

Identifying Conditions Present in Gray Zone Conflicts: A Structured Focused Analysis of Gray Zone Conflict

A Monograph

by

MAJ Nelson A. Lamb
US Army



School of Advanced Military Studies
US Army Command and General Staff College
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Approved by:

_____, Monograph Director
Justin E. Kidd, PhD

_____, Seminar Leader
Barton L. Johnke, COL

_____, Director, School of Advanced Military Studies
Brian A. Payne, COL

Accepted this 21st day of May 2020 by:

_____, Acting Director, Office of Degree Programs
Prisco R. Hernandez, PhD

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Abstract

Identifying Conditions Present in Gray Zone Conflicts: A Structured Focused Analysis of Gray Zone Conflict, by MAJ Nelson A. Lamb, 69 pages.

In 2014, Russian-speaking soldiers wearing unmarked uniforms seized the Crimean parliament building and other Crimean critical infrastructure. While uniformed and Russian-speaking, the Russian Government did not recognize these soldiers as their own. These non-flagged forces took control of the Crimean Peninsula, defeating the defending Ukrainians in a matter of days. Now colloquially known as “little green men,” these soldiers of the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade secured strategic access to the Black Sea and ushered in a new form of an old game. This approach is known today as gray zone conflict, and though Russia’s actions caught the world off guard, the tools to potentially predict where it happens next exist within our collective history

As such, this research seeks to identify the conditions for a state to choose gray zone conflict over conventional conflict examining two case studies with a structured focus research methodology: the Platine Conflict between Argentina and Brazil, and the Nagorno Karabakh Conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. While minor struggles compared to gray zone conflict between NATO and Russia today, they provide insight into the conditions present when a nation chooses gray zone conflict over conventional war to achieve geopolitical goals.

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Introduction

Background of the Study

In 2014, Russian-speaking soldiers wearing unmarked uniforms seized the Crimean parliament building, the Simferopol airport, Ukrainian critical infrastructure, and Ukrainian naval and army installations. While uniformed and Russian speaking, the Russian Government did not officially recognize these soldiers as their own. These non-flagged forces took control of the air, maritime, land, and cyberspace domains of the Crimean Peninsula, defeating the defending Ukrainians in a matter of days.¹ Now colloquially known as “little green men,” these soldiers of the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade secured strategic access to the Black Sea and ushered in a new form of an old game. This approach is known today as gray zone conflict, though history has known it by other names such as salami tactics, and conflict below the threshold of war, among others.²

This new form of gray zone conflict left many in the West confused on how to contend with the practice.³ At its core was deniability, with Russian officials calling these little green men Russians on vacation in Ukraine.⁴ This difficulty in attribution to the government of Russia made

¹ Timothy J. Williams, “Cyberwarfare and Operational Art” (SAMS Monograph, Command and General Staff College, 2017), 29–31.

² US Army Special Operations Command, “*Little Green Men*”: *A Primer on Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare, Ukraine 2013–2014*, US Government Report (Fort Bragg, NC: USASOC, 2016), accessed September 25, 2019, <https://info.publicintelligence.net/USASOC-LittleGreenMen.pdf>; Ron Synovitz, “Russian Forces In Crimea: Who Are They And Where Did They Come From?,” News, *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, last modified March 4, 2014, accessed December 4, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russian-forces-in-crimea--who-are-they-and-where-did-they-come-from/25285238.html>.

³ US Army Special Operations Command, *Little Green Men*, 5–6.

⁴ Mateusz Buczek, trans., “ДНРівець: За нас воюють російські військові ‘у відпустці’ [DPR-Member: Russian Military Members ‘on vacation’ Fight for Us],” News, *Українська правда [Pravda]*, last modified August 28, 2014, accessed December 3, 2019, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2014/08/28/7036002/>; Thomas Grove, “Ukraine Rebel Leader Says Russian Soldiers in Their Ranks: Russian State TV,” *Reuters*, August 28, 2014, accessed December 3, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-russia-soldiers-idUSKBN0GS0N120140828>.

the Western response inadequate to prevent the violation of Ukraine's sovereignty. This inadequacy led to a crisis in theoretical thought because the nature of the aggression was not clear. While the nature of the aggression was not explicit, the conditions present in gray zone aggression warrant exploration. Though the nature or timing is difficult to predict, the conditions favorable to gray zone conflict can be understood, and with an understanding of these conditions can come possible counteractions to gray zone aggressions.

Any conventional war with the United States, or any of its allies, would be a costly affair regardless of how much an advantage the United States may or may not have over a potential adversary. America's adversaries have chosen the gray zone of warfare as a means to reduce the risk of conventional wars. They approached this through its inherent deniability and low cost in terms of human, political, and economic capital. The difficulty of attribution within the relatively new cyberspace domain further gives adversaries a significant increase in their freedom of action to contest the US and its allies' interests in a deniable manner, more so than gray zone conflicts of the past.⁵

States have engaged in gray zone conflict as a means of contesting an adversary while curtailing the risk of a conventional war. The tools to conduct gray zone conflict have only increased in capability and availability, and this research investigated the conditions favorable to conducting it. Modern history is replete with examples of gray zone disputes, agnostic of region and time.⁶ Even with its prevalence, historical research has focused much of its effort on the

⁵ Michael J. Mazarr, "Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict," *Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, Advancing Strategic Thought* (December 2015): 115; Claudia Major and Christian Mölling, "Rethinking Deterrence: Adapting an Old Concept to New Challenges," *German Marshall Fund of the United States* (2016): 6; US Government, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: White House, 2017), 2, accessed September 25, 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905-2.pdf>.

⁶ Meredith Sarkees and Frank Wayman, *Resort to War, 1816-2007* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2010), accessed September 3, 2019, <https://sk.sagepub.com/cqpress/resort-to-war>.

conditions in which conventional war occurs. Despite the historical precedent set for gray zone conflict, there has been limited research to identify conditions favorable for it to occur.

This gap in research is partially due to gray zone contests being a level of conflict on which the US military has historically not focused, and academia has followed suit.⁷ As such, the US Army struggles to define this concept of conflict. This leaves a significant gap in doctrine, which was first addressed by General Mattis when he removed the current phasing construct of the conflict continuum, as it did not account for gray zone conflict.⁸ Army doctrine acknowledges the continuum of conflict, though it remains to be seen if the lessons learned over the last nineteen years of counterinsurgency and low-intensity conflict will be institutionally lost ahead of any potential gray zone conflict the US military might face.⁹

Definition of Terms

Since this study addresses gray zone conflict, a mutable term which lacks a doctrinal nor widely accepted definition, several related terms require definition to facilitate the study of conditions present in these conflicts.

⁷ Nathan Frier, Christopher Compton, and Tobin Magsig, “Gray Zone: Why We’re Losing the New Era of National Security,” Defense News, *Defense One*, last modified June 9, 2016, accessed October 4, 2019, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2016/06/gray-zone-losing-new-era-national-security-strategy/128957/>.

⁸ US Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 3-0: Joint Operations*, Joint Doctrine (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, October 22, 2018), chap. 5, accessed August 6, 2019, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_0ch1.pdf?ver=2018-11-27-160457-910.

⁹ Ibid., chaps. 5–8; Stephen Tyminski, “Preparing for the Future: Insurgents Get a Vote,” *Small Wars Journal*, last modified January 2019, accessed October 4, 2019, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/preparing-future-insurgents-get-vote>; US Department of the Army, *Field Manual 3-0: Operations*, US Army Doctrine (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, October 2017), accessed October 4, 2019, https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/ARN6687_FM%203-0%20C1%20Inc%20FINAL%20WEB.pdf.

Gray Zone Conflict

Gray zone conflict is defined as anything short of conventional war which leverages multiple instruments of national power to intentionally achieve limited, instead of outright, political victories in a deniable manner to gain influence over a system or actor.¹⁰

Conventional Conflict

Conventional conflict is defined as a conflict, not necessarily a declared war, in which both sides freely admit to their involvement and openly leverage any or all instruments of national power to achieve national or state objectives, which may or may not be publicly stated.

Deterrence Capability

Deterrence is a direct or indirect approach aimed at preventing an actor who intends to harm the national interests of a station or nation (See figure 1.1).¹¹ A deterrence capability is a tool within the four instruments of power (diplomatic, economic, military, informational) which achieves the direct or indirect deterrence approach as depicted in figure 1.1.

¹⁰ This definition is the result of a conversation with Dr. Dan G. Cox on his unpublished manuscript *The Coming War with Russia*, along with a compilation of research and definitions set forth in the following articles: Michael C. McCarthy, Matthew A. Moyer, and Brett H. Venable, “Deterring Russia in the Gray Zone” (Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, March 2019), accessed August 30, 2019, <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pdffiles/PUB1407.pdf>; US Army Special Operations Command, “*Little Green Men*”: *A Primer on Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare, Ukraine 2013–2014*, US Government Report (Fort Bragg, NC: USASOC, 2016), accessed September 25, 2019, <https://info.publicintelligence.net/USASOC-LittleGreenMen.pdf>; Joseph L. Votel et al., “Unconventional Warfare in the Gray Zone,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 2016, no. 1st Quarter (Spring 2016): 101–9; Michael J. Mazarr, “Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict,” *Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press*, *Advancing Strategic Thought* (December 2015): 139; Jahara W. Matisek, “Shades of Gray Deterrence: Issues of Fighting in the Gray Zone,” *Journal of Strategic Security* 10, no. 3 (2017): 1–26.

¹¹ Frans-Paul van der Putten, Minke Meijnders, and Jan Rood, *Deterrence as a Security Concept Against Non-Traditional Threats*, Deterrence (Clingendael Institute, 2015), 8, JSTOR, accessed September 25, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05422.4>.

Measures aimed at emphasizing/increasing the cost that the would-be perpetrator must take into account:		Measures aimed at reducing the gains that the would-be perpetrator could achieve:
Direct	Convincing the Would-be perpetrator that an attack or harmful act of any kind will trigger retaliatory action.	Reducing the opportunity to carry out an attack by visibly increasing the number and/or quality of security measures and increasing the operational risks to the perpetrator (reducing an attack's probability of success).
Indirect	Convincing the would-be perpetrator that a substantial investment is required for an attack.	Convincing the would-be perpetrator that performing the harmful act or acts will not contribute to achieving the intended objective (reducing the gains that can be achieved if an attack is successful).

Figure 1.1. The Various Forms of Deterrence. Source: Frans-Paul van der Putten, Minke Meijnders, and Jan Rood, *Deterrence as a Security Concept Against Non-Traditional Threats*, Deterrence (Clingendael Institute, 2015), 8, JSTOR, accessed September 25, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05422.4>.

Alliance

An alliance is defined as an agreement, accepted by two or more parties to cooperate in the military operations of one or more of the powers in either defensive or offensive military operations.¹²

Dominant Ethnicity

The term dominant ethnicity of a nation or state is defined as the largest ethnicity within a state, provided another ethnicity within the state or nation is not in control of the government.

Significant World Power

This is defined as a nation or state that meets at least one of the two following criteria. As a nation or state, measured at the time of the studied conflict, as one of the ten largest economies in the world in terms of gross domestic product. As a country with an economy ten times greater

¹² Brett Ashley Leeds, "Do Alliances Deter Aggression? The Influence of Military Alliances on the Initiation of Militarized Interstate Disputes," *American Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 3 (July 2003): 427–8.

than that of both of the combatants, and the ability to project military capability into the conflict region to influence its outcome.

Proxy Force

Geraint Hughes defines a proxy as “a non-state paramilitary group receiving direct assistance from an external power.”¹³ Hughes draws a distinction between military and non-military forces, calling the latter surrogates. For this research, the author will refer to both as proxies since each can be used to achieve political or military objectives against a competing state or nation without openly engaging that state or nation directly in conflict, with the intent of maintaining deniability of operations by these forces.¹⁴

Robust Economic Relationship

An economic relationship between two or more nations in which disruption of this relationship would cause either party to intervene in a conflict using one or more of the instruments of power to restore or maintain the benefits of the economic relationship.

Theoretical Framework

This research is framed within Thucydides’ concept of fear, honor, and interest as the only reason to engage in a conflict.¹⁵ Likewise, it is couched within Sun Tzu’s concept of using the fewest resources possible to achieve victory in war or potentially defeating an enemy without fighting.¹⁶ This aligns with the Gerasimov Doctrine’s concept of “The practical use of

¹³ Geraint Hughes, *My Enemy’s Enemy: Proxy Warfare in International Politics* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2014), 11.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Thucydides, Robert B. Strassler, and Richard Crawley, *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, First Touchstone edition; Free Press trade paperback edition (2008)., Army Chief of Staff professional reading list, 2017 (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 43.

