then actually interrogates the history in each case, using the model to illuminate how the Russia decisions to use force in specific ways unfolded in and through time. The report then concludes with brief reflections on what this means for engagement with Russia.

Coercion and Crisis Bargaining

Analyzing the differing trajectories between direct military involvement and covert uses of force is important for crisis bargaining and deterrence. Direct military involvement is a classic form of power politics, and therefore these situations should be easiest to exert deterrence pressures on through conventional force posture and diplomatic communication. In contrast, covert military involvement is designed precisely to avoid escalation and deterrent responses all while promoting regime change. Covert regime change comprises clandestine actions undertaken expressly to replace the leadership of another state during peacetime, where the intervening state does not intend for its role to be apparent or acknowledged publicly.⁸ Covert activities in support or against a foreign government are also important practices of international politics. The United States' National Security Council stated in Directive 10/2 that "the overt foreign activities of the U.S. Government must be supplemented by covert operations... so planned and executed that any U.S. government responsibility for them is not evident to unauthorized persons and if uncovered the U.S. Government can plausibly disclaim any responsibility for them."⁹

When policymakers believe that a regime change operation could be considered a justified intervention by international observers, they conduct the mission overtly. On the other hand, if policymakers believe the mission could be considered illegitimate because it violates norms of justified intervention, they conduct it covertly. Covert military operations allow leaders to conform outwardly to collective expectations for appropriate behavior while secretly violating those norms.

⁸ These actions can include assassinating foreign leaders, sponsoring coup d'états, manipulating electoral results, as well as aiding, funding, and arming dissident groups in their efforts to overthrow the government. As the comparison cases do not allow for a more expansive view of covert activity, this conceptualization excludes such other forms of covert activity not designed to replace the governmental leadership of a foreign power: counterintelligence, diplomacy, operational security, or propaganda and excludes covert efforts to prop-up a state's allies through publicly unacknowledged financial or military aid.

⁹ National Security Council Directive 10/2 (1948). The Directive specifies that covert operations include covert activities related to propaganda; economic warfare; preventative direct actions, including sabotage, anti-sabotage, demolition, and evacuation measures; subversion against hostile states, including assistance to underground resistance movements, guerillas, and refugee liberation groups, and support of indigenous anti-communist elements in threatened countries of the free world.

In the case of the Ukrainian internationalized civil war, Russia has pursued a policy of only pursuing actions that can be construed as legal under current international law. Since 1945, when it comes to the legal and direct uses of force across borders, three types of threats are viewed as normatively appropriate to use force: operations to correct third-party violations of territorial borders, attempts to settle civil conflicts that result in humanitarian disasters, and efforts to prevent massive terrorist attacks. The United States has supported formalizing several of these norms into international law by signing the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights as well as the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which calls on signatories “to prevent and to punish” genocide during peace or wartime.¹⁰ Moreover, cross-border military operations must follow the core principle that interventions must be multilateral and must have United Nations’ support to be considered legitimate. Because none of these conditions are met in Ukraine’s internationalized civil war, Russia has pursued a strategy of covert regime change action.

The question of annexation is just as important a process to explain as covert regime change operations. Territory has long ranked as perhaps the foremost issue over which states come into conflict and is the issue most associated with the onset of war.¹¹ Territorial acquisitiveness and expansion, moreover, is not always synonymous for a revisionist foreign policy: The international relations literature has long held that territorial expansion can occur for security-seeking as well as revisionist motives as a part of crisis bargaining.¹² Included in security-driven territorial expansion are motives that range from “increasing resources and resource autonomy”¹³ to “decreasing adversary resources and in extreme cases eliminating its adversary as a sovereign state.”¹⁴

While *conquering* territory as a part of inter-state war is a well understood tradition, unilaterally *annexing* territorial as part of a bargaining process in international crises is less well explicated. Annexation of territory, I argue, is better understood as an issue of *coercion during crisis bargaining* rather than as a settlement after the termination of crisis bargaining and inter-state war.¹⁵ This form of coercion is known as compulsion, and seeks to prevent future escalation and increase the security of the targeting state in relationship to the targeted state.

¹⁰ *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*. 2002. See: Lippman, Matthew. "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide: Fifty Years Later, The." *Arizona Journal of International & Comparative Law*. 15 (1998): 415.

¹¹ Vasquez, John, and Marie T. Henahan. "Territorial disputes and the probability of war, 1816-1992." *Journal of Peace Research* 38, no. 2 (2001): 123-138.

¹² Glaser, Brecher, Michael, and Jonathan Wilkenfeld. 1997. *A Study of Crisis*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. Jervis, Robert. "Cooperation under the security dilemma." *World politics* 30, no. 02 (1978): 167-214. Lebow, R.N., 2010. *Why nations fight: past and future motives for war*. Cambridge University Press.

¹³ Glaser, Charles L. *Rational theory of international politics: the logic of competition and cooperation*. Princeton University Press, 2010, p. 36.

¹⁴ Glaser, Charles L. *Rational theory of international politics: the logic of competition and cooperation*. Princeton University Press, 2010, p. 36.

¹⁵ Wittman, Donald. "How a war ends a rational model approach." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 23, no. 4 (1979): 743-763. Wagner, R. Harrison. "Bargaining and war." *American Journal of Political Science* (2000): 469-484.

Rationalist bargaining approaches to the study of international crises identify three types of coercive strategies. Coercion is any use or threat of the use of force that stops short of military defeat of the target in a major war.¹⁶ Two forms of coercion are well known: compellence and deterrence.¹⁷ The third type of coercion—compulsion—is less well known.¹⁸

1. Compellence is coercion (threat of violence) demanding that a target revise to the status quo. Sechser best defines compellence as an “explicit demand by one state (the challenger) that another state (the target) alter the status quo in some material way, backed by a threat of military force if the target does not comply.”¹⁹ If the target does not act to change the status quo, then compellence is considered to have failed.
2. Deterrence is coercion demanding that the target maintain the status quo. Any action taken by the target to alter the status quo is a deterrence failure.²⁰
3. Compulsion is limited brute force unilaterally imposing a relative gain at a target's expense. Compulsion fails if the targeting state cannot unilaterally maintain the imposition.²¹

Each of these strategies are pursued to cause specific distributional outcomes during or after a crisis--what rational theorists refer to as bargaining.²²

This discussion of the types of coercion is of particular relevance in the ongoing Ukrainian crisis, given Russia's unilateral annexation of Crimea. Daniel Altman refers to annexation as a type of compulsion called "*fait accompli territorial land grabs*" which he defines as occurring when "one state uses its military to unilaterally seize a disputed piece of territory with the intention to assume control of that territory."²³ According to Altman's data, from 1945 to 2014, 76 land grabs occurred. One of the 76 occurred due to compellence—Indonesia compelled the Netherlands into transferring its holdings in New Guinea to Indonesia. Seventy-five of the 76 land grabs happened by *fait accompli*. In so far as annexation-via-compulsion, like other forms of coercion, fall into the middle ground between waging war for territory, international arbitration and cooperative diplomatic resolutions, explaining the Russian choice to pursue strategies of compulsory territorial gain are critical to explaining where Russia sees the line between peace and war.

¹⁶ Pape, Robert A. *Bombing to win: Air power and coercion in war*. Cornell University Press, 1996. Pillar, Paul R. *Negotiating peace: War termination as a bargaining process*. Princeton University Press, 2014.

¹⁷ Schelling 1996. Schelling distinguished between coercion and “brute force,” with the latter including genocide and mass killing. However, subsequent research in political science and strategic studies on coercion has come to not only view mass killing, in some instances, as a form of coercion (Valentino 2005; Stevenson 2014), but to include all forces of militarized interaction short of outright defeat in war (Pape 1996).

¹⁸ One of the most robust rationalist accounts of compulsion is to be found in Gruber, Lloyd. *Ruling the world: Power politics and the rise of supranational institutions*. Princeton University Press, 2000. In this account, powerful countries use institutions to remove certain kinds of status quo equilibrium from weaker states, forcing them to choose between two bad options (from the weak states' points of view). This ability to choose the choices is a form of coercion and power politics.

¹⁹ Sechser, Todd S. Militarized Compellent Threats, 1918–2001. *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 28 (4) (2011): 377-401.

²⁰ Reiter, Dan. "Exploring the bargaining model of war." *Perspectives on Politics* 1, no. 01 (2003): 27-43.

²¹ Gruber, Lloyd. *Ruling the world: Power politics and the rise of supranational institutions*. Princeton University Press, 2000.

