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**THESIS**

**USING THEIR OWN PEOPLE AGAINST THEM:  
RUSSIA'S EXPLOITATION OF ETHNICITY IN  
GEORGIA AND UKRAINE**

by

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December 2015

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EXPLOITATION OF ETHNICITY IN GEORGIA AND UKRAINE**

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## ABSTRACT

Russia consistently exploits ethnic divides in its foreign policy strategy, specifically against states in its “near abroad.” Georgia and Ukraine have been on the receiving end of this strategy for most of their post-Soviet history. As a result, the sovereignty of both has been systematically and repeatedly violated by Russia.

A comparative study of Georgia and Ukraine, two countries that share a unique historical relationship with Russia but are now ideologically moving outside its orbit, permits a more nuanced view into two distinctive aspects of Russia’s exploitation of ethnic divisions: Georgia as an ancient and unique nation located in the crossroads of three continents, and Ukraine as a fellow Slavic country with a shared Russian history fighting to create its own identity.

Russia’s efforts to exploit ethnic divides fall into six categories: exporting propaganda, manipulating identity, arming insurgents, supplying fighters, exploiting presence, and freezing