¹⁶ Sunzi et al., *The Art of War: The Complete Text of Sun Tzu’s Classic Compiled in This Special Edition with Frederick the Great’s Instructions to His Generals and Machiavelli’s The Prince* (Raleigh, NC: Sweetwater Press, 2007), 20, 28. For the first use, list all authors. This prob has a translator as well

nonmilitary methods and means can cause a collapse in the energy, banking, economic, information, and other spheres of a state's daily activities."¹⁷

Research Questions

One primary and two secondary research questions guided this study. The primary question was, are there identifiable characteristics of the conditions in which gray zone conflict is the preferable method of conflict over conventional war? The secondaries are, what economic, social and geopolitical conditions led to the contest between the Brazilian government and the Rosas Government of Argentina to remain below the threshold of war from 1845 until 1852, and what change in those conditions led this conflict to reach open war in the Platine conflict of 1851 instead of remaining a gray zone conflict? Second, if Armenia and Azerbaijan remained locked in a gray zone conflict starting in 2009 through 2016, what economic, social, and geopolitical conditions caused it to reach open conflict in 2016?

Based on initial historiography, the researcher expected to find three hypotheses for a state to choose gray zone conflict over conventional war, and the research will show that at a minimum two of the three hypotheses exist in gray zone conflicts. The first was that a nation would choose gray zone conflict when an ethnic group in a diaspora condition could serve as a proxy force in the state in which the aggressor nation wished to exert influence. Second, a state would choose gray zone conflict as a means to achieve policy goals in a state which was engaged in a military alliance with a larger nation, or in which a larger nation had significant economic interests, to avoid escalating the contest, at least initially, to a wider conventional war. Third, a state would choose a gray zone strategy to subvert another state's deterrence capability. In each

¹⁷ Mark Galeotti, "The 'Gerasimov Doctrine' and Russian Non-Linear War," *In Moscow's Shadow's*, last modified July 6, 2014, accessed August 30, 2019, http://cs.brown.edu/people/jsavage/VotingProject/2017_03_09_MoscowsShadow_GerasimovDoctrineAndRussianNon-LinearWar.pdf; Valery Gerasimov, "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight; New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying out Combat Operations," trans. Robert Coalson, *Military Review* (February 2016): 25.

condition, the aggressor state desires to maintain some level of deniability to mitigate risk or to maintain international prestige and standing amongst other nations.

This paper was organized into six sections. Section one is the introduction. Section two is the literature review, and section three addresses the paper's methodology. Sections four and five are devoted to the case studies of the Platine conflict between Brazil and Argentina, and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Section six reports the findings, recommendations, and conclusions.

Review of Literature

Introduction

Before 2014, American research was not focused on the concept of gray zone conflict and focused instead on conventional conflicts.¹⁸ Research on the conditions in which war occurs was similarly focused on conventional conflicts. Since *Resort to War*, an overarching reference work detailing all conflicts since 1816, defined war as an armed conflict as one resulting “in a minimum of 1,000 battle deaths,” there arose a naturally occurring gap for gray zone conflicts.¹⁹ These types of conflicts often have fewer than this threshold of casualties or were in actuality conflicts between two states executed through a proxy combatant.

Since 2014, the concept of gray zone conflict has increased in historical and military interests. The National Security Strategy names it as the subversion of free societies through manipulation of information, international institutions and free media.²⁰ Russia codified this concept with Vladimir Putin’s acceptance of Gerasimov’s doctrine, defining this approach as:²¹

The integrated employment of military force and political, economic, informational or other non-military measures implemented with a wide use of the protest potential of the population and of special operations forces.²²

This definition was an effort to level the proverbial playing field with the United States, or any of its allies. The advent of social media has only served to amplify the effectiveness of efforts within

¹⁸ McCarthy, Moyer, and Venable, “Deterring Russia in the Gray Zone,” 9.

¹⁹ Sarkees and Wayman, *Resort to War, 1816-2007*, 6.

²⁰ US Government, *National Security Strategy*, 2, 37, 45–50.

²¹ McCarthy, Moyer, and Venable, “Deterring Russia in the Gray Zone,” 8.

²² Vladimir Putin, “The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation,” Government, *The Embassy of the Russian Federation to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*, last modified June 29, 2015, accessed October 28, 2019, <http://rusemb.org.uk/press/2029>.

the gray zone. The difficulty of attribution within the cyberspace domain gives the gray zone approach the freedom of action to contest the United States and its allies' interests covertly.²³

Historical Traces

Like conventional conflict, gray zone conflict is rooted in the foundational texts of war and warfare; primarily, Thucydides' concept of fear, honor, and interest as the only reasons to engage in a conflict.²⁴ As conflicts between nations, gray zone conflict and conventional conflict are equally political actions since they are extensions of "politics by other means."²⁵ As such, they are both equally influenced by the basic political impulses of fear, honor, and interest. The idea of avoiding a costly conventional war is couched within Sun Tzu. This is best seen in the concept of using the fewest resources possible to achieve victory in war, as well as his definition of the acme of skill being to defeat an adversary without fighting him.²⁶

Russia has been part of the broader development of modern gray zone conflict, and these concepts serve as the theoretical base for this paper. The Gerasimov Doctrine espoused these concepts, and stated: "The practical use of nonmilitary methods and means can cause a collapse in the energy, banking, economic, information, and other spheres of a state's daily activities."²⁷ Yet, Gerasimov's ideas find their roots dating back to Clausewitz. His theory of war being a

²³ Mazarr, "Mastering the Gray Zone," 6; Michael N. Schmitt and NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, eds., *Tallinn Manual 2.0 on the International Law Applicable to Cyber Operations*, Second edition (Cambridge, United Kingdom; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 81–3.

²⁴ Thucydides, Robert B. Strassler, and Richard Crawley, *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, First Touchstone edition; Free Press trade paperback edition (2008)., Army Chief of Staff professional reading list, 2017 (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 43.

²⁵ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Peter Paret and Michael Howard, First Princeton Paperback printing (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 88.

²⁶ Sunzi et al., *The Art of War: The Complete Text of Sun Tzu's Classic Compiled in This Special Edition with Frederick the Great's Instructions to His Generals and Machiavelli's The Prince* (Raleigh, NC: Sweetwater Press, 2007), 20, 28.

²⁷ Galeotti, "The 'Gerasimov Doctrine'"; Gerasimov, "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight," 25.

“continuation of politics by other means” buttresses the ideas of the Communist Manifesto and the Red Army, the predecessor to the modern Russian Military.²⁸ These ideas of Soviet strategy included Unified War, where multiple efforts across multiple countries and instruments of national power were controlled from a supreme central position moving toward a single purpose.²⁹ Common Western interpretations of *On War* see this continuation of politics as distinct stair-stepped changes in a nation’s efforts. Instead, Soviet doctrine, and the Gerasimov doctrine, see this type of conflict as multidisciplinary, fluid, and continuous. They combine it with politics, economics, diplomacy, and information in ways that allow it to operate as an equal partner with the military in national efforts to contest an adversary.³⁰

Gray Zone Conflict

When deterrence raised the cost of aggression, adversaries sought what Matissek called “a nuanced form of warfare... with limited political victories, as opposed to outright military triumphs that would be easier to identify and respond.”³¹ Schelling termed these limited victories as “salami tactics,” an idea that an adversary could operate below the threshold of war by making small aggressions which did not warrant a military response, but cumulatively achieved a strategic goal.³² Both Matissek and Schelling wrote before 2014, but the subsequent resurgence of gray zone conflict has been treated as a new and surprising phenomenon. Both Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dunford and Defense Secretary Mattis provided testimony before the US House Armed Services Committee that described China and Russia as being unable to

²⁸ Clausewitz, *On War*, 88; Vanya Eftimova Bellinger, “Marie von Clausewitz” (Lecture, Fort Leavenworth, KS, July 22, 2019); Azar Gat, “Marxism and Military Theory,” in *A History of Military Thought; From the Enlightenment to the Cold War* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 495–514.

²⁹ Byron Dexter, “Clausewitz and Soviet Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs* 29, no. 1 (1950): 41.

³⁰ US Army Special Operations Command, *Little Green Men*, 1, 15.

³¹ Matissek, “Shades of Gray Deterrence,” 2.

³² Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, Revised edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 66.

challenge the United States in the conventional sphere, resorting to innovation in the gray zone out of necessity.³³ General Dunford defined the strategy as using “...political influence, economic coercion, use of cyber, use of information operation, and then military posture.”³⁴ The committee received the brief on gray zone conflict as though it was a new approach to conflict leveraged by America’s enemies, despite there being extensive historical instances of it. Although the moniker applied to gray zone conflict is varied, the approach is not a new phenomenon.³⁵

Gray zone conflict has existed for years as a means to undermine an adversary. While the definitions vary, they fit within an action which is adversarial in nature, existing somewhere more contentious than peace, but short of open conflict on the conflict continuum (figure 2.1). Conflict at or right of conventional war on figure 2.1 has been easy to identify, and responses are institutionalized. Conflicts left of conventional war on figure 2.1 but right of peaceful competition fall into the gray zone response are clear on the international stage.

³³ Jim Garamone, “US Military Must Develop All-Domain Defenses, Mattis, Dunford Say,” News, *DoD News*, last modified April 18, 2018, accessed November 27, 2019, https://www.army.mil/article/204026/us_military_must_develop_all_domain_defenses_mattis_dunford_say.

³⁴ Ibid.; Jim Mattis, *Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis House Armed Services Committee Written Statement for the Record* (Washington, DC: US Department of Defense, 2018), accessed November 27, 2019, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS00/20180412/108075/HHRG-115-AS00-Wstate-MattisJ-20180412.pdf>; NBC News, *Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, Joint Chief Joe Dunford Testify At House Hearing* (Washington, DC: NBC, 2018), accessed November 27, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITprYLtE3ZA>.

³⁵ NBC News, *Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, Joint Chief Joe Dunford Testify at House Hearing*.

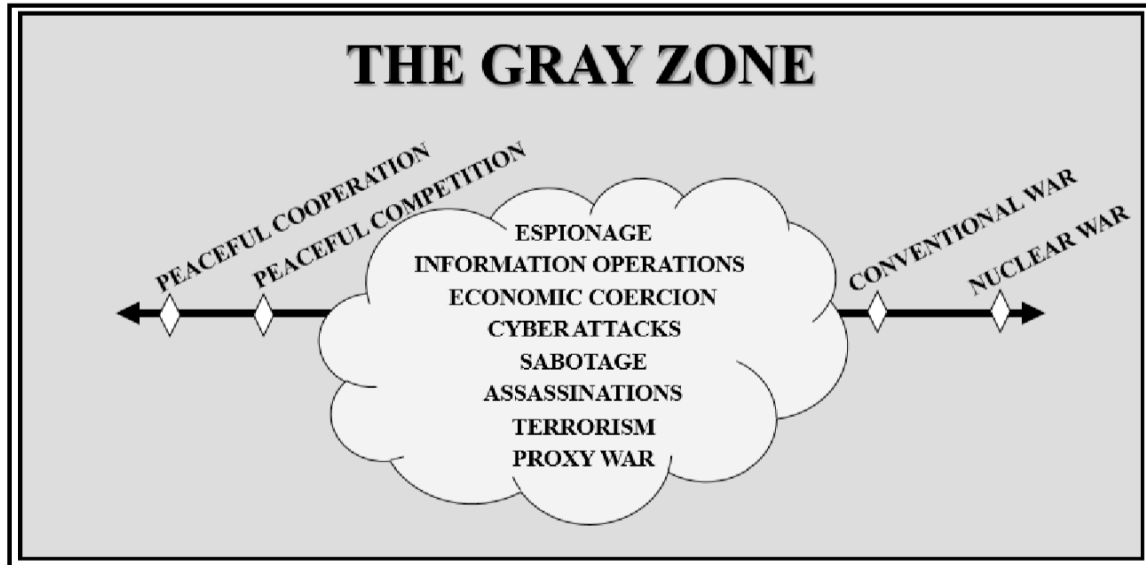


Figure 2.1. The Gray Zone. Source: Michael C. McCarthy, Matthew A. Moyer, and Brett H. Venable, “Deterring Russia in the Gray Zone” (Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, March 2019), accessed August 30, 2019, <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pdffiles/PUB1407.pdf>.