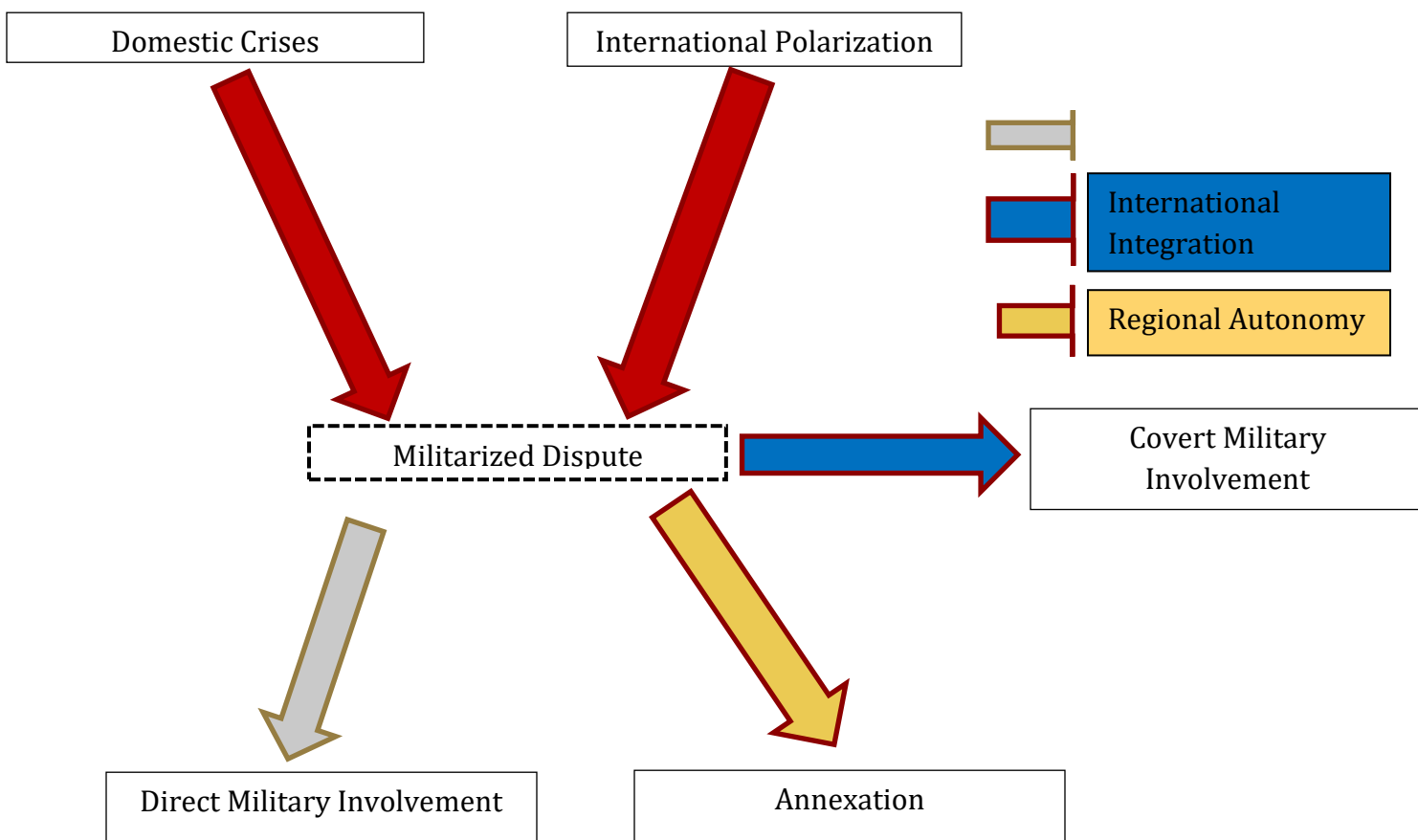
²² Reiter, Dan. "Exploring the bargaining model of war." *Perspectives on Politics* 1, no. 01 (2003): 27-43.

²³ Daniel Altman, "By *Fait Accompli*, Not Coercion: How States Wrest Territory from Their Adversaries", Working Paper 2015, http://www.danielaltman.com/uploads/3/2/3/1/32312379/altman_by_fait_accompli.pdf.

Explaining Divergent Crisis Trajectories

The ideal method for inductive theorization of divergent trajectories is comparative historical analysis.²⁴ Within non-statistical methods, comparative historical analysis has a long, distinguished tradition of induction and analysis of intertwined historical processes. Moreover, as there are only three outcomes to account for *annexation* (Crimea), *covert military involvement* (Ukraine) and *direct military involvement* (Georgia), comparison of the foreign policy decision-making is the best method for identifying likely causal factors into a generalizable model of five factors depicted in **Error! Reference source not found.** below.

Figure 1: Theory of Russian Cross-Border Uses of Forces



²⁴ Mahoney, James. 2003. "Strategies of Causal Assessment in Comparative Historical Analysis", in *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*. James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemey, editors. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. When Will Russia Use Force in Support of Foreign Policy Objectives? Comparative Evidence from the Ukrainian (2014) and Georgia (2008) Crises

The foundation of this analysis is that *domestic crises during high levels of international polarization* are very bad for peaceful foreign policy interactions.²⁵ Domestic crises within countries in Russian spheres of influence and civilization along with significant international polarization are jointly sufficient in creating conditions of militarized interstate crises. International polarization, particularly if it involves the potential for NATO expansion or extends the reach of the EU policy preferences, increases the salience of the crisis within Russian decision-making circles.

What are these two factors so crucial to predicting when Russia will use force outside of its borders? There are two important aspects of this model to explain in more detail: why *domestic* crises also cause *international* crises, and why NATO bothers Russia so much.

Domestic crises create danger because of the potential to trigger regime change. When friendly governments face insurgencies or social instability, major powers frequently step in and provide diplomatic, military, and financial support. The United States and Soviet Union did so during the Cold War, and the United States and Russia still do. One of the United States' most important policies since World War II relates to the composition of regimes—the ways in which elites use domestic institutions to govern and the kinds of domestic institutions used in governance—as well as the composition of cartels—the sets of elites ruling the state; these policies are pursued sometimes overtly, sometimes covertly. Prominent recent examples include Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. This concern over regimes and cartels is not behavior isolated to Russia and the United States; France has long aided friendly governments in its former African colonies, hoping to stabilize them. Much of today's assistance comes in the form of conventional counter-terrorism forces. For instance, "Operation Barkhane is essentially a French anti-terrorist combat force of 3000 men, permanently stationed in the African Sahel. It has a centralized command headquartered in Chad and includes heavy arms, notably about 40 planes for combat and intelligence operations, stationed in various parts of the region."²⁶

Domestic regime composition has international implications because a state's foreign policies can dramatically shift in the wake of regime change. Other states know this and react accordingly. These shifts from regime change are not temporary aberrations. If the new regime survives, the policy changes are likely to be long-lasting and so are the international consequences. Regime changes have this effect because they produce organizational changes within the state itself, sometimes slowly, sometimes rapidly. States are not fixed set of capabilities and operating levers. The state is an institutional complex that can be substantially reshaped when a new regime takes power.

Domestic crises produce militarization because Russia's concern, like most other major powers, is regime security for important export partners and pro-Russian governments within the territory of the former Soviet Union. In so far as the post-colonial territorial integrity norm prevents European and American

²⁵ Cadier, David, and Margot Light. "Conclusion: Foreign Policy as the Continuation of Domestic Politics by Other Means." In *Russia's Foreign Policy*, pp. 204-216. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015.

²⁶ Daniel Woker, "France's counter-terrorism role in Africa: No more Afghanistans" in *The Interpreter*, accessed at: <http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2014/08/01/france-counter-terrorism-africa.aspx>.

countries from directly governing states they attack, the battle over regime alignment has increased salience relative to the battle for territory: most of the major post-war (WWII) institutions designed to keep the territorial peace are also regularly used to promote regime change and democratization. A part of political science known as “international political economy” theorizes and catalogs this transformation. Robert Gilpin's historical work demonstrates a system of capitalist economic order designed to rival Soviet economic policy produces domestic institutional support within “Western” states through a series of conferences and international organizations.²⁷ Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth's argue that the United States won the Cold War through a capitalist containment of the Soviet sphere (in Europe) backed by NATO.²⁸ Stephen Rosato demonstrates that United States' foreign policy had a direct hand in promoting the first customs unions, known as the European Coal and Steel Community, between West Germany and France and that both France and German bought into sharing these critical industrial resources to eliminate the problem of differential growth believed to have triggered two world wars. Whereas Soviet economic policy destroyed foreign policy independence, the American-led capitalist model locked key rivals in growth-limiting and resource-sharing collectives, organized through globalized production, around the needs of a U.S.-dominated military alliance.²⁹

In short, major states have always been attuned to the potential changes in foreign policy that domestic crises can wrought, especially as international politics institutionalized after the Second World War;³⁰ it should not be surprising that the *responses* to domestic crises could similarly intertwine with international politics. This leads into the next aspect of how domestic crises lead to Russian militarization: Russia's overwhelming concern about the long-term effects of NATO expansion on Russian security, irrespective of what NATO claims its goals are.