While not new, modern gray zone conflict has undergone a significant rebirth widely considered the result of the Gerasimov doctrine.³⁶ Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation Armed Forces, saw the future of conflict as;

In the twenty-first century, we have seen a tendency toward blurring the lines between the states of war and peace. Wars are no longer declared and, having begun, proceed according to an unfamiliar template... The very “rules of war” have changed. The role of nonmilitary means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness.³⁷

While it was widely believed that Gerasimov developed this as a new approach to gray zone conflict, Rumer attributed the origins of the concept to Foreign and Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov as a means to prevent the rise of a US-dominated unipolar world.³⁸

³⁶ Molly K. Mckew, “The Gerasimov Doctrine,” *POLITICO Magazine*, accessed December 4, 2019, <https://politi.co/2KZQIKd>.

³⁷ Gerasimov, “The Value of Science Is in the Foresight,” 23–4.

³⁸ Eugene Rumer, “The Primakov (Not Gerasimov) Doctrine in Action,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, accessed December 4, 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/06/05/primakov-not-gerasimov-doctrine-in-action-pub-79254>.

As applied in Ukraine, the Gerasimov doctrine has been the subject of significant study, but beyond its residence between competitive peace and open war, there are varying opinions on what it is. Votel, Cleveland, Connett, and Irwin saw gray zone conflict as more population-centric, with the goal being influence more than victory.³⁹ Bill Conner focused more on misdirection and deniability in his assessment of Gerasimov's doctrine, while McCarthy, Moyer, and Venable saw it more as a whole of government approach.⁴⁰ Mazarr, publishing one year after the Russian involvement in Ukraine, created a list of criteria which defined gray zone conflict noting that it,

- Pursues political objectives through cohesive, integrated campaigns;
- Employs mostly nonmilitary or non-kinetic tools;
- Strives to remain under key escalatory or red line thresholds to avoid outright, conventional conflict; and
- Moves gradually toward its objectives rather than seeking conclusive results in a specific period of time.⁴¹

Mazarr used McCarthy's continuum to further divide the escalation of techniques within the gray zone portion (figure 2.2). Using Schelling's definition of "salami tactics" as slight advances seeking a continuous advantage, alongside Dolman's definition of strategy as "an unending process that can never lead to conclusion," gray zone conflict is the best way for an adversary to leverage all instruments of national power to persistently undermine deterrence.⁴² This is Gerasimov's new approach to this old model.

³⁹ Votel et al., "Unconventional Warfare in the Gray Zone," 102.

⁴⁰ Bill Connor, "Understanding and Defeating Putin's 'Gray Zone,'" News, *Daily Caller*, last modified February 22, 2017, accessed November 27, 2019, <https://dailycaller.com/2017/02/22/understanding-and-defeating-putins-gray-zone/>; McCarthy, Moyer, and Venable, "Deterring Russia in the Gray Zone," 5.

⁴¹ Mazarr, "Mastering the Gray Zone," 58.

⁴² Everett C. Dolman, *Pure Strategy: Power and Principle in the Space and Information Age*, Cass series--strategy and history 6 (New York, NY: Frank Cass, 2005), 4; Mazarr, "Mastering the Gray Zone," 107, 115, 118; McCarthy, Moyer, and Venable, "Deterring Russia in the Gray Zone," 5.

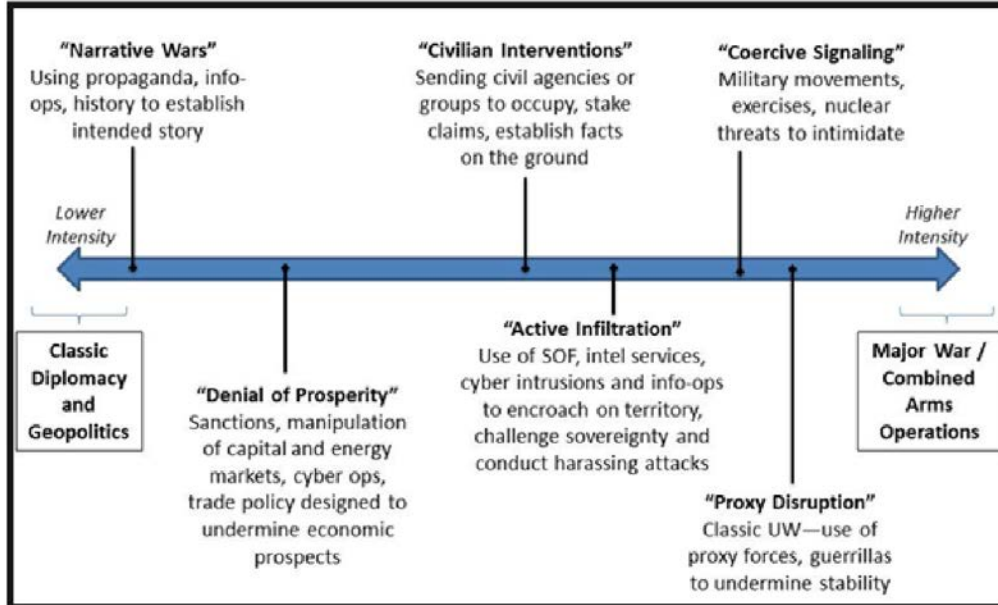


Figure 2.2. A Spectrum of Gray Zone Techniques. *Source:* Michael J. Mazarr, “Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict,” *Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, Advancing Strategic Thought* (December 2015): 60.

Alliances

There exists a tremendous body of knowledge on the merits of alliances as a means of reducing the scale and scope of wars. Important literature on alliances has been penned by Ashley Leeds, J. Naik, and George Strüver. These authors differ in their opinions as to what makes an alliance viable. None of them addressed this viability when faced with an unconventional threat such as gray zone conflict, which Mazarr described as particularly effective in its ability to exploit nationalist divisions.⁴³

Leeds defined alliances broadly, stating they can take many forms for any number of purposes.⁴⁴ These definitions all involved some form of agreement between two or more states for some form of cooperation. Her concepts ran contrary to J. Naik and George Strüver who both

⁴³ Mazarr, “Mastering the Gray Zone,” 39.

⁴⁴ Brett Ashley Leeds and Savun, Burcu, “Terminating Alliances: Why Do States Abrogate Agreements?,” *Journal of Politics* 69, no. 4 (November 2007): 1118–1120.

argued that an alliance is only truly viable if it exists between nations with similar ideologies or interests.⁴⁵ Leeds instead claimed that formal, open, military alliances are the most robust alliances, and this would increase the likelihood that a bilateral conflict could become a multilateral conflict.⁴⁶ These types of alliances have an inherent deterrence factor for potential aggressors against an allied state, especially mutual defense pacts. It is this deterrence factor which would potentially drive an aggressor state to prefer gray zone conflict as a means to undermine the omnipresent clauses which accompanied such pacts, which are rarely unconditional promises of support in any situation.⁴⁷

Christensen and Snyder argued that alliances are inherently a catalyst for war. They asserted this is particularly true in multipolar alliances and situations where multiple states are vying for power, such as before World War One. They claimed this multipolarity is what drove states to shift their allegiances to maintain a balance of power.⁴⁸ Similarly, Vasquez claimed that alliances do not serve to deter war, but rather increase its likelihood.⁴⁹

While Leeds proffered the most compelling argument for deterrence, she fell short in addressing the phenomenon of gray zone conflict rising as a result of this deterrence factor. Mazarr, Matisek, Major, and Mölling all addressed the rising difficulty of using traditional means

⁴⁵ J. A. Naik, "Dissolving Alliances," *Economic and Political Weekly* 10, no. 37 (September 13, 1975): 1460–1461; Georg Strüver, "International Alignment between Interests and Ideology: The Case of China's Partnership Diplomacy," *German Institute for Global and Area Studies* (2016): 1, 4–6, accessed September 9, 2019, : <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep07519>.

⁴⁶ Leeds, "Do Alliances Deter Aggression," 427–30; Brett Ashley Leeds, "Alliance Reliability in Times of War: Explaining State Decisions to Violate Treaties," *International Organization* 57, no. 4 (2003): 801–827.

⁴⁷ Leeds, "Do Alliances Deter Aggression," 427–30; Leeds and Savun, Burcu, "Terminating Alliances."

⁴⁸ Thomas J. Christensen and Jack Snyder, "Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity," *International Organization* 44, no. 2 (1990): 137–168.

⁴⁹ JOHN VASQUEZ and MARIE T. HENEHAN, "Territorial Disputes and the Probability of War, 1816–1992," *Journal of Peace Research* 38, no. 2 (March 1, 2001): 123–138.

of deterrence to counter non-traditional threats such as gray zone conflict.⁵⁰ Leeds's explanations of the various types of alliances were excellent in defining its viability in the face of a threat external to the alliance, but as Matissek stated, the often clandestine, proxy-based, and slowly escalating nature of gray zone conflict makes it difficult to counter with typical alliances.⁵¹ This means the most robust alliances, as defined by Leeds, are susceptible to aggression which remains at a level below the threshold of open conflict. Keeping aggression below this threshold mitigates the risk to the aggressor of widening the conflict. As these authors argued, alliance deterrence must modernize to meet the modern threat in the gray zone.⁵²

Deterrence

Major and Molin described deterrence as a means to change the thinking of an opponent of their chance of success in aggression, or that the costs of aggression outweigh the potential benefits; therefore, potential aggressors will choose not to attack.⁵³ Van der Patten categorized this capability into four forms: directly increasing costs through retaliation, indirectly increasing the costs to attack, directly reducing the chances of an attack's success, and reducing the potential benefits an attack would yield (figure 1.1).⁵⁴ Within this model, deterrence can be conventional military, nuclear, or geographic.⁵⁵ The latter being a case in which a nation's geographic depth creates a requirement too costly for the potential benefits for the aggressor. Coupled with Leeds's concept that certain alliances deter aggression, it is clear that deterrence need not originate from the state an aggressor proposes to attack.⁵⁶ Likewise, economic relationships can serve to deter,

⁵⁰ Matissek, "Shades of Gray Deterrence"; Major and Mölling, "Rethinking Deterrence"; Mazarr, "Mastering the Gray Zone."

⁵¹ Matissek, "Shades of Gray Deterrence."

⁵² Ibid.; Major and Mölling, "Rethinking Deterrence"; Mazarr, "Mastering the Gray Zone."

⁵³ Major and Mölling, "Rethinking Deterrence," 1–2.

⁵⁴ van der Putten, Meijnders, and Rood, *Deterrence as a Security Concept Against Non-Traditional Threats*, 8.

⁵⁵ Major and Mölling, "Rethinking Deterrence," 1.

⁵⁶ Leeds, "Do Alliances Deter Aggression," 427.

which will be covered further in the economic interrelation subsection.⁵⁷ Each of these authors acknowledged the effect deterrence has to minimize conflicts and limit wars in scope, scale, and frequency.

While the use of deterrence for reducing conflict and limiting wars is used around the world; deterrence as an effective means, whether nuclear or conventional, is not a universally held position.⁵⁸ Mathur called into question the stability of nuclear weapons in a multipolar nuclear-armed contest.⁵⁹ Conventional conflict was equally questioned for its destabilizing nature due to the loss of life massive conventional responses have, and how this would not necessarily deter minor transgressions of gray zone conflicts.⁶⁰

Equally concerning is aggression via non-military capabilities. The traditional model of deterrence was questioned in its effectiveness against gray zone conflict, principally when applied via primarily civilian targets, often via non-lethal means such as cyberspace, propaganda, and information operations.⁶¹ These tools played into what Schelling called salami tactics or the means of circumventing an adversary's commitments.⁶² While the thresholds of military commitments are often clear, economic, cyberspace and information operations quickly undermine these commitments in their non-attributional nature or non-traditional approach.

⁵⁷ Kathy L. Powers, "Dispute Initiation and Alliance Obligations in Regional Economic Institutions," ed. Christopher Sprecher and Volker Krause, *Journal of Peace Research* 43, no. 4 (July 2006): 453–71.

⁵⁸ Hans M. Kristensen, Robert S. Norris, and Ivan Oelrich, *From Counterforce to Minimal Deterrence*: (Federation of American Scientists, 2009), 1–5, 14–20, JSTOR, accessed November 6, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/lumen.cgscarl.com/stable/resrep18937>; Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, XI.

⁵⁹ Sahil Mathur, *China, Indian Ocean & The Nuclear Deterrence: The Destabilizing Effect* (Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, 2014), 1–3, JSTOR, accessed November 6, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep09029>.

⁶⁰ John D. Steinbruner and Tyler Wigg-Stevenson, *Reconsidering the Morality of Deterrence* (Center for International & Security Studies, U. Maryland, 2012), JSTOR, accessed November 6, 2019, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05022>.

⁶¹ Major and Mölling, "Rethinking Deterrence," 1–3.

⁶² Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 66–8; Schmitt and NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, *Tallinn Manual 2.0*.

Economic Interrelation

Economic interrelation differs from economic sanctions. It is the threat of direct or indirect intervention with any or all of a nation's instruments of power in a conflict to defend an economic interest. Economic sanctions alone are designed to inflict primarily financial harm to modify a state's behavior.⁶³ Economic sanctions are a tool of national power, and while they may have a deterrent effect, they are not an indication of a state's willingness to deter to defend economic interest.

States who rely on another state for imports, or to which they export goods, have a national interest in protecting the benefits of that economic relationship. As a national interest, states often intervene military to defend that interest. The potential for intervention by a third party to defend an interest would have an inherent deterrent effect on aggression between two parties with whom one or more are engaged with the third economically. The common, though not exclusive, use of military intervention to defend economic interests underpins this concept as highly regular in foreign policy. In recent history, the use of military forces to defend, or even proactively protect, economic interests has been common. According to Suonpää, Great Britain used military forces to defend economic interest in Persia, Shanghai, and Turkey as early as the 1880s.⁶⁴ Before that date, these operations were not openly conducted, unless they were more closely aligned with national policy.⁶⁵ Powers asserted that economic agreements have an inherent deterrence effect, and the twentieth-century formation of regional economic institutions has only increased their effect at deterrence.⁶⁶ Therefore, potential intervention by a third party

⁶³ Tom C. Lin, "Financial Weapons of War," *Minnesota Law Review* 100 (April 14, 2016): 1401.

⁶⁴ Mika Suonpää, "Financial Speculation, Political Risks, and Legal Complications: British Commercial Diplomacy in the Balkans, c. 1906-1914," *The Historical Journal* 55, no. 1 (March 2012): 97–104.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Powers, "Dispute Initiation and Alliance Obligations in Regional Economic Institutions," 453.

may also serve to deter antagonism, similar in effect to formalized alliances though not explicitly stated in the economic relation.

The merits of this intervention are not widely accepted as an effective means of ensuring a nation's economic stability. Gholz and Press argued that supporting a nation indirectly, as opposed to direct military involvement, was the best way to ensure economic and trading stability.⁶⁷ Likewise, the Weinberger-Powell doctrine called for military intervention being used to achieve well defined military aims, and only as a last resort. While the document left room for limited aims, such as economically based military intervention, this appeared to be the exception to the rule if one uses the measure of vital national interests as stated in the doctrine.⁶⁸ Vital national interests are best defined as something for which a nation is willing to die.⁶⁹

Hillen interpreted the Weinberger-Powell doctrine more broadly. Of his five vital national interests, two of them were economically minded.⁷⁰ These were preventing hostile interference in the Western hemisphere, and ensuring American access to foreign trade and resources. The current National Security Strategy asserted that “economic security is national security.”⁷¹ Likewise, Joint Doctrine Note 1-18 defined economic prosperity as a vital national interest.⁷² Suonpää emphasized that states, the United States among them, were willing to

⁶⁷ Eugene Gholz and Daryl G. Press, “Paying to Keep the Peace; Is Military Intervention Abroad Necessary to Protect US Economic Interests?,” *Regulation* Spring (2003): 40–44.

⁶⁸ John T. Correll, “The Weinberger Doctrine,” *Air Force Magazine*, last modified March 2014, accessed November 14, 2019, <http://www.airforcemag.com/MagazineArchive/Pages/2014/March%202014/0314weinberger.aspx>.

⁶⁹ US Department of Defense, *Joint Doctrine Note 1-18: Strategy*, Joint Doctrine, Joint Doctrine Notes (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, June 16, 2017), VII, JCS.mil, accessed November 15, 2019, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/jdn_jg/jdn1_18.pdf?ver=2018-04-25-150439-540.

⁷⁰ John Hillen, “American Military Intervention: A User’s Guide,” Political, *The Heritage Foundation*, last modified May 2, 1996, accessed November 15, 2019, <https://www.heritage.org/defense/report/american-military-intervention-users-guide-0>.

⁷¹ US Government, *National Security Strategy*, 1, 4.

⁷² US Department of Defense, *JDN 1-18*, II-3–4.

intervene for economic purposes as indicated by his reference to the British Empire.⁷³ The US intervention in Kuwait showed the acceptance of this as truth.⁷⁴

The willingness to use force in defense of economic interests has historically indicated its inherent deterrent effect. This effect is especially distinct if a nation intends to operate within a region in which a more powerful nation holds economic interests.

⁷³ Suonpää, "Financial Speculation, Political Risks, and Legal Complications," 98–104.

⁷⁴ David J. Rothkopf, *The Price of Peace: Emergency Economic Intervention and US Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1998), 5–6.

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the characteristics relevant to gray zone conflicts. Using a qualitative case study approach, along with the structured, focused comparison methodology outlined by George and Bennett, this study evaluated two gray zone conflicts. This approach used a series of standardized questions, each of which was intended to identify the conditions in which gray zone conflicts are most likely to occur.⁷⁵

Case Selection

The first case study examined the conflict between the Brazilian government and the Rosas Government of Argentina from 1845 until 1852. This conflict ultimately evolved into conventional war in the Platine conflict of 1851.⁷⁶ This conflict involved a rising power in the Argentine Confederation based in Buenos Aires, and an existing power in the Brazilian Republic, demonstrating Thucydides' trap on the South American Continent in the nineteenth century.⁷⁷ The concept of war being inevitable between a rising power and a status-quo power resulted from the study of the Peloponnesian War, in which Sparta viewed Athens' growth as a threat, which made war between them inevitable.⁷⁸ Graham T. Allison illustrated this concept in 2017 in his book, *Destined for War*, in which he applied the concept to China and the United States.⁷⁹ The theory is present when examining sixteen conflicts since the fifteenth century, excluding the

⁷⁵ Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), chaps. 3–4.

⁷⁶ Sarkees and Wayman, *Resort to War, 1816-2007*; Douglas Lemke, "Power Politics and Wars without States," *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 4 (October 2008): 774–786.

⁷⁷ Joseph T. Criscenti, "Argentine Constitutional History, 1810-1852: A Re-Examination," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 41, no. 3 (August 1961): 401–409; Leslie Bethell, ed., *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. 3 (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 648.

⁷⁸ Thucydides, Strassler, and Crawley, *The Landmark Thucydides*, 49, 65.

⁷⁹ Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?*, Reprint edition (Mariner Books, 2018).

Platine Conflict, resulting in twelve wars.⁸⁰ The Platine Conflict demonstrates a gray zone conflict which, though influenced by Great Britain and France, did not directly involve a world power.⁸¹ It arose between two ethnic groups and demonstrated conflict in which the involved parties conducted the conflict absent of wider alliances or significant deterrence capabilities.

The second case was the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and focused from 2009 to 2016.⁸² Neither country was a significant world power, but the conflict often directly or indirectly involved the Russian Federation maintaining peace or a balance of power between the two states.⁸³ The two states are of two distinct ethnicities from southern Asia, both maintained a practical, if not nominal, alliance with Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union.⁸⁴

The structured, focused comparison methodology as outlined by George and Bennett served to guide and standardize data collection in this qualitative study.⁸⁵ This methodology was purpose-built to address issues in basing foreign policy studies in otherwise unrelated historical examples by using a “structured” standardized set of questions that address the object of the research across more than one case study.⁸⁶ It is “focused,” in that it only reviews certain facets of the historical cases.⁸⁷ Their method sets forth the guidelines for a systematic comparison of

⁸⁰ Harvard Kennedy School, “The Thucydides Trap Project,” Academic, *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*, accessed February 27, 2020, <https://www.belfercenter.org/thucydides-trap/resources/case-file-graphic>.

⁸¹ Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, 3:645.

⁸² Sarkees and Wayman, *Resort to War, 1816-2007*.

⁸³ Joseph R. Masih and Robert O. Krikorian, *Armenia at the Crossroads*, Postcommunist states and nations 2 (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999), 104.

⁸⁴ NA, “PiX Azerbaijan Overview,” Government Research, *PiX Today*, last modified August 8, 2019, accessed August 16, 2019, <https://www.pixtoday.net/article/article/82013>; NA, “PiX Armenia Overview,” Government Research, *PiX Today*, last modified August 8, 2019, accessed August 16, 2019, <https://www.pixtoday.net/article/article/81684>; Brett Ashley Leeds et al., “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions, 1815-1944,” *International Interactions* 28 (2002): 237–260.

⁸⁵ George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

political events occurring in different regions, time periods, and conditions to compile those findings. This study was conducted using a standardized set of research questions to evaluate each case, which revealed comparable data from the two disparate case studies to support this study's hypotheses.⁸⁸

Each case was based in its respective historiography, in which the Correlates of War database served to identify which conflicts were preceded by a period of more than five years of confrontation below the threshold of war.⁸⁹ The researcher chose five years as a reasonable period which would exclude conflicts interrupted by ceasefires and brief armistices. In the case of the Platine Conflict, secondary historiographies were used to determine the ethnicities. Leeds's Alliance Treaty Obligations Provisions Project (ATOP) version 4.1 allowed for an examination of the foreign policy of the conflict's participants.⁹⁰ This database provided a primary source of which alliances Argentina, Brazil, and the Platine Republics were members. Unlike alliances in the region, trade data is not currently available for the trading partners of Buenos Aires, Brazil, and the Platine Republics before 1870, and the researcher derived this information from secondary sources.

In the case of the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict, the researcher augmented secondary historiographies with primary sources and reporting on the respective conflicts. Primary data sources included Leeds' ATOP dataset and Katherine Barbieri's Correlates of War Trade dataset. The researcher used trade data to determine economic relationships in which the gray zone combatants were involved. Barbieri's data facilitated an analysis of the changes in trade between Armenia and Azerbaijan throughout the conflict, which then correlated to the changes in the

⁸⁸ George and Bennett, 2005, chaps. 3–4.

⁸⁹ Sarkees and Wayman, *Resort to War, 1816-2007*.

⁹⁰ Leeds et al., "Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions."

conduct of the gray zone conflict.⁹¹ Likewise, Leeds' alliance data provided a detailed data set of diplomatic agreements between the combatants and other interested countries, allowing for an assessment of how these agreements potentially influenced the conduct of the conflict.⁹²

Data Analysis

This study examined one primary research question, two secondary research questions, and four structured, focused comparison questions to evaluate the study's hypotheses. The primary question asked, are there identifiable characteristics of the conditions in which gray zone conflict is the preferable method of conflict over large scale conflict? The secondary research questions investigated the researcher's two case studies. The first asked, what caused the Brazilian government and the Rosas Government of Argentina to remain below the threshold of war from 1845 until 1852? The second investigated, why did Armenia and Azerbaijan remain locked in a gray zone conflict from 2009 to 2016

The four structured, focused comparison questions were developed to address the secondary questions in a standardized manner. While each question yielded varying answers, the mutual results served to indicate those critical conditions for a government's selection of gray zone conflict over conventional. The first was, what were the dominant ethnicities of the competing states? The researcher expected the existence of a diaspora to serve as a factor which facilitated the use of proxies in gray zone conflict, as well as justification for a party's participation in the conflict, and potentially a condition contributing to it being a preferred method of conflict.

The next three questions investigated the potential cost of a conventional conflict being so high it lessens the potential to use conventional conflict as an option for an aggressor in the

⁹¹ Katherine Barbieri and Omar M. G. Keshk, "Correlates of War Project Trade Data Set Codebook, Version 4.0 Online: [Http://Correlatesofwar.Org](http://Correlatesofwar.Org)," 2016; Katherine Barbieri, Omar M. G. Keshk, and Brian Pollins, "Trading Data: Evaluating Our Assumptions and Coding Rules," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 26, 5 (2009): 471–491.

⁹² Leeds et al., "Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions."

conflict. Question two asked of what alliances were the participating states members? Since alliances and mutual defense pacts are inherent deterrents, an open war would have widened a conflict, leading an aggressor to alternatively choose gray zone conflict as a less costly option.⁹³ A potential wider escalation of the conflict to other, potentially more powerful states would have increased the cost of contesting the initial state.