Russia accepted that NATO was necessary to prevent a militarized Germany and had been critical in allaying fears of Western Germany's economic rise.³¹ As the Cold War came to a close, Soviet leaders preferred NATO forces remain in Europe, an arrangement they thought would keep a reunited Germany peacefully aligned toward its neighbors.³² Importantly, Russian/Soviet leaders were interested in keeping the status quo: peaceful Germany in a stable Europe with unchanged NATO boundaries. These leaders assumed that Western diplomats understood their concerns about NATO expansion.

²⁷ Gilpin, Robert. *Global Political Economy*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001.

²⁸ Brooks, Stephen G., and William C. Wohlforth. 2001. "Power, Globalization, And The End Of The Cold War: Reevaluating A Landmark Case For Ideas." *International Security* 25 (3) (2001): 5-53. doi:10.1162/016228800560516.

²⁹ Caverley, Jonathan D. "United States hegemony and the new economics of defense." *Security Studies* 16, no. 4 (2007): 598-614.

³⁰ Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, Mette and Verdier. Daniel. "European integration as a solution to war." *European Journal of International Relations* 11, no. 1 (2005): 99-135.

³¹ Hartrich, Edwin. "The Fourth and Richest Reich: How the Germans Conquered the Postwar World." (1980) Ninkovich, Frank A. *Germany and the United States: the transformation of the German question since 1945*. No. 2. Twayne Pub, 1995. Smith, Tony. *America's mission: the United States and the worldwide struggle for democracy*. Princeton University Press, 2012. Jackson, Patrick Thaddeus. *Civilizing the enemy: German reconstruction and the invention of the West*. University of Michigan Press, 2006.

³² Stepashin, Sergey. "Russia and NATO: A vital partnership for European security." *The RUSI Journal* 138, no. 4 (1993): 11-17. Hines, John G., Phillip A. Petersen, and Notra Trulock Iii. "Soviet Military Theory from 1945–2000: Implications for NATO." *Washington Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (1986): 117-137.

Whether the leaders at the time in the Bush I, Clinton and Bush II Administrations understood the agreement as Russia understood it, NATO expanded significantly nevertheless. The first round of enlargement took place in 1999 and brought in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. The second occurred in 2004; it included Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Russia leaders complained stridently during each round of NATO expansion, and yet expansion continued with Albania and Croatia becoming members in 2009.

Russia protests were not unheard; they were even answered, though never in a way that seemed to seriously acknowledge Russian concerns. For instance, NATO has always been clear that its policies of expansion were no longer about containment. In addition, new member states did not host forward-deployed forces and starting in 2009, warships, rather than member states closer to Russia such as the Czech Republic or Poland, hosted new missile defense systems. To open lines of strategic communication, NATO created the NATO-Russia Council in 2002, well before two additional rounds of expansion let in nine additional members.

Despite these confidence-building measures, NATO expansion, more than other factor in the model, is contributing to the international polarization that allows domestic crises to spark into international crises, especially concerning Georgia and Ukraine, where Russia made clear NATO was not welcome. When NATO announced in 2008 that Georgia and Ukraine “will become members of NATO,” NATO created the preconditions for domestic crises in these countries to spark international crises.³³

NATO membership provides regime security to non-pro-Russian governments while also curtailing Russia’s response to politically disloyal regimes in what it considers its sphere of influence. (Moreover, generally NATO partners do not purchase Russian weapons; Russian foreign military sales are a very important export-related aspect of Russian economic foreign policy.) It would be hyperbole to say that NATO has done nothing to communicate non-hostility; however, it seems there is little that NATO can do, as long as it keeps expanding, to communicate a non-threatening posture. While this may seem defeatist and pessimistic, it is ultimately the Russians, not the West, who ultimately get to decide what counts as a threat to them.

Integration into international institutions determines whether Russia will use force covertly or directly; and the presence of regional autonomy shapes whether Russia can annex territory. Integration into international institutions increases the importance of regime alignment for Russian foreign policy goals since Russia can directly intervene military to reverse policies it does not like within countries that are outside of key international institutions.

³³ Reuters, De Spiegel, "NATO Expansion Defeat: France and Germany Thwart Bush's Plans," April 03, 2008. Accessed at: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/nato-expansion-defeat-france-and-germany-thwart-bush-s-plans-a-545078.html>. See also: Steven Erlanger and Steven Lee Myers, "NATO Allies Oppose Bush on Georgia and Ukraine", April 03, 2008. Accessed at: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/03/world/europe/03nato.html?_r=0.

International institutions have this shaping effect on Russia's use of force patterns because membership and integration into international institutions enables the target of Russian militarized activity pre-established fora through which the target can organize a collective, international response to Russia. For countries outside of these institutions, they would have to build relationships and lines of communication contemporaneously with a response to Russia's militarized activity.

Similarly to NATO membership expansion, Russia sees EU expansion as a threat to the international order they sustain through the Commonwealth of Independent States and European Customs Union. The European Union's European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) launched in 2004 and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) launched in 2009 seeks to institutionalize and integrate states emerging from the former Soviet Union,³⁴ including Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia.³⁵ Officially, the ENP encourages economic integration and political association of European countries outside of the EU; in practice what this means is that the member states of the EU grant favored access to the EU market in return for extensive political, economic and administrative reforms in the target country.³⁶ Russia reacted strongly against the EaP's launch, condemning "this new EU initiative in terms that had until then been reserved for NATO."³⁷

Whereas international institutions provide instructional frameworks for organizing collective responses to Russian foreign policy behavior, thereby constraining Russia's militarized options, regional autonomy agreements provide domestic institutional pathways for direct annexation, expanding Russia's militarized options. Specifically, electoral processes, such as plebiscites and referendum, enable Russia to claim it is responding to domestic sentiment rather than organizing an invasion outright. Respect for democratic and electoral processes limits the power politics responses of European and American responders in these circumstances.³⁸

How Geopolitical Competition Caused International Polarization Involving Ukraine and Georgia

Heretofore the report has theorized that certain kinds of international institutions polarize the international environment. I now turn in this section to show specifically how international polarization occurred vis a vis Ukraine and Georgia.

³⁴ Cadier, David. "Eastern partnership vs Eurasian Union? The EU–Russia competition in the shared neighbourhood and the Ukraine crisis." *Global Policy* 5, no. s1 (2014): 76-85.

³⁵ Chatham House. "Soft Power? The Means and Ends of Russian Influence." REP Seminar Summary (2011): 1-25.

³⁶ Cadier, David. "Eastern partnership vs Eurasian Union? The EU–Russia competition in the shared neighbourhood and the Ukraine crisis." *Global Policy* 5, no. s1 (2014): 76-85.

³⁷ Cadier, David. "Eastern partnership vs Eurasian Union? The EU–Russia competition in the shared neighbourhood and the Ukraine crisis." *Global Policy* 5, no. s1 (2014): p.79. See also: Russia's Lavrov lashes EU over new "Eastern Partnership", *EUbusiness*, 22 March 2009.

³⁸ Hyde, Susan D. "Catch us if you can: Election monitoring and international norm diffusion." *American Journal of Political Science* 55, no. 2 (2011): 356-369. Svoboda, Milan, and Svitlana Chernykh. "Third-Party Actors and the Success of Democracy: How Electoral Commissions, Courts, and Observers Shape Incentives for Election Manipulation and Post-Election Protest." *Journal of Politics* 77, no. 2 (2014): 407-420.

Ukraine is split between Eastern Ukrainians with pro-Russian sympathies and Western Ukrainians more oriented toward Europe.³⁹ Ukrainians from the west historically have done everything physically possible to maintain independence from any imperialist power, which, in their mind includes Russian domination. Eastern Ukrainians, on the other hand, trace their collective lineage to the Kievan Rus' via the triune people's thesis.⁴⁰ The political imaginaries of Eastern Ukraine draw from the same genealogies and political rhetoric as those of the Russian civilization-state movement to a time when Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus were under the same rule.⁴¹

The foreign policy orientation of Ukraine, thereby, is highly dependent on which regime is in power in Kiev as different governing coalitions draw from different sectors of Ukrainian society.⁴² In 2002, Leonid Kuchma, the second president of Ukraine, sought membership in NATO in effort to balance Russian influence. This became a contentious issue in Ukrainian politics, and when Yushchenko took over the presidency, he was not on board with integration into NATO. Russia used this bureaucratic disagreement as leverage to help convince the Ukrainian citizens that Western integration leads to political destabilization.⁴³

Similarly, Russian discomfort with eastward expansion of NATO and the European Union militarized both the Georgian conflict in 2008 and the aftermath of the coup in Ukraine. In Russia's eyes, NATO expansion means threats of encirclement and a unipolar western world. Since the Crimean War of 1853-1856, Russia has feared European countries working together against it. NATO expansion, from a Russophile perspective reduces the OSCE framework's importance of using non-military multilateral organizations to limit crisis escalation. Moreover, Russian policy elites argued that embedding Eastern European countries into American-dominated institutions will force them to accept Western policy decisions. As a result, the world will become unipolar and not remain multipolar as Russia would prefer. For example, in the context of Georgia, anthropologist and neurobiologist Kirill Reznikov asserts: "Saakashvilli and his brothers-in-arms have repeated so many times that Georgia is a European country...But this is not true, it is all a matter of political manipulation...The problem is that this idea of Georgian Europeanness provides the basis on which an immense geopolitical game against Russia is constructed."⁴⁴

In 2008, both the United States' and Russia's foreign policy toward the region shifted. These changes in policy began in April 2008. NATO's April 2008 summit in Bucharest involved, among other things, deciding whether to admit Georgia and Ukraine. Disagreement within NATO prevented the successful bids: "While Canada, the United Kingdom and many Eastern European countries had backed the US push

³⁹ Riabchuk, Mykola. "Ukraine: One State, Two Countries?" *Transit* 23 (2002).

⁴⁰ Gvozdev, Nikolas K. "Ukraine's Ancient Hatreds." *The National Interest* (2014) 16-24.

⁴¹ Gvozdev, Nikolas K. "Ukraine's Ancient Hatreds." *The National Interest* (2014) 16-24.

⁴² D'Anieri, Paul. "What has changed in Ukrainian politics?: assessing the implications of the orange revolution." *Problems of Post-Communism* 52, no. 5 (2005): 82-91.

⁴³ Chatham House. "Soft Power? The Means and Ends of Russian Influence." REP Seminar Summary (2011): 1-25.

⁴⁴ Kolstø, Pål, and Aleksander Rusetskii. "Power differentials and identity formation: Images of self and other on the Russian-Georgian boundary." *National Identities* 14, no. 2 (2012): p. 141.

to see the NATO alliance expand eastwards, France and Germany have warned that this would unnecessarily provoke Russia, which has voiced concerns about the alliance's expansion to its borders."⁴⁵

In April 2008, President Putin formally withdrew CIS sanctions to permit Russian trade and investment in the separatist regions, and established, via presidential directive, "government-to-government ties with Abkhazia and South Ossetia."⁴⁶ In response, U.S. policy shifted from supporting existing conflict management frameworks toward aiding Georgian calls for alternative settlement mechanisms.⁴⁷ The United States and its allies—Great Britain, France and Germany—even went so far as to reprimanded Russia in the United Nations Security Council: These countries expressed that they were "highly concerned about the latest initiative to establish official ties with Abkhazia and South Ossetia without the consent of the Government of Georgia. We call on the Russian Federation to revoke or not to implement its decision."⁴⁸ In addition to these diplomatic condemnations, NATO, through training exercises, increased its activity in Georgia. NATO's main goal was to strengthen the capacity of the Georgia state to better maintain internal security within its existing recognized international border.

Importantly, these aspects of geopolitical competition increased international polarization ignited the Georgian and Ukrainian crises into an international militarized crisis.

Domestic Crisis in Ukraine

The taproot of Ukraine's domestic crisis was the global financial crisis of 2008. The negative impacts of the global financial crisis were particularly acute in Ukraine: Between 2000 and 2007, Ukraine's GDP grew on average by 24% a year.⁴⁹ Its GDP peaked at \$178 billion USD in 2008.⁵⁰ Beginning in 2008, Ukraine's economy severely contracted as existing economic inefficiencies became macroeconomic brakes on the larger economy. For example, the steel industry had been over-producing to make Chinese steel imports less competitive. After the global financial crisis, with a glut of available steel but no buyers,

⁴⁵ Reuters, De Spiegel, "NATO Expansion Defeat: France and Germany Thwart Bush's Plans," April 03, 2008. Accessed at: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/nato-expansion-defeat-france-and-germany-thwart-bush-s-plans-a-545078.html>. See also: Steven Erlanger and Steven Lee Myers, "NATO Allies Oppose Bush on Georgia and Ukraine", April 03, 2008. Accessed at: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/03/world/europe/03nato.html?_r=0.

⁴⁶ Nichol, Jim. *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia: Political Developments and Implications for US Interests*. DIANE Publishing, 2011, p. 13.

⁴⁷ Nichol, Jim. *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia: Political Developments and Implications for US Interests*. DIANE Publishing, 2011, p. 13.

⁴⁸ Nichol, Jim. *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia: Political Developments and Implications for US Interests*. DIANE Publishing, 2011, p. 13.

⁴⁹ Aslund, Anders. "Ukraine: Worst Hit by the Financial Crisis." Washington: Peterson Institute for International Economics. (2009): 4-29.

⁵⁰ Aslund, Anders. "Ukraine: Worst Hit by the Financial Crisis." Washington: Peterson Institute for International Economics. (2009): 4-29.

the market slumped resulting in the steel industry in Ukraine experiencing a decline in output of 13.4%.⁵¹ In addition, prices for a ton of semi-finished steel plummeted from \$1,000 to \$250.⁵²

The steel industry’s woes were synecdochic for the larger national economic crisis in Ukraine: The hryvnia (Ukrainian currency) was devalued in 2008 and caused an increase in foreign debt in private sectors. The devaluation not only increased the real value of Ukraine’s external debt balances, but, due to the reduced availability of credit during the financial crisis, prevented refinancing of any foreign loans and public sector debt. Debt service and limited external resource flows crowded out Ukraine’s ability to provide public goods and services.

The effects of the global financial crisis pushed Ukraine into an activist economic foreign policy, leading it to court two competing blocs for economic support—the European Union and Russia—thereby inflaming existing pro- and anti-Russian cleavages domestically.⁵³ Two offers resulted from this economic diplomacy, one from the European Union (EU) and one from Russia through the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU). Table 1: below offers a quick comparison of the two deals.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of the EU and ECU Offers

	DCFTA deal from the EU	ECU deal
History and Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The EU is made up of 28 member states. • The EU originated out of the European Coal and Steel Community founded in 1951 with member states Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Luxembourg.⁵⁴ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ECU was established in October 2007 by Russia. • The current members are Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia.
Duties and Tariffs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced import duties projected to save Ukrainian exporters €487m annually • Includes €330m relief for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukraine would get a share of import duties as a part of the ECU • 87.9% of current duties go to

⁵¹ Orlov, Oleksii. “Price Linkages Between Ukrainian Steel Market and The World Economy.” PhD Thesis, Kiev: Kiev School of Economics, 2009.

⁵² Stern, David. “Economic Crisis Sweeps Eastern Ukraine.” *Makeevka*, April 7, 2009. Accessed October 19, 2015.

⁵³ Cadier, David. "Eastern partnership vs Eurasian Union? The EU–Russia competition in the shared neighbourhood and the Ukraine crisis." *Global Policy* 5, no. s1 (2014): 76-85.

⁵⁴ Rosato, Sebastian. *Europe united: power politics and the making of the European Community*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011.

	<p>agricultural products.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes €26.8m relief on chemicals.⁵⁵ 	<p>Russia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belarus and Kazakhstan claiming 4.7% and 7.33% respectively. • Harmonization of sanitary food standards.⁵⁶
Energy Products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces tariffs on energy exports • Prohibits taking of or interrupting the transit of energy goods. • Ukraine must create an independent regulator to ensure competition and an efficient functioning of the gas and electricity market.⁵⁷ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gas prices are reduced up to \$8 billion per year.
Travel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukraine can eventually join the visa-free travel sphere within the EU. • Visa-free travel projected to lead to more tourism and revenue from tourism for Ukraine.⁵⁸ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECU does not need to provide visa-free incentives since Ukrainians are already permitted to stay in Russia up to 90 days without a visa.
Conditionality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukraine has to abide by sanitary and phytosanitary measures and animal welfare legislation set by the EU. • Ukraine must maintain effective competition laws and end sponsorship of government-backed monopolies. • Ukraine will apply EU rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ukraine would have to adopt ECU import tariffs for countries outside of the union.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ European Union. "EU-Ukraine Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area." Brussels, April 1, 2013. Accessed October 27, 2015.