Question three asked if any of the participating states maintained a robust trading relationship with a state which possessed a significant deterrence capability. The potential for losing this relationship might have induced a nation to enter a conflict to protect a beneficial trade relationship. Trade would have a similar deterrence effect as an alliance, which would increase the likelihood of an aggressor nation to choose gray zone conflict.

The fourth question was whether an involved state held any real or perceived deterrence capability. Like economics, alliances have the potential to deter, and this question focused more on nuclear deterrence or the presence of a large naval or land force on which a belligerent could call upon in a conventional conflict. A deterrence capability is intended to convey the message that aggression is either impossible or not worth the cost for potential gain. In that case, gray zone conflict seemed to be a logical alternative to neutralize these capabilities.⁹⁴ The researcher expected the mental balance of cost outweighing the benefit of contesting a state conventionally being a significant characteristic in a belligerent's decision to choose gray zone conflict.

⁹³ Leeds, "Do Alliances Deter Aggression," 427–30.

⁹⁴ Major and Mölling, "Rethinking Deterrence," 1–2; Matissek, "Shades of Gray Deterrence," 1–3.

Case Study One: The Platine Conflict

Introduction

The Platine Conflict between the Rosas dictatorship of Argentina and the Republic of Brazil stands as a formative conflict in the development of South American politics. As such, the conflict permeated the general histories of Latin America as a whole.⁹⁵ In the first half of the nineteenth century, Paraguay, Uruguay, and the other Platine Republics were considered part of Argentina, though for this research they will be considered their own political entities. The conflict displayed many of the traits associated gray zone conflicts today, despite occurring in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Brazilian's pursued national objectives through the four instruments of national power in a single campaign against the Rosas Argentinians, although they executed in a gradual but not conclusive manner. Lastly, they did so, exclusively below the threshold of open war before 1850, even after primarily leveraging proxies instead of their conventional armies.⁹⁶

The Platine conflict culminated in the Plata War of 1851-1852 and was a relatively small war by European standards of the time totaling 1,300 battle-related deaths between the belligerents.⁹⁷ The Platine conflict between the government of Brazil and the Rosas dictatorship of Argentina began in 1819.⁹⁸ Following Organski's Power Transition Theory, both countries formed from the recently vacated Portuguese and Spanish holdings in South America and were dominant economic and political forces in South America seeking to upend the other for

⁹⁵ Pelham Horton Box, *The Origins of the Paraguayan War* (Urbana, IL: The University of Illinois, 1929); Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. 3, p. ; Box, *The Origins of the Paraguayan War*; David Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1982: From Spanish Colonization to the Falklands War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

⁹⁶ Mazarr, "Mastering the Gray Zone," 58; Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1982*, 106; Criscenti, "Argentine Constitutional History, 1810-1852," 401-9.

⁹⁷ Sarkees and Wayman, *Resort to War, 1816-2007*, 83.

⁹⁸ Lemke, "Power Politics and Wars without States," 778.

dominance of the region.⁹⁹ Each country held vast natural and agricultural resources, and both had aspirations to be the dominant force on the continent, with Brazil as the status quo power, and the Rosas as the rising power. Despite the political maneuvering of the two, both countries operated in the shadow of economically interested European superpowers.

Within the Rio de la Plata region, which included modern Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay, there were sixteen autonomous political entities, in addition to the Rosas-led government of Argentina located in Buenos Aires (figure 4.1).¹⁰⁰ The Platine conflict was contested between Brazil and Argentina, with the surrounding smaller republics torn between the two states. These republics stood at the headwaters forming the Amazon River and had been contested during Portuguese and Spanish colonialization in the region. These contestants were vying for the dominance of the La Plata region at the expense of their neighbors while playing Brazil against Argentina.¹⁰¹ Both powers supported their own leaders in the region. Brazil backed the liberally-minded politicians of the Rio de la Plata region, and Argentina backed conservatively minded leaders. Each nation worked to counter the other's influence in their region through indirect means, such as when the Brazilian government leveraged the information instrument of power to flood the already Rosas-disenchanted Platine region with anti-Rosas propaganda and Brazilian government sympathizers.¹⁰² The Platine regions were a natural buffer zone between Brazil and Argentina, as shown in figure 4.1. As depicted, the Platine republics, shown under the green shading, are pressed between the militarily and economically, not to

⁹⁹ A. F. K. Organski, *World Politics* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1958), chap. 12.

¹⁰⁰ Lemke, "Power Politics and Wars without States," 776-7.

¹⁰¹ D. Mclean, "Garibaldi in Uruguay: A Reputation Reconsidered," *The English Historical Review* CXIII, no. 451 (April 1, 1998): 351; Criscenti, "Argentine Constitutional History, 1810-1852," 401-9; Box, *The Origins of the Paraguayan War*, 18-27.

¹⁰² Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1982*, 111-2; E. Bradford Burns, *A History of Brazil* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 228-230.

mention geographically, larger Brazil and Argentina. Further complicating the situation was the interest in the region expressed by the global powers of France and Great Britain.



Figure 4.1 South America 1846. The shaded green area denotes the Plata River Basin and the primary location of the conflict Source: Bradford, “South America 1846,” Retail, *Geographicus Rare Antique Maps*, accessed February 27, 2020, <https://www.geographicus.com/P/AntiqueMap/SouthAmerica-bradford-1846>.

Question 1: What were the dominant ethnicities of the competing states?

While detailed census data on the ethnicities of the Brazilian and Argentinian populations was not available, secondary sources identified that the populations of the two countries consisted of Native Americans and the ethnicity of their colonizing nations.¹⁰³ Having been a colony of Spain as recently as 1810, Argentina was of predominantly Spanish descent, like much of the

¹⁰³ Lemke, “Power Politics and Wars without States,” 777; Rex A. Hudson, *Brazil: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1997), sec. Race and Ethnicity, accessed March 17, 2020, <http://countrystudies.us/brazil/13.htm>.

Platine region.¹⁰⁴ Each of these provinces was ruled by a caudillo, Spanish for strongman, such as Argentinian leader Manuel de Rosas in Buenos Aires.¹⁰⁵ Unlike the Platine region, the Brazilian empire originated predominantly from Portugal, a fact that they worked to overcome to exert influence in Brazil's neighboring former Spanish Colonies. To gain influence, Brazil flooded the Platine Republics' exclusively native American and Spanish descent population, bringing it to one-fifth Portuguese descent.¹⁰⁶

While the contested region between capitals of Brazil and Argentina were initially of Spanish descent, the Brazilian's used migration to create an artificial diaspora in the Plata Region. Using the Uruguayan Platine Republic as an example, nearly twenty percent of the population was of Portuguese descent after that resettlement, with the other majority being Spanish.¹⁰⁷ This gave Brazil the voting block to subvert the de Rosas administration in the Platine region, and justification for intervention when the time came.

Question 2: Of what alliances were the participating state's members?

With the removal of Spanish control from South America and subsequent Brazilian independence from Portugal, neither country had an explicit alliance with larger countries.¹⁰⁸ The researcher speculated this was due to the newly formed nature of the South American nations; however, that was not made clear in the research. While these nations did have international involvement from other countries in their economies, it seemed neither Brazil nor Argentina were willing to enter into a formal alliance to protect these investments.

¹⁰⁴ Lemke, "Power Politics and Wars without States," 777.

¹⁰⁵ "Definition of Caudillo," Dictionary, *Merriam-Webster*, accessed October 30, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/caudillo>; Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, 3:647–9.

¹⁰⁶ Burns, *A History of Brazil*, 228–30.

¹⁰⁷ Mclean, "Garibaldi in Uruguay," 351.

¹⁰⁸ Leeds et al., "Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions."

Question 3: Did any of the participating states maintain a robust economic relationship with a state which possessed a significant deterrence capability?

The geographies of Brazil and Argentina were of great economic interest to France, Great Britain, and the United States. Those nations were particularly interested in their agricultural outputs, and their ability to control the agricultural exports via the Amazon and Plata Rivers leading to the Atlantic Ocean.¹⁰⁹ To these world powers access to these regions was vital. This interest created further enmity between Brazil and Argentina.¹¹⁰ To exert influence over these regions, Argentinian leader de Rosas blocked exports from the regions, prompting France and Great Britain to blockade Buenos Aires to guard their economic interests.¹¹¹ By 1846, Great Britain concluded Argentina was more valuable as a means of economic stability in the regions, and this led to tacit support of the de Rosas administration.¹¹² After his defeat at Caseros, de Rosas called on this support, as a British Warship evacuated him to England. Following the blockage, this evacuation ended Britain's direct involvement in the Platine Conflict.¹¹³

Despite the two country's lack of significant allies, the coveted agricultural exports of their spheres of influence made the region of great economic interest to substantial world powers.¹¹⁴ The navy's of these world powers introduced a deterrence factor for any nations who threatened the agricultural output of the region, a capability demonstrated by France and Great Britain's willingness to blockade South American Nations. Both sides had the incentive, if not the

¹⁰⁹ Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, 3:649–50; Harris Gaylord Warren, *Paraguay: An Informal History* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949), 185.

¹¹⁰ Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1982*, 111–2.

¹¹¹ Burns, *A History of Brazil*, 229; Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, 3:645–7.

¹¹² Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1982*, 112–3.

¹¹³ Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, 3:648; Mclean, "Garibaldi in Uruguay," 364.

¹¹⁴ Leeds et al., "Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions."

desire, to maintain a conflict below the threshold of war lest they draw the ire of these world powers..¹¹⁵

Question 4: Did any of the participating states possess a significant deterrence capability, whether nuclear, conventional or otherwise?

By comparison to most European nations, neither Argentina nor Brazil possessed a significant deterrence capability between 1845 and 1852. Although each had ample forces to bully the Platine republics into joining their camp, neither could project their forces beyond the Plata region. In 1845, Argentina possessed an army of approximately 30,000 well-equipped soldiers, while holding a slight advantage in its ability to send this force into the Plata region..¹¹⁶ Brazil had an army of 18,000 soldiers primarily concerned with domestic security, and their ability to export this force was limited at best..¹¹⁷ Contesting de Rosas directly in La Plata was out of the questions for Brazil. Through diplomacy and their artificially created diaspora, the Brazilians were able to leverage the forces of the Platine Republics. This combined force was able to field an army equal to the numbers and capability of Argentina to resist the danger of a hegemonic “Greater Argentina” on Brazil’s borders..¹¹⁸

Argentina’s well-trained army was a significant deterrence capability to Brazil expanding into the Plata region. This drove Brazil to leverage the forces of the Platine Republics under the Argentina-appointed Platine leader General Urquiza who was openly revolting against the

¹¹⁵ Manuel de Rosas chose to disregard this in his blockade of exports to significant world powers in 1838 and again in 1843-6. Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, 3:645.

¹¹⁶ US Army and American University (Washington, DC), eds., *Argentina: A Country Study*, Country Studies (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1985), 283–4.

¹¹⁷ Hudson, *Brazil: A Country Study*, sec. The Regency Era, 1831-40 and The Second Empire, 1840-89.

¹¹⁸ Burns, *A History of Brazil*, 229; US Army and American University (Washington, DC), *Argentina*, 283–4; Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, 3:648; Lemke, “Power Politics and Wars without States,” 774–5; Warren, *Paraguay*, 185–6.

Argentinian Government. Brazil supplemented Urquiza's army with their navy and a token expeditionary force.¹¹⁹

Conclusion

Brazil's direct involvement was the culmination of Brazilian subversion of de Rosas' expansionist policies, de Rosas' economic weakness from his defiance of the French blockade, and the insurrection of former de Rosas ally Urquiza and his Platine coalition of 28,000 soldiers.¹²⁰ Brazil's direct involvement was not a matter of de Rosa's actions forcing Brazil's hand, nor the government's alignment to these Platine Republics or their proxies there. It was instead an opportunity to eliminate a rival state's influence in the region, and its threat to Brazil with minimal cost.

Brazil's political and financial support to liberal politicians in the Platine region showed their willingness to counter de Rosas' "Greater Argentina" plan diplomatically and economically.¹²¹ Their resettling of tens of thousands of Brazilians, and flooding the region with anti-Rosas propaganda served to sway public opinion on the selection of these politicians in an apparent use of the information instrument of power.

¹¹⁹ US Army and American University (Washington, DC), *Argentina*, 284; Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, 3:648.

¹²⁰ US Army and American University (Washington, DC), *Argentina*, 284; Burns, *A History of Brazil*, 229; Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, 3:648; Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1982*, 111–2.