⁵⁶ Dragneva, Rilka, and Kataryna Wolczuk. "Russia, the Eurasian Customs Union and the EU: cooperation, stagnation or rivalry?" Chatham House Briefing Paper REP BP 1 (2012).

⁵⁷ European Union. "EU-Ukraine Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area." Brussels, April 1, 2013. Accessed October 27, 2015.

⁵⁸ European Union. "EU-Ukraine Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area." Brussels, April 1, 2013. Accessed October 27, 2015.

	<p>on public procurement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-Ukrainian businesses in the EU must be able to compete for Ukrainian government business as if they were Ukrainian companies.⁵⁹ 	
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Yanukovich, nonetheless, was trying to thread of needle of international polarization. Ukraine accepting the EU association agreement would mean further integration with the west, and to Russia, it would mean losing a country in which it has political influence.⁶¹ There was no way to appease both Russian concerns and Ukrainian economic needs in relation to the EU association agreement since both sides are competing for the same area of influence. It was foreseeable that Yanukovich’s decision, either for EU or for ECU, would not have a peaceful resolution completely favorable to Ukraine.⁶²

His government had already signed the Kharkiv accords with Russia in the summer of 2010, extending the Russian lease on Sevastopol by 25 years from 2017 to 2042, in exchange for a 30% reduction in the price paid by Ukraine for gas imports from Russia from 2010-2019.⁶³ Sevastopol is an important port to Russia for many reasons, because it provides Russia with a warm water port. Russia also offered Ukraine the opportunity to join the ECU which is currently comprised of countries that used to make up the USSR.⁶⁴ Ukraine also gained much needed gas price relief before the onset of winter for nine years.

While negotiating and signing deals with Russia and the ECU, the Ukrainian government was also negotiating with the EU since 2007. The EU offered the Association Agreement (AA)—the first steps toward joining the EU as a member state—as well as the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) deal with Ukraine which would introduce Ukraine to the EU market and drastically lower tariffs.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Dragneva, Rilka, and Kataryna Wolczuk. "Russia, the Eurasian Customs Union and the EU: cooperation, stagnation or rivalry?" Chatham House Briefing Paper REP BP 1 (2012).

⁵⁹ European Union. "EU-Ukraine Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area." Brussels, April 1, 2013. Accessed October 27, 2015.

⁶¹ Dragneva, Rilka, and Kataryna Wolczuk. "Russia, the Eurasian Customs Union and the EU: cooperation, stagnation or rivalry?" Chatham House Briefing Paper REP BP 1 (2012).

⁶² Haukkala, Hiski. "From cooperative to contested Europe? The conflict in Ukraine as a culmination of a long-term crisis in EU–Russia relations." *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 23, no. 1 (2015): 25-40.

⁶³ Simon Pirani, Jonathan Stern, Katja Yafimava. "Russo-Ukrainian gas agreement and its implications for Europe." April, 2010. Formal Report, Oxford: Oxford Institute for Energy Studies.

⁶⁴ Cadier, David. "Eastern partnership vs Eurasian Union? The EU–Russia competition in the shared neighbourhood and the Ukraine crisis." *Global Policy* 5, no. s1 (2014): 76-85.

⁶⁵ Crawford, Jo-Ann, and Roberto V. Fiorentino. *The changing landscape of regional trade agreements*. Geneva: World Trade Organization, 2005. Panagariya, Arvind. "EU preferential trade arrangements and developing countries." *The World Economy* 25, no. 10 (2002): 1415-1432. Gawrich, Andrea, Inna Melnykovska, and Rainer Schweickert. "Neighbourhood Europeanization through ENP: the case of Ukraine." *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 48, no. 5 (2010): 1209-1235.

When Will Russia Use Force in Support of Foreign Policy Objectives? Comparative Evidence from the Ukrainian (2014) and Georgia (2008) Crises

The comparison set forth in Table 1: makes plain why Yanukovich could favor the EU deal over the ECU deal. Yet, despite the comparatively greater benefits of the EU deal to the ECU deal, Yanukovich chose the Russian deal and foreclosed the possibility of signing the comprehensive agreement with the EU. Putin sweetened the ECU deal with the gas agreement—a domestically salient pocket-book issues as most Ukrainians heat their homes over the winter with Russian gas. As soon as Yanukovich rejected the EU deal, his government concluded the \$15 million gas deal with Russia.⁶⁶

The day Yanukovich abandoned the DCFTA with the EU, protests began in Maidan. Then-opposition leader and now Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk took to Twitter⁶⁷ to mobilize the nation, calling for Ukrainians to join him in Maidan to protest Yanukovich's decision. On November 22 2013, the jailed Tymoshenko also urged Ukrainians to protest.⁶⁸ By November 24, there were an estimated 100,000 people rallying in Kiev. On November 30, the Berkut⁶⁹ riot police descended on the square without warning and began to beat protesters with rubber truncheons and fists. There were roughly 1,000 protesters at Maidan when the police arrived. Pictures from the BBC⁷⁰ show protesters bleeding from head wounds and the Berkut dragging protesters away by force. By early December, BBC⁷¹ estimates that over 800,000 people were rallying in Kiev and Maidan. Protesters also occupied Kiev City Hall.⁷²

The Kiev International Institute of Sociology⁷³ surveyed 1037 randomly selected protesters in order to ascertain the motives of protesters. The survey revealed three main causes for protesting as follows: 70% were protesting the November 30 violence against protesters; 53.5% were protesting over Yanukovich's refusal to sign the DCFTA; 50% were protesting for a change of life in Ukraine. Opposition appeals only accounted for 5% of the people surveyed, suggesting that the protests were not as politically motivated as originally thought. Moreover, 72.4% of those surveyed vowed to stay in Maidan for as long as necessary. Perhaps the vow to stay in Maidan as long as necessary is why February 20, 2014, was the bloodiest day in Ukraine in over 70 years.

⁶⁶ BBC. "Russia offers Ukraine major economic assistance." December 17, 2013. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25411118>.

⁶⁷ Arseniy Yatsenyuk, Twitter post, November 21, 2013, 1:22 am, https://twitter.com/Yatsenyuk_AP/status/403453433648148481

⁶⁸ Gabriela Baczyńska, Pavel Polityuk, Raissa Kasolowsky. Timeline: Political Crisis in Ukraine and Russia's Occupation of Crimea. Kiev, March 8, 2014.

⁶⁹ BBC. "Ukraine police disperse EU-deal protesters." November 30, 2013. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25164990>.

⁷⁰ BBC. "Ukraine police disperse EU-deal protesters." November 30, 2013. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25164990>.

⁷¹ BBC. "Ukraine Crisis: Timeline." November 13, 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26248275>.

⁷² BBC. "Ukraine Protesters: 'Fringe' demonstrators storm council." December 1, 2013. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25177679>.

⁷³ Kiev International Institute of Sociology. Maidan (2013). Press Release, Kiev: Kiev International Institute of Sociology.

These protests, in response to the government's plan concerning the EU deals, transformed the economic crisis into a domestic political crisis: the new government formed in the aftermath of the protest movement emerged out of some of the main political figures involved in those protests.⁷⁴

Domestic Crisis in Georgia: Self-Inflicted Instability

The foundation of the domestic crisis in Georgia lay in the policies of Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili initiated to (finally) re-incorporate two separatist regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. South Ossetia's place within and under Georgia sovereignty had been contested since its 1923 incorporation. This contested sovereignty was exacerbated by the collapse of the Soviet juridical arrangements.⁷⁵ Sporadic warfare escalated in 1992 when the Russians involved themselves on behalf of the South Ossetians.⁷⁶ On June 24, 1992, then Russian President Boris Yeltsin and then Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze agreed to a ceasefire; Georgian, South Ossetian, and Russian peacekeepers were deployed to South Ossetia to prevent further conflict.⁷⁷ When a Georgian nationalist president, Mikheil Saakashvili came into power in 2004, he aimed to pull South Ossetia back towards Georgian policy and lead the country towards the west to partner with NATO and the European Union.⁷⁸ Saakashvili made it his mission to clean up illegal traffic in South Ossetia and even pulled for the election of a fellow Georgian nationalist, Dmitry Sanakoyev, in a governing seat of the region. Under him, the separatist governments were weakened, and Georgian troops were sent in to South Ossetia to bomb illegal trade routes and shut down the Ergenti Market, a major trading post and hotbed for smuggling.⁷⁹

The closure of Ergenti Market was the beginning of Georgia's domestic crisis. The market was the economic center of South Ossetia—millions of dollars had flowed in and out of the market daily with no repercussions. By shutting down the Ergenti Market, Georgia and Saakashvili hoped that South Ossetia would turn to Georgia for help. Instead, the attack on the Ergenti Market made things worse for the relationship between the two. The local South Ossetian economy collapsed, souring the few friendly ties between Georgians and South Ossetians who frequented the market. Meanwhile, Russia used the market closure as an opportunity for economic leadership to rescue the peoples in Georgia from what Prime Minister Putin described as the "criminal policy of the current leadership" of Georgia.⁸⁰ Similarly, President Medvedev announced that "to us it is axiomatic that the Georgia people is of course not to be blamed for the aggression and the genocide [on the South Ossetian people]. This is the guilt of the

⁷⁴ Cadier, David. "Eastern partnership vs Eurasian Union? The EU–Russia competition in the shared neighbourhood and the Ukraine crisis." *Global Policy* 5, no. s1 (2014): 76-85.

⁷⁵ Stevenson, John. "The Influence of Nationalism on Russian Security Policy: The Logics of Order and Terrorism in the Shift from Nation-State to Nation-Civilization," College Park, MD: START, 2015.

⁷⁶ International Crisis Group. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/south-caucasus/georgia.aspx>.

⁷⁷ International Crisis Group. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/south-caucasus/georgia.aspx>.

⁷⁸ Strachota, Krzysztof, Bartuzi, Wojciech. *Reintegration or Reconquest? Georgia's policy towards Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the context of the internal and international situation*. Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies, 2008. Accessed November 20, 2015.

⁷⁹ Freedom House. "South Ossetia" Report, 2009. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2009/south-ossetia>.

⁸⁰ Kolstø, Pål, and Aleksander Rusetskii. "Power differentials and identity formation: Images of self and other on the Russian–Georgian boundary." *National Identities* 14, no. 2 (2012): 142.

criminal and irresponsible regime which unleashed this war.”⁸¹ Monies were sent and smuggling routes established to reinvigorate the region economically.⁸² As a result, one anonymous government official said “South Ossetia is more linked to Russia – 80 percent of their economy is linked. Before, it was dependent on Ergenti and Georgia.”⁸³

Why Russia Annexed Crimea and Not South Ossetia or Abkhazia

Russia ultimately was able to directly annex territory from Ukraine because Ukraine’s domestic political structure of Ukraine afforded Crimea more regional autonomy than the separatist regions in Georgia.

Crimean Succession

On February 21, Yanukovich signed a deal⁸⁴ with the opposition leaders to end the domestic political crisis. This signing was witnessed by Poland, Germany, and France; notably, Russia, though involved in the talks, refused to sign. The stipulated deal reverted Ukraine back to the constitution of 2004 and asserted that a national unity government would be formed within 10 days of the signing of the deal. Other clauses in the agreement included a mandate that the powers of the president, government, and parliament will be reformed and that there would be a joint investigation into the massacre on February 20.

By February 22, Yanukovich was gone. After signing a deal to end the protests on February 21, Yanukovich fled Ukraine on the 22 and surfaced in Rostov-on-Don. The leadership change was a regime change—precisely what Russia feared. Over the next three days, the new government made substantial changes including issuing a warrant for Yanukovich’s arrest and banning Russian as the second official language of Ukraine. Both of these actions served to demonstrate that the new government was not going to accommodate Russian geopolitical considerations in its domestic policies at all.

The central government targeting the Russian population gave Putin pretext to act. By March 1, the Russian parliament approved Putin’s request to use force in Ukraine in order to protect Russian interests. Ukraine is 17.3%⁸⁵ ethnically Russian and as of 2001 the Crimea population is 58.3%⁸⁶ ethnic Russians. The timing of the Duma’s authorization to use force and the threat posed to Russians in Ukraine suggest that humanitarian concern for the ethnic Russians was not the only consideration in Crimea, if present at all. The language ban from February 23 was repealed on February 27 in favor of a bill that claimed to better reflect the “interests of both eastern and western Ukraine and of all ethnic groups and minorities,”

⁸¹ Kolstø, Pål, and Aleksander Rusetskii. "Power differentials and identity formation: Images of self and other on the Russian–Georgian boundary." *National Identities* 14, no. 2 (2012): 142.

⁸² Freese, Theresa. "Smuggling to Survive." (2005). http://www.eurasianet.org/georgia/shida/story_print.html.

⁸³ Freese, Theresa. "Smuggling to Survive." (2005). http://www.eurasianet.org/georgia/shida/story_print.html.

⁸⁴ Ukraine, Poland, Germany, France. "Agreement on the Settlement of Crisis in Ukraine." Government Mandate, (2014) Kiev: Ukraine.

⁸⁵ Conant, Eve. "Ethnic Russians: Pretext for Putin's Ukraine Invasion?" May 2, 2014.

⁸⁶ Lubin, Gus "How Russians Became Crimea's Largest Ethnic Group In One Haunting Chart." March 16, 2014.

⁸⁷ according to then-acting president Aleksandr Turchinov, but was indistinguishable in substance from the bill it replaced.

Russia imposed this annexation on the new government as a way of showing its displeasure that a leadership change had also led to a “political revolution,” which occurs when there a major change in how and for whom the instruments of power are being used by the leadership, without a transformation of pre-revolution property relations.⁸⁸ Annexation of Crimea was the cost of a pro-Western/anti-Russian foreign policy of alignment because its military leases in Sevastopol, Crimea, especially the ones signed by the previous governments, would be something Russia would worry that an anti-Russian government would renege on. Crimea was a part of Russia proper since 1783⁸⁹ until it was transferred to Ukraine in 1954. When the Soviet Union fell in 1992, Crimea remained a part of Ukraine and Sevastopol became the subject of hotly contested lease agreements. Crimea was ceded to Ukraine as a “noble act on the part of the Russian people”⁹⁰ to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the reunification of Ukraine and Russia.

With Crimea remaining under Ukraine’s sovereign control, Russia would have to jump through hoops to keep Sevastopol if the regime changed. The Kharkiv accords allowed Russia to use Sevastopol until 2042, but with a new government it wasn’t guaranteed that they would view the accords as legitimate. By using military force, Russia seized Crimea for good, if they could keep it.

The conventional balance of force favors Russia over Ukraine, if Ukraine were to attempt a direct military response to reclaim Crimea. However, if Russian annexation provokes either internal resistance (to perceived occupation) or external resistance, as in the multilateral coalition to rollback Iraqi conquest of Kuwait in 1991, compulsion as a coercive strategy would have failed. Here the fractured electoral process in Ukraine, combined with the humanitarian pretext, favors a Russian referendum to solve both the internal and external dimensions of coordinated resistance. Given the prevalence of norms of respecting the results of elections—ironically and cynically deployed in this case in the aftermath of a pro-Western coup deposing the elected leader—the referendum was Russia’s “democratic” justification for the annexation of Crimea.⁹¹

This electoral process, however, could only play out because of the ways in which the domestic institutions of Ukraine granted Crimea regional autonomy. First, the local elites elected for unification

⁸⁷ Tass Russian News Agency. “Ukraine’s parliament-appointed acting president says language law to stay effective.” March 01, 2014.

⁸⁸ Trotsky, Leon. *The revolution betrayed: what is the Soviet Union and where is it going?* Mehring Books, 1937.

⁸⁹ Anderson, M.S. “The Great Powers and the Russian Annexation of the Crimea, 1783-4.” *The Slavonic and East European Review* (1958): 17-41.

⁹⁰ “Meeting of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,” February 19, 1954, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, GARF. F.7523. Op.57. D.963, L1-10. Published in “Istoricheskii arkhiv,” issue 1, vol. 1 (1992). Translated for CWIHP by Gary Goldberg. <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/119638>.

⁹¹ Hyde, Susan D. “Catch us if you can: Election monitoring and international norm diffusion.” *American Journal of Political Science* 55, no. 2 (2011): 356-369. Svoboda, Milan, and Svitlana Chernykh. “Third-Party Actors and the Success of Democracy: How Electoral Commissions, Courts, and Observers Shape Incentives for Election Manipulation and Post-Election Protest.” *Journal of Politics* 77, no. 2 (2014): 407-420.

with Russia: On March 6, 2014 Crimea's parliament voted to join Russia. A popular referendum—which Putin stated he would respect the results of—was held ten days later.⁹² The results of the referendum were that 95.6%⁹³ of voters supported rejoining Russia.