¹²¹ Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1982*, 104.

Case Study Two: The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

Introduction

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Armenia and Azerbaijan had a volatile relationship punctuated with small wars, intermixed with Russian intervention. Before its dissolution, Soviet rule kept the two nations' dispute over Nagorno Karabakh (NK) in check. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the conflict reached a point in which Armenia facilitated NK's breakaway from Azerbaijan. Nagorno Karabakh accounted for fourteen percent of Azerbaijan's internationally recognized territory and was a majority ethnic Armenian population (figure 5.1).¹²² Although declared an autonomous region, it was surrounded by an Armenian buffer zone, and remained in a state of "frozen conflict."¹²³ It was also a gray zone contest between Azerbaijan and Armenia.¹²⁴



Figure 5.1. Nagorno-Karabakh Region. Source: "Baku 'Shoots Down' Armenian Helicopter," News, *Radio Free Europe*, last modified November 12, 2014, accessed October 30, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenia-azerbaijan-karabakh-helicopter-down/26687375.html>.

¹²² Thomas De Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War*, 10th-year anniversary edition, revised and updated ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 3.

¹²³ "Baku 'Shoots Down' Armenian Helicopter," News, *Radio Free Europe*, last modified November 12, 2014, accessed October 30, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/armenia-azerbaijan-karabakh-helicopter-down/26687375.html>.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*; De Waal, *Black Garden*, 9.

Armenia and Azerbaijan existed as nominal democracies since the fall of the Soviet Union, and both had remained under significant Russian Federation influence afterward. Any instability caused by a conflict between the two was of significant interest to Russia.¹²⁵ Azerbaijan and Armenia maintained an ethnic affinity with Turkey and Iran due to their significant diaspora population in those regions.¹²⁶

The frozen Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was a defining aspect of national identity for both Azerbaijan and Armenia.¹²⁷ Operating in the Russian back yard, both countries were aware of Russia's ability to intervene militarily in any larger-scale open conflict in the region.¹²⁸ Both countries attempted to keep conflict below the threshold of conventional war because the cost of Russian intervention on either side served as a significant deterrent.¹²⁹ The Soviets viewed the words "Nagorny Karabakh" as an "intractable conflict fought by exotic and implacable people."¹³⁰ From 2009 to 2016 powers, Russia and Europe remained diplomatically focused on conflicts in Syria and Ukraine. Concurrently, international economic interest in the region's oil reserves increased, which correlated with the rise and fall of crude oil within that same timeframe.¹³¹ As international economic interest drove Armenia and Azerbaijan to keep their conflict below the threshold of war to avoid the ire of the United States and other oil-interested

¹²⁵ NA, "Azerbaijan Overview"; De Waal, *Black Garden*, 8–9.

¹²⁶ Masih and Krikorian, *Armenia at the Crossroads*, 104, 116.

¹²⁷ NA, "Armenia Overview."

¹²⁸ Masih and Krikorian, *Armenia at the Crossroads*, 105.

¹²⁹ Michael P. Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict: Causes and Implications* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 23–32.

¹³⁰ De Waal, *Black Garden*, 9.

¹³¹ Simon Tisdall, "Azerbaijan-Armenia Conflict Is a Reminder of Europe's Instability," *The Guardian* (Armenia, April 3, 2016), sec. World news, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/03/azerbaijan-armenia-conflict-europe-instability-nagorno-karabakh>; "Crude Oil Price Today: Market Insider," News, *Businessinsider.Com*, last modified February 21, 2020, accessed February 21, 2020, <https://markets.businessinsider.com/commodities/oil-price?type=wti>.

nations, as the traditional power balance for the two, Russia was not focused on the region to keep a gray zone conflict from forming between two.

Many observers have defined this conflict of one of inevitability over ethnicity or religion since Armenia and Azerbaijan are Christian and Muslim respectively.¹³² Historically the region has most often been a flashpoint between great powers; including the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman Empires.¹³³ Relations between the two countries were acceptable during the Cold War era, but this accepts that the USSR held complete control over the two states. When Gorbachev released this control ever so slightly as part of Perestroika, the deluge of grievances came forth and rose to the surface. This led to a war between the two states from 1990 to 1995, immediately after gaining their independence from the Soviet Union. During that war, Russia and Europe made six major, yet unsuccessful attempts to resolve the conflict, though Armenian-backed Nagorno Karabakh broke from Azerbaijan control.¹³⁴ Neither country maintained diplomatic relations with the other during this time, which Armenia ascribed to the Ottoman mass killings of Armenians.¹³⁵ Once Russia reapplied control, the nature of conflict returned to the gray zone after 2016.¹³⁶

Leading to 2016, the conflict increased in its violence, though it remained low in intensity. Advances in unmanned aerial vehicle technology and availability, alongside the increased accuracy of artillery, had made attacks against moving vehicles, troop concentrations,

¹³² Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 23–32.

¹³³ Tisdall, “Azerbaijan-Armenia Conflict Is a Reminder of Europe’s Instability.” during final edit, remember Ibid cannot be first on the page.

¹³⁴ Carey Cavanaugh, *Renewed Conflict Over Nagorno-Karabakh* (Council on Foreign Relations, 2017), 1, JSTOR, accessed December 12, 2019, www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05705.

¹³⁵ Tisdall, “Azerbaijan-Armenia Conflict Is a Reminder of Europe’s Instability”; Moorad Mooradian and Daniel Druckman, “Hurting Stalemate or Mediation? The Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, 1990-95,” *Journal of Peace Research* 36, no. 6 (1999): 710.

¹³⁶ De Waal, *Black Garden*, 2; Alexander Mercouris, “Fighting in Nagorno Karabakh: A Headache for Moscow,” News, *Russia Insider*, last modified April 3, 2016, accessed August 16, 2019, <https://russia-insider.com/en/node/13720>.

and formations well beyond the front lines possible for both sides.¹³⁷ Snipers accounted for approximately thirty deaths every year between the two nations' armies.¹³⁸ In 2014, Azerbaijani air defense units downed an Armenian helicopter in their territory, prompting increased enmity between the two countries, but short of open war.¹³⁹ This aggression prompted a war of words between the two nation's leaders, culminating in Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev to openly threaten reunification of the NK region via military means.¹⁴⁰ In April 2016, a brief yet intense four-day war erupted between the two countries, resulting in three hundred and fifty casualties.¹⁴¹ Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Turkish and Russian diplomatic intrusions hampered the peace process.¹⁴²

Question 1: What were the dominant ethnicities of the competing states?

In 2010, the South Caucasus nation of Azerbaijan reported a population of 8.8 million compared to Armenia's 3.09 million.¹⁴³ Given the political nature of the NK region's population, researchers estimated the population in NK at 110,000.¹⁴⁴ Ethnically, 91.6% of Azerbaijan's population was of Azerbaijani descent. People of Azerbaijani descent are predominantly Muslim. Accounting for 1.3% of its total population are ethnic Armenians who resided almost exclusively in NK.¹⁴⁵ Conversely, Armenia's population was 98.1% of Armenian descent, of which 93.6% of

¹³⁷ NA, "Armenia Overview."

¹³⁸ De Waal, *Black Garden*, 2.

¹³⁹ "Baku 'Shoots Down' Armenian Helicopter."

¹⁴⁰ Enjoli Liston, "Azerbaijan's President Threatens War with Armenia via Twitter," *The Guardian*, August 7, 2014, sec. World news, accessed August 16, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/07/azerbaijan-president-threatens-war-armenia-twitter>.

¹⁴¹ Cavanaugh, *Renewed Conflict Over Nagorno-Karabakh*, 1.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ World Bank, "Population Estimates and Projections | DataBank," International Government Organization, *The World Bank*, last modified 2010, accessed October 30, 2019, <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/population-estimates-and-projections>.

¹⁴⁴ De Waal, *Black Garden*, 326.

¹⁴⁵ NA, "Azerbaijan Overview"; Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 12.

those Armenians were Christian.¹⁴⁶ These two countries were comprised of two radically different ethnicities and historically charged religions that served as a recipe for conflict. This was particularly evident in the enclave of NK, which acted as an Armenian powder keg. The fact that nearly all of the Armenian population within Azerbaijan existed within NK formed a leverage point for Armenian efforts to undermine Azerbaijan short of open conflict

Question 2: Of what alliances were the participating states members?

Armenia and Azerbaijan were members of a complex web of non-aggression and defense pacts designed by each to gain an advantage over the other. This was rooted in both of their relationships with Russia as former Soviet Republics. Figures 5.2, 5.3, 5.4 show the maneuvering the two countries conducted to balance the political advances of the other, with Armenia working to keep from being physically cut off by Azerbaijan's allies. Despite a mutual defense pact in the case of Azerbaijan and Turkey, both nations maintained a significant political relationship with the Russian Federation.¹⁴⁷ The Russian Federation began manipulating Azerbaijan as a means to control the two and maintain relative stability in what it considered its near-abroad. Russia's involvement in the region was less focused from 2009 to 2016 due to its Georgian and Ukrainian Conflicts during that time.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ NA, "Armenia Overview."

¹⁴⁷ Masih and Krikorian, *Armenia at the Crossroads*, 104; Audrey L. Altstadt, *Frustrated Democracy in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan* (Washington, DC: New York, NY: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Columbia University Press, 2017), 46.

¹⁴⁸ Altstadt, *Frustrated Democracy in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan*, 46; Igor Zevelev, "The Russian World in Moscow's Strategy," Academic, *Center for Strategic International Studies*, last modified August 22, 2016, accessed December 5, 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russian-world-moscows-strategy>.



Figure 5.2. Armenian Alliance Network, 2007-Today. This map depicts Armenia’s relative isolation when view beside its neighbors and enemies Turkey and Azerbaijan. Maps developed with mapchart.net. Alliance information derived from Brett Ashley Leeds’s Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP) project version 4.01. Created by author.



Figure 5.3. Azerbaijan Alliance Network, 2007-Today. Maps developed with mapchart.net. Alliance information derived from Brett Ashley Leeds’s Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP) project version 4.01. Created by author.

Azerbaijan Treatise		
Country	Established	Treaty
Georgia	1993	Non-Aggression
Turkey	1994	Defense
Bulgaria	1995	Non-Aggression
Romania	1996	Non-Aggression
Uzbekistan	1996	Non-Aggression
Kazakhstan	1996	Neutrality
Russia	1996	Non-Aggression
Ukraine	1996	Non-Aggression
Tajikistan	2007	Non-Aggression
Belarus	2007	Non-Aggression

Armenia Treatise		
Country	Established	Treaty
Romania	1994	Non-Aggression
Bulgaria	1995	Non-Aggression
Denmark	1996	Neutrality
Russia	1997	Defense
Kazakhstan	1999	Non-Aggression
Belarus	2001	Non-Aggression
Georgia	2001	Non-Aggression
Kyrgyzstan	2002	Non-Aggression

Figure 5.4. Azerbaijan-Armenian Alliance Timeline Table, 2007-Today. Alliance information derived from Brett Ashley Leeds’s Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP) project version 4.01. Created by author.

Besides Russia, Azerbaijan maintained especially close ties with Turkey. This aligned with the historic issues Turkey has had with ethnic Armenians.¹⁴⁹ Turkey regularly conducted blockades of oil and other necessities for Armenia after 1991. Further, Turkey saw Azerbaijan as a counterbalance to its neighbor Armenia. The Armenians saw closer ties to Russia as a balance against the Azeris-Turkish pact, while Russia saw close ties with both Armenia and Azerbaijan as a means to hold Georgia in check strategically.¹⁵⁰ Likewise, an Armenian diaspora in Iran created a sense of close ties between Armenia and its Armenian-Iranian population.¹⁵¹ Figures 5.2 and 5.3 display the veritable surrounding of Armenia by Azerbaijan’s diplomatic maneuvering, as well as Armenia’s efforts to counterbalance the shifts in regional international relations.

Both countries operated within a web of interested regional and global powers. Since both viewed NK as vital to their national interests, it was unlikely either would allow the current

¹⁴⁹ Lucy Kafanov, “Turkey, Armenians Battle over Genocide 100 Years Later,” *News, USA Today*, last modified April 23, 2015, accessed March 17, 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2015/04/23/turkey-armenia-genocide-massacre-anniversary/26261059/>.

¹⁵⁰ Altstadt, *Frustrated Democracy in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan*, 46.

¹⁵¹ Masih and Krikorian, *Armenia at the Crossroads*, 104–119.

status quo to remain. A military clash between the two in 2016 was unavoidable without some measure of appeasement by the other. This is despite the significant deterrence served by having powerful allies and other economically and politically interested nations such as Russia.¹⁵² To undermine the deterrence to conflict provided by these allies and interested nations, Azerbaijan and Armenia both chose to undermine their respective adversary at levels below the threshold of war.

Question 3: Did any of the participating states maintain a robust economic relationship with a state which possessed a significant deterrence capability?

As an oil-exporting nation, Azerbaijan maintained significant economic relations with numerous countries around the world, and this interest only increased as crude oil prices spiked starting in 2009.¹⁵³ In addition to its formal ally Turkey, US interests held upwards of forty percent of Azerbaijan's oil.¹⁵⁴ This oil was sent west to support European Union energy requirements (appendix A). The Azerbaijanis used this oil interest as a way to galvanize France, Russia, Great Britain, Japan, Italy, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, and Norway against Armenia by portraying aggression in NK as aggression against these nations' oil supply.¹⁵⁵ Conversely, Armenia possessed little economic value for any of the major nations. While oil interests favored Azerbaijan, the country used their windfall oil profits to narrow Armenia's significant advantage in military capability (figure 5.5 and appendix A). Their oil wealth allowed them to leverage the interest for arms and training from not only Russia but also the United States and other Western nations.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Fred Charles Iklé, *Every War Must End*, Revised edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

¹⁵³ "Crude Oil Price Today."

¹⁵⁴ Masih and Krikorian, *Armenia at the Crossroads*, 111.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Altstadt, *Frustrated Democracy in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan*, 44; Masih and Krikorian, *Armenia at the Crossroads*, 107; Barbieri and Keshk, "Trade Data Set."

Unlike Azerbaijan, Armenia lacked significant economic ties with other powers, though it did share a strategically valuable border with Iran (appendix A).¹⁵⁷ While Russia saw Iran as a potential strategic partner, the United States saw it necessary to contain the Iranians. Armenia made itself a strategically, if not economically, valuable partner.¹⁵⁸ During the oil price spike, efforts to reduce the price of shipping Azerbaijani oil to Europe improved Armenia's prospects. The planned oil pipeline to Europe was planned to cut through Armenian territory. From the perspective of the United States and the European Union, this would have eliminated Russia's ability to influence oil exports from the region. For the Russians, this made Armenia a potential partner, increasing their strategic value by stopping this pipeline, and keeping Azerbaijani oil exports flowing through infrastructure that Russia controlled.¹⁵⁹

Shifting economic and strategic winds allowed both Azerbaijan and Armenia to keep external powers invested in their respective plights. Given the oil exports of the region, the aforementioned nations all had an interest in keeping the region out of major conflict to ensure the continued flow of crude oil (figure 5.5 and appendix A). It was reasonable for either Azerbaijan or Armenia to factor the potential for these nations to intervene to defend their economic interest. Both nations had an incentive to contest the other in pursuit of control of NK while maintaining conflict below a level which would have induced outside intervention.

¹⁵⁷ Barbieri, Keshk, and Pollins, "Trading Data."

¹⁵⁸ Masih and Krikorian, *Armenia at the Crossroads*, 110, 124.

¹⁵⁹ Mercouris, "Fighting in Nagorno Karabakh"; Masih and Krikorian, *Armenia at the Crossroads*, 123.



Figure 5.5. Price Per Barrel of Crude Oil. Source: “Crude Oil Price Today: Market Insider,” News, *Businessinsider.Com*, last modified February 21, 2020, accessed February 21, 2020, <https://markets.businessinsider.com/commodities/oil-price?type=wti>.

Question 4: Did any of the participating states possess a significant deterrence capability, whether nuclear, conventional or otherwise?

From 2009 to 2016, military forces in the region were improved to achieve a deterrent effect. The armed forces of NK represented one of the most combat-capable forces in the Caucasus.¹⁶⁰ With sixty-five out of every 1,000 residents serving actively or in the reserves, this force, and its Armenian parent force, was widely considered to be more capable than its Azerbaijani counterparts.¹⁶¹ After the withdrawal of Soviet forces during the breakup of the Soviet Union, both Armenia and Azerbaijan were able to acquire rough parity in military capability with their acquisitions of Soviet armaments.¹⁶² Conversely, recent windfall oil revenues fueled massive military expansion by the Azerbaijanis government. Modern tanks, air

¹⁶⁰ NA, “Armenia Overview.”

¹⁶¹ “Armenian Army,” Military Encyclopedia, *Global Security*, accessed December 3, 2019, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/armenia/army.htm>; Tomáš Baranec and Juraj Beskid, “Nagorno-Karabakh and the Military Balance,” News, *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, last modified May 10, 2016, accessed December 3, 2019, <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13362-nagorno-karabakh-and-the-military-balance.html>.

¹⁶² Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, 44.

defense, and infantry fighting vehicles significantly improved the technical quality of Azerbaijan's army, though experts still believed Armenia maintained an advantage in terms of experience and quality.¹⁶³ Whether the quality of units or quality of equipment, neither force seemed to have a significant advantage in terms of conventional military capability, nor did either have a nuclear capability. Since "each country views Karabakh as a historically vital piece of territory that must be liberated at all costs," it is unlikely that one nation would have been deterred by the other.¹⁶⁴ However, an outside capability that would eliminate their prospects of taking or holding NK would have had a significant deterrent effect, at least in keeping the conflict in the gray zone where deterrence proves less effective.¹⁶⁵

Conclusion

Both Armenia and Azerbaijan limited their conflicts over the NK region while leveraging multiple instruments of national power to intentionally achieve limited instead of outright political victories. This was likely done to limit the involvement of international parties, all of which had an interest in the region for economic and regional stability. To maintain the gray-zone nature of this conflict, Armenia leveraged the nominally autonomous NK government and military to keep the dispute active, yet frozen, using political, military, and financial support to NK.

¹⁶³ "Armenian Army"; "Nagorno-Karabakh," Military Encyclopedia, *Global Security*, accessed December 3, 2019, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/nagorno-karabakh.htm>.

¹⁶⁴ Masih and Krikorian, *Armenia at the Crossroads*, 72.

¹⁶⁵ Matissek, "Shades of Gray Deterrence."

Analysis and Recommendations

As gray zone conflicts, both the Platine and Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts aligned two of the researcher's three hypotheses. Each met a minimum of two of the three hypotheses present for a state to select gray zone conflict. While the NK and Platine conflicts took place in different regions of the world and eras of history, they are both examples of gray zone conflict. As such, they exhibit many of the same characteristics that led to each conflict.

The hypotheses were examined by answering four structured, focused comparison questions. The first hypothesis was that a state selects gray zone conflict when an ethnic group in a diaspora condition could serve as a proxy force in a state in which the aggressor nation wished to exert influence. This hypothesis was not confirmed. To examine this hypothesis, the researcher used the question, what were the dominant ethnicities of the competing states? The researcher expected the existence of a diaspora to serve as a factor which facilitated the use of proxies in gray zone conflict, as well as justification for a party's participation in the conflict, and potentially a condition contributing to it being a preferred method of conflict. This was displayed only in the NK case study of this research. Armenians leveraged ethnic Armenians in the Azerbaijani region of NK to split them from Azerbaijan's control. This Armenian diaspora in Azerbaijan was Armenia's tool to contest the Azerbaijani government and avoid a larger conflict that would draw international interest.

While the Platine conflict did not seem to have an ethnic affinity aspect to these states' decisions to engage in gray zone conflict. While the ethnically aligned population was not present to influence their decision to choose gray zone conflict, Brazil took steps to artificially create this diaspora by inundating the Platine Region with ethnic Portuguese. Brazil recognized this condition as a prerequisite to conduct this method of war, but it did not influence the initial decision to choose gray zone conflict.

The second hypothesis was that a state would choose gray zone conflict as a means to achieve policy goals in a state which was engaged in a military alliance with a larger nation, or in which a larger nation had significant economic interests, to avoid escalating the contest, at least initially, to a wider conventional war. To evaluate the second hypothesis for a state's selection of gray zone conflict, the research examined two research questions. This approach confirmed this hypothesis in both case studies. This is best explained if the second question regarding alliances is examined alongside the third question, economic interrelation. Question two, were either of the involved countries in a military alliance, was only affirmed in the NK Conflict. Question three, did either involved nation maintain a robust trading relation, was affirmed in both cases.

Despite these conflicts being very different in nature, location, and time; they both shared interesting aspects between them, most notably the willingness of a third-party-nation to intervene to defend economic interests. This interest proved to be a critical consideration for the Argentinian government, particularly following the European blockade of Argentina responding to its interdiction of goods leaving the Platine region. These nations' willingness to counter threats to their economic interests served as a deterrence factor in itself. Likewise, Brazil heeded this lesson when they exerted influence on the Platine region to counter the de Rosas regime in a manner which did not threaten these agricultural exports. This threat of blockade, not an alliance with a stronger nation to which neither nation was a party, encouraged the participating nations to contest the other through proxies, or non-military means below the threshold of war to avoid the ire of these world powers.

One hundred and fifty years later, Armenia and Azerbaijan found themselves in a similar dilemma; they faced international interest in the free flow of crude oil out of the Caucasus. Correspondingly, efforts to route oil pipelines out of the Caucasus threatened to shift regional powers' ability to influence the conflict. The Platine conflict, much like the actions between Azerbaijan or Armenia, threatened the economic lifeblood of larger powers. As such, both

belligerents had an interest in avoiding a situation which would expand the conflict, and gray zone conflict appeared to be how they achieved this.

The NK conflict existed in an entangled military environment with great powers that created a deterrent effect. Both sides held formal defensive treaties with the larger powers of Turkey and Russia, though Russia held interests in keeping Armenia and Azerbaijan balanced against each other as a means of stability in the region and to limit Western influence and expansion. Unlike NK, neither nation in the Platine Conflict were a member of an alliance.

The fourth hypothesis regarding deterrence capabilities with the belligerent states was confirmed in both case studies. It was examined with the question, did either state hold any real or perceived deterrence capability. In Argentina, De Rosas' large and well-trained army served to deter any conventional intervention by the Brazilian government into the Plata region. This deterrence left Brazil to counter Argentina below the threshold of conventional war. Their efforts remained in the gray zone until their limited victories led to a precipice in which conventional involvement was less risky. This precipice was Argentinian strongman Urquizo's divergence from the de Rosas Regime, and it provided the perfect proxy for Brazil to back in their bid to contest Argentina in the gray zone.

In the Caucasus, the Armenian diaspora in the NK region of Azerbaijan allowed the Armenians to fortify the region and keep it as a de facto client state apart from Azerbaijan. In response, Azerbaijan leveraged increased oil revenues to accelerate its military modernization which, and then used to threaten Armenian control of NK. This stalemate of deterrence led the region to several minor bloody clashes, as well as a steady requirement for soldiers on the frontlines, but it appears to have kept the two countries below the threshold of conventional war.

Since this research confirmed two of the three hypotheses, and the third, an ethnically aligned population, was seen as a prerequisite by Brazil, if not a factor in its decision, the primary research question is affirmed. There are identifiable characteristics of the conditions in which gray zone conflict is the preferable method of conflict over conventional war.

Applicability Today

The notion of protecting people of similar ethnicity is a common pretext for intervention and was most recently used in Vladimir Putin's concept of "Novorossiya" or "New Russia" as a justification for Russian actions in Southern and Eastern Ukraine.¹⁶⁶ While "Novorossiya" was a factor in the Ukraine conflict, it did not appear to be a factor in NK.

In 2016, the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia came to a head. Patriotic fervor created a situation of spiraling enmity in which a minor border clash in the disputed area established after the 1994 conflict was crossed by both sides with tanks, artillery, and helicopters. Outpourings of national support for both country's soldiers could be seen throughout Armenia and Azerbaijan. Economic interrelation, and fear of intervention by a larger power held this national enmity in check and in the gray zone between 2009 and this conflict in 2016. While the causes of the conflict remain speculative at best, given the poor methods of command and control of forces in the region, speculative reasoning can be made based on historical evidence.