The Lack of Regional Autonomy in South Ossetia

South Ossetia lacked the regional autonomy that Crimea possessed, which meant that Russia could not manipulate a pre-existing electoral process. In 1989, the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast (SOAO) sent a request to the Georgian Supreme Soviet asking that South Ossetia be made an Autonomous Republic which frustrated Georgian authorities.⁹⁴ An attempt to diffuse the mounting tension between the two parties ended violently on November 23, 1989, when 15,000 Georgians marched on Tskhinvali and were met by a mob of South Ossetians, militia, and soldiers from the 8th regiment of the Soviet Army.⁹⁵ The following year, the Georgian Supreme Soviet passed a law banning regional parties,⁹⁶ thus barring the South Ossetians from electing anyone to the Georgian Parliament who represents South Ossetian interests. In response the South Ossetians proclaimed full sovereignty within the USSR on September 20, 1990.⁹⁷ The South Ossetians boycotted the Georgian elections and held their own parliamentary elections in December 1990.⁹⁸ Tbilisi proclaimed a state of emergency in South Ossetia and appointed the Georgian Interior Troops commander as the mayor of Tskhinvali.⁹⁹

The final dent in the relationship between South Ossetia and Georgia came in the form of a referendum, confirming South Ossetia's independence from Georgia, held in November 2006.¹⁰⁰ The separatists in South Ossetia reported that 95% of the 55,000 eligible voters participated and 99% of those votes approved the referendum.¹⁰¹ Moreover, a separate election saw 96% of voters reelect Eduard Kokoit, a pro-Russian integration South Ossetian, as governor of South Ossetia.¹⁰² The OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) and the U.S. State Department declined to recognize those votes.¹⁰³ Instead, they acknowledged the results of a simultaneously held election by the ethnic Georgians living in

⁹² BBC. *Crimea referendum: Voters 'back Russia union'* March, 16, 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26606097>.

⁹³ BBC. *Crimea referendum: Voters 'back Russia union'* March, 16, 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26606097>.

⁹⁴ International Crisis Group. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/south-caucasus/georgia.aspx>.

⁹⁵ International Crisis Group. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/south-caucasus/georgia.aspx>.

⁹⁶ International Crisis Group. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/south-caucasus/georgia.aspx>.

⁹⁷ International Crisis Group. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/south-caucasus/georgia.aspx>.

⁹⁸ International Crisis Group. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/south-caucasus/georgia.aspx>.

⁹⁹ International Crisis Group. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/south-caucasus/georgia.aspx>.

¹⁰⁰ Nichol, Jim, "Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for the U.S. Interests." CRS Report for Congress (2008): 2-15

¹⁰¹ Nichol, Jim, "Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for the U.S. Interests." CRS Report for Congress (2008): 2-15

¹⁰² Nichol, Jim, "Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for the U.S. Interests." CRS Report for Congress (2008): 2-15

¹⁰³ Nichol, Jim, "Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for the U.S. Interests." CRS Report for Congress (2008): 2-15

South Ossetia, in which pro-Georgian Dmitry Sanakoyev was elected governor of South Ossetia, and the Georgian referendum which unsurprisingly supported Georgian territorial integrity.¹⁰⁴

In September 2008, Russia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia signed Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance treaties, which, among other things, set new levels for the number of Russian troops those countries would host, effectively nullifying earlier basing agreements with the EU and OSCE.¹⁰⁵ In addition, the Friendship Treaties advance the “civilization” goal of Russian foreign policy by linking the two domestic-legal systems for eventual absorption: “the agreements provide for free entry into Russia” in the context of a pledge to “unify their civil, tax, welfare and pension laws [as well as] their banking, energy, transportation and telecommunications system” with Russia’s while allowing Russian embassies to protect the interests of the residents of the regions when they travel abroad ¹⁰⁶ While providing international recognition of these territories as separate from Georgia, *indirectly* integrating these separatist regions into *Russian civilization*, the lack of regional autonomy prevented Russia from *directly* incorporating them into the *Russian state*.

Explaining Covert Intervention in the Ukrainian Internationalized Civil War

- Covert intervention is simply a strategy of regime change designed to stay below an escalation threshold that would provoke a coordinated, military international response. Double-verified details about the precise nature of the covert activity are hard to come by, though we can portray some of these actions from various reports and news articles. With some militants operating with elite precision reminiscent of special forces units in conducting raids on police stations¹⁰⁷, there has been heavy suspicion of Russian-sponsored covert activity, which includes:
 - An unknown number of armed Russian-speaking “green men” leading the takeover of government buildings in eastern Ukraine;¹⁰⁸
 - Preventing monitoring agencies from verifying facts on the ground;¹⁰⁹
 - Several important commanders of the separatist fighters were reserve officers in the Russian military with ties to the GRU (the Russian military intelligence agency)¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ Nichol, Jim, “Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for the U.S. Interests.” CRS Report for Congress (2008): 2-15

¹⁰⁵ Nichol, Jim, “Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for the U.S. Interests.” CRS Report for Congress (2008): p. 15.

¹⁰⁶ Nichol, Jim, “Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for the U.S. Interests.” CRS Report for Congress (2008): p. 14

¹⁰⁷ Keith A. Darden, “The War on Truth in Ukraine”, New York Times. April 27, 2014

¹⁰⁸ Keith A. Darden, “The War on Truth in Ukraine”, New York Times. April 27, 2014. The green men are referred to as “separatists” and “rebels,” implying that they are distinct from Russian regular forces, although they have been suspected to Russian troops and agents that have infiltrated into Ukraine

¹⁰⁹ Keith A. Darden, “The War on Truth in Ukraine”, New York Times. April 27, 2014

¹¹⁰ James Miller, Pierre Vaus, Catherine A. Fitzpatrick and Michael Weiss, “An Invasion by Any Other Name: The Kremlin’s Dirty War in Ukraine.” The Interpreter, Institute of Modern Russia. (2015): 1-84. http://www.interpretermag.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/IMR_Invasion_By_Any_Other_Name.pdf.

Russia's covert internationalization of the Ukrainian crisis has yielded it important benefits.¹¹¹ For example, Russia's involvement rattled the EU's and thereby delayed implementation of the DCFTA.¹¹² The delay gives Russia more time to sway Ukraine concerning its discussions to join the ECU – while the Association Agreement was signed, it is ineffective without the DCFTA.

Explaining (Overt) Military Intervention into Georgia

An attack on Sanakoyev and other Georgian authorities in South Ossetia started an exchange of artillery fire across regional lines. Russian forces supported the breakaway region and occupied the naval port of Abkhazia. Dmitry Medvedev, the Russian president at the time, claimed that the Russian use of force in this context was purely for defense of the people of the Caucasus.

The rising tensions between Georgia and South Ossetia came to a violent end on July 3, 2008.¹¹³ A bomb killed a South Ossetian police chief, and Sanakoyev, the appointed South Ossetian governor, narrowly escaped death by a roadside mine.¹¹⁴ These two incidents led Georgia and South Ossetia to exchange artillery fire across the border.¹¹⁵ The following events are laid out in the below timeline for simplicity.

¹¹¹ Carment, David, Patrick James, and Zeynep Taydas. "The internationalization of ethnic conflict: state, society, and synthesis." *International Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (2009): 63-86.

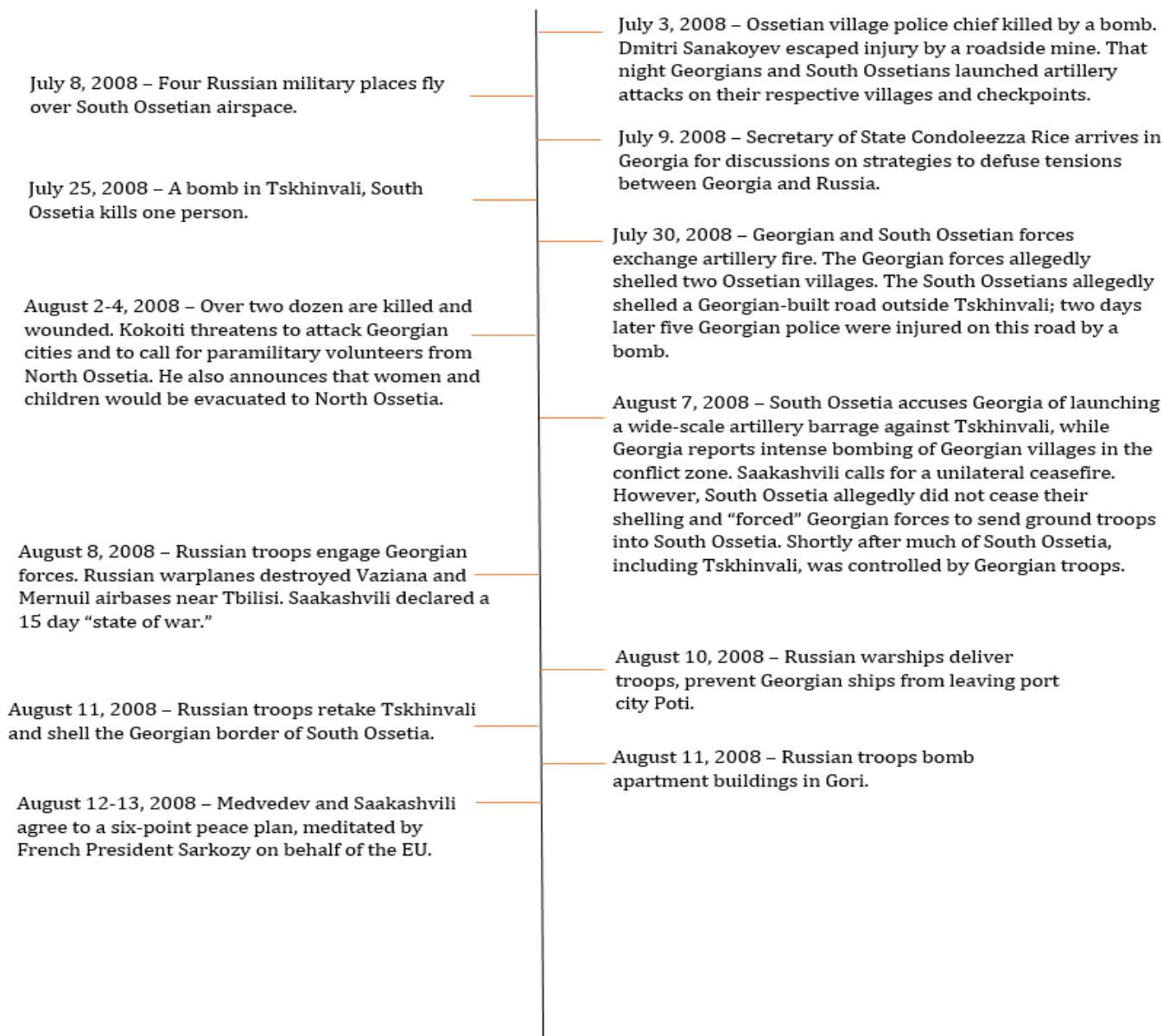
¹¹² Speck, Ulrich. "Postponing the Trade Agreement with Ukraine: Bad Move, EU." September 30, 2014.

¹¹³ Nichol, Jim, "Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for the U.S. Interests." CRS Report for Congress (2008): 2-15

¹¹⁴ Nichol, Jim, "Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for the U.S. Interests." CRS Report for Congress (2008): 2-15

¹¹⁵ Nichol, Jim, "Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for the U.S. Interests." CRS Report for Congress (2008): 2-15

Figure 2: A Timeline of the Georgian War



Russia did not openly use force in South Ossetia until August 8, a little over a month after the hostilities began. Russia intervened on behalf of South Ossetia on August 8 in response to the Georgian army marching on the South Ossetian capital, Tskhinvali.¹¹⁶ Before the Georgian Army’s offensive, the South Ossetians were arguably holding their own against the Georgian forces and did not require Russian intervention to prevent the South Ossetian regime from being destroyed by the Georgian armed forces. However, once Georgian forces pushed into South Ossetian territory and threatened the separatist capital, Russia mobilized to protect its ally being overrun and forcibly reincorporated into Georgia.

¹¹⁶ Nichol, Jim, “Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for the U.S. Interests.” CRS Report for Congress (2008): 2-15

On August 8, shortly after Russian troops interceded on behalf of South Ossetia, Medvedev vowed to “punish” Georgia,¹¹⁷ intimating that Russia planned more than to just support the South Ossetian forces. Russian troops fortified the South Ossetian border with Georgia and began shelling Gori, Georgia. On August 12, Medvedev announced that “the aggressor has been punished and suffered very heavy losses.”¹¹⁸ Within four days, Georgia suffered millions of dollars of damages. Russian troops occupied Poti, pillaging the city and blocking trade from entering and leaving the city.¹¹⁹ They detained 20 Georgian troops, allegedly destroyed a Georgian missile boat, and seized vehicles that were being shipped out of the port city.¹²⁰ The World Bank estimated that Georgia suffered \$394.5 million in damages, and its economic growth forecast for 2008 dropped from 9% to 3.5%.¹²¹

Within four days, a peace plan was brokered by the EU and French president Nicolas Sarkozy and presented to both the Russian president Dmitry Medvedev and Saakashvili.¹²² The six-point peace plan¹²³ called for the following:

- definitive cessation of hostilities,
- non-use of force,
- free access for humanitarian aid,
- withdrawal of both Georgian and Russia forces to their pre-conflict stations, and
- the opening of international discussion on the modalities of security and stability in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Interestingly, there was no mention made of respecting Georgian territorial integrity within the main points of the peace plan.

Russia’s overt intervention was a successfully act of compellence. An EU fact finding report labeled Georgia the aggressor in the war due to their illegal shelling of Tskhinvali on August 7-8.¹²⁴ Not only does this justify Russia’s use of military force, but it also exposes the weaknesses of the Georgian military. Instead of trying a peaceful response, they responded with firepower that they couldn’t sustain past the two days indicated above.

¹¹⁷ Nichol, Jim, “Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for the U.S. Interests.” CRS Report for Congress (2008): 2-15

¹¹⁸ Nichol, Jim, “Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for the U.S. Interests.” CRS Report for Congress (2008): 2-15

¹¹⁹ Nichol, Jim, “Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for the U.S. Interests.” CRS Report for Congress (2008): 2-15

¹²⁰ Nichol, Jim, “Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for the U.S. Interests.” CRS Report for Congress (2008): 2-15

¹²¹ Nichol, Jim, “Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for the U.S. Interests.” CRS Report for Congress (2008): 2-15

¹²² Nichol, Jim, “Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for the U.S. Interests.” CRS Report for Congress (2008): 2-15

¹²³ Sarkozy, Nicholas. *Protocole d’accord*. Paris. From Embassy of France in Washington, D.C. <http://www.ambafrance-us.org/IMG/pdf/accord6points.pdf> (accessed November 16, 2015).

¹²⁴ BBC. “Georgia ‘started unjustified war.’” *BBC News*, September 30, 2009. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8281990.stm>.

On September 17, 2008, Russia signed “Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance” agreements with Abkhazia and South Ossetia.¹²⁵ In addition to allowing Russia to station troops in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the agreements also demand that the regions unify their civil, welfare, tax and pension laws, and their infrastructure systems with the Russian model.¹²⁶ Russia is essentially paving the path for the eventual integration of the two regions into Russia. Now that Russia can openly station troops in South Ossetia, the Georgian dream of using military force to bring South Ossetia to heel is all but vanquished.

Conclusions

The timing of Russia’s regional activities from 2008 to present could not have been predicted along with the 2008 financial crisis. However, Russia (meaning Putin) sees the world differently than the West. Putin’s vision will continue to be on a collision course with what the West portrays as the best practices of the international system (recognition of international territories) by state actors. To Putin, regional domestic crises serve as an opportunity to step in and provide support, especially in the case of South Ossetia. The “familiarity card” played by Russia toward the Ossetians is exactly what was seen in Crimea in 2014. By finding reasons to arouse people’s identification with Russian culture, Putin devises the right moment to engage in militarized disputes. Nevertheless, the target’s country’s integration into international institutions determines whether Russia will use force covertly or openly.

Russia’s pursuit of multipolarity has sparked this duel between the Kremlin and NATO. The poaching of former Soviet bloc states into the EU and NATO presents a threat that Russia sees as requiring retaliation to break the Western encirclement evolving in the region. NATO membership provides regime security to non-pro-Russian governments while diminishing Russia’s role in what it considers its sphere of influence. Such alliances cut into Russian weapons exports, and Putin cannot afford to incur to such actions since sanctions has heavily devalued the Russian ruble.

The combination of both domestic crises and international polarization will result in Russia using military force covertly. This was the case in Ukraine, where there is a split between Western (pro-Europe) and Eastern Ukrainians (pro-Russia). Allowing, Putin to align his propaganda Russian sympathy message to Ukrainians. Evidence from the Georgian crisis in 2008 paints a clear image of when Russia aims to use direct military force. Though stakes remain high in the region, Putin’s fears will only push him to engage in more land grabs while NATO can only react through training exercises in the Baltic.

¹²⁵ Nichol, Jim, “Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for the U.S. Interests.” CRS Report for Congress (2008): 2-15

¹²⁶ Nichol, Jim, “Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for the U.S. Interests.” CRS Report for Congress (2008): 2-15