Inflammation of the conflict arose out of decades of Soviet-enforced peace between the two nations. When Mikhail Gorbachev addressed the unrest in the Communist Party in the Soviet Union as part of Perestroika, he directed his attention away from maintaining order in the far-flung Soviet satellite states of Azerbaijan and Armenia. The historical enmity between the two nations exploded into a conflict between themselves and their Soviet rulers in 1988, lasting as open conflict through 1991.¹⁶⁷ Between 2009 and 2016, Russia was embroiled in conflicts in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria. Similar to 1988, open conflict erupted between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2016. While it will remain impossible to prove causality of Russia's global actions

¹⁶⁶ Eve Conant, "Ethnic Russians: Pretext for Putin's Ukraine Invasion?," News, *National Geographic News*, last modified May 2, 2014, accessed October 24, 2019, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/5/140502-russia-putin-ukraine-geography-crimea-language/>.

¹⁶⁷ Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict*, chap. 2; "Gorbachev and Perestroika," Academic, last modified August 28, 2008, accessed December 5, 2019, <http://mars.wnec.edu/~grempel/courses/wc2/lectures/gorrev.html>.

and conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, there was a surprising historical correlation between the Soviet Union's Perestroika and Afghan conflict with an NK conflict in 1988, and ongoing Russian conflicts in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria with an NK conventional conflict in 2016.

Future Research

The Nagorno Karabakh and Platine conflicts show several similarities in the conditions present in the two gray zone conflicts. Particularly, condition two, alliance with a larger nation, three, an economic interest in a nation, and four, deterrence capability. Condition one, an ethnically aligned diaspora, was present at the onset of the NK Conflict, and interestingly was artificially met during the Platine conflict by Brazil. Brazil's efforts to artificially meet this condition during the conflict potentially indicated how important Brazil felt this was to a successful gray zone conflict. While condition one was not necessarily important to the initial decision for Brazil, it appeared to be a prerequisite for Brazil to conduct gray zone conflict.

Since these conditions were confirmed in these two case studies, future research can be applied to extrapolating this research to other gray zone conflicts. A potential source of information is the Correlates of War project. This project details all wars since 1815. Within these conflicts, gray zone conflicts are identified as "conflict continues at below war level" in the COW Codebook.¹⁶⁸ Further research can also be applied to identifying additional conditions which influence a state's decision to conduct gray zone conflict over conventional war, as those hypotheses, while confirmed in this research, are not all-inclusive.

Additionally, these conditions should be mapped across today's current geopolitical environment. Globalization created a landscape in which many portions of the world find

¹⁶⁸ Meredith Reid Sarkees, "Inter-State Wars (Version 4.0): Definitions and Variables" (CQ Press, 2010), 4, accessed February 4, 2020, <https://correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/COW-war/inter-state-wars-codebook>.

themselves as a significant economic interest for one or more world powers.¹⁶⁹ Likewise, the increasing human, economic, and material cost of conventional wars have created a deterrent effect in nearly every conflict excepting the most imbalanced of potential wars.¹⁷⁰ This increasing cost means that gray zone conflict is not only increasing to counter American interests but when coupled with globalization, it is increasing in likelihood across the globe agnostic of primary participants in the conflict. By mapping where these conditions are present, it may be possible to prevent gray zone conflicts by taking measures to alter these conditions.

¹⁶⁹ Tarak Barkawi, *Globalization and War* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 27–28.

¹⁷⁰ Major and Mölling, “Rethinking Deterrence,” 1–3.

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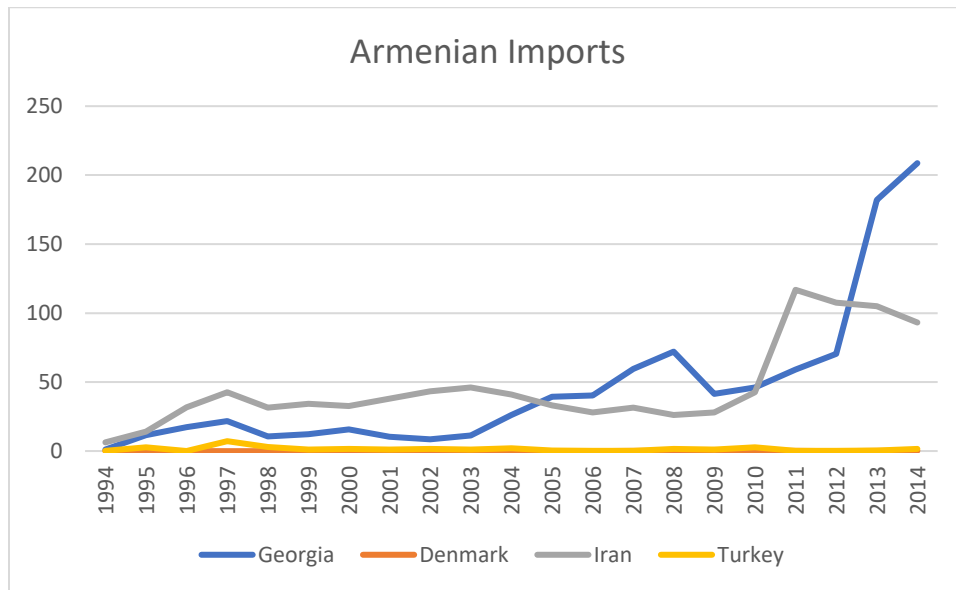
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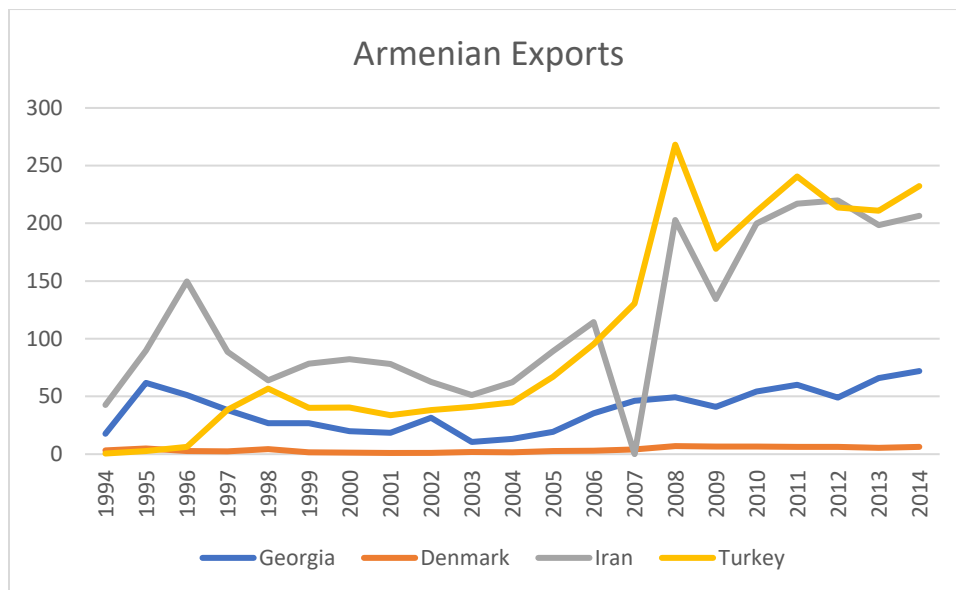
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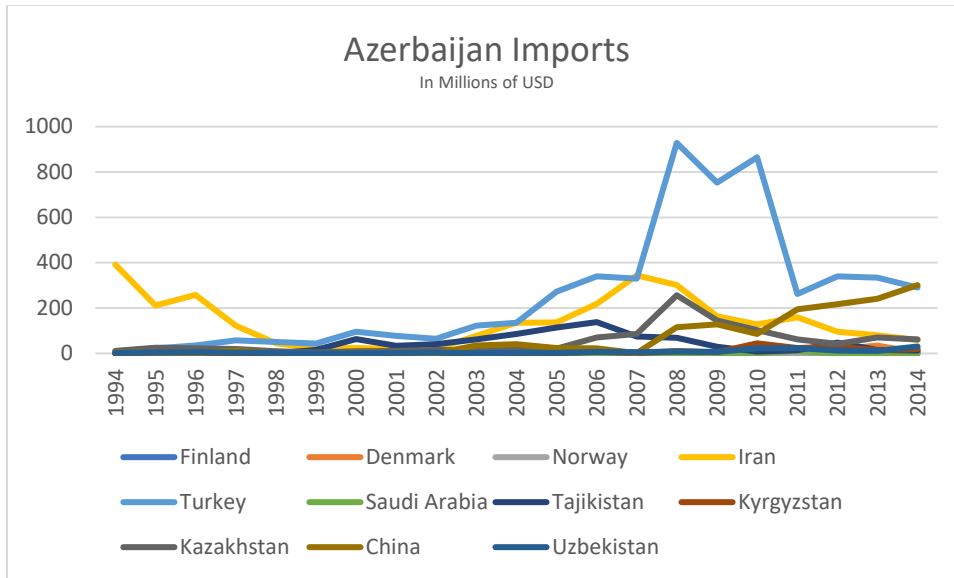
Appendix A: Armenian and Azerbaijan Import and Export Trends



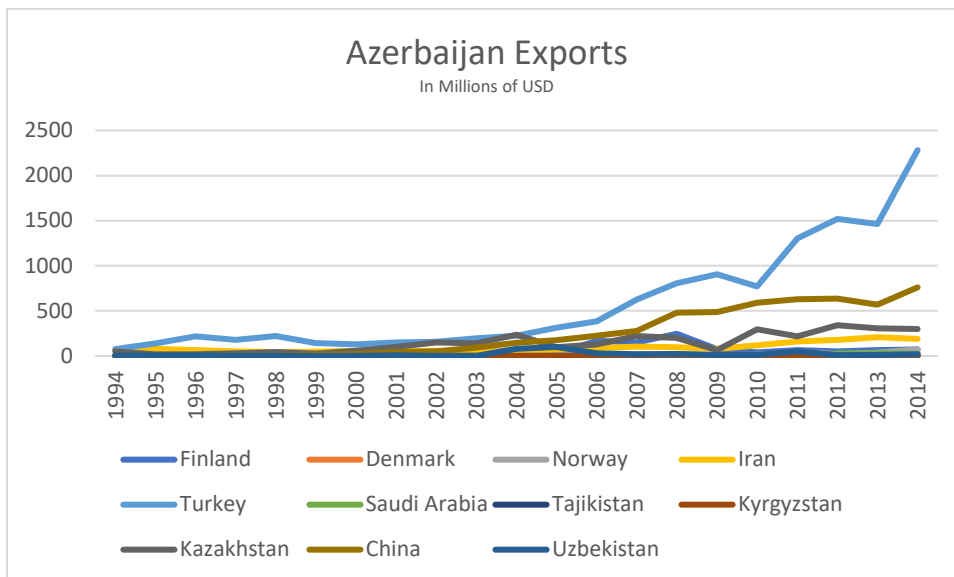
Appendix A-1. Armenian Import Trends, 1994-2014. Note the large increase in imports to Armenia from Georgia and Iran starting in 2009 and continuing during the gray zone conflict with Azerbaijan. Source: Barbieri and Keshk, “Trade Data Set”; Barbieri, Keshk, and Pollins, “Trading Data.” *Peace Science* 26, 5 (2009): 471–491.



Appendix A-2. Armenian Export Trends, 1994-2014. Imports to Armenia show a significant increase in 2007 in the region aligning with the researcher’s hypothesis that economic interrelation with larger powers influences a state’s choice of gray zone conflict. Source: Barbieri and Keshk, “Trade Data Set”; Barbieri, Keshk, and Pollins, “Trading Data.”



Appendix A-3. Azerbaijan Import Trends, 1994-2014. The reader should note the massive increase in import revenues from Turkey in 2007-2011 indicating a significant increase in the economic interrelation between Azerbaijan and Turkey. Source: Katherine Barbieri and Omar M. G. Keshk, “Correlates of War Project Trade Data Set Codebook, Version 4.0 Online: [Http://Correlatesofwar.Org](http://Correlatesofwar.Org),” 2016; Katherine Barbieri, Omar M. G. Keshk, and Brian Pollins, “Trading Data: Evaluating Our Assumptions and Coding Rules,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 26, 5 (2009): 471–491.



Appendix A-4. Azerbaijan Export Trends, 1994-2014. Starting in 2006, but primarily in 2009 and 2010, the oil prices depicted in figure 5.5 drove Azerbaijan’s export revenue massively upward allowing Azerbaijan to modernize its armed forces to deter Armenia into the gray. It also drove economic interest in the region, and potentially keep the conflict in the gray zone due to fear of intervention by a larger economically interested power. Source: Barbieri and Keshk, “Trade Data Set”; Barbieri, Keshk, and Pollins, “Trading Data.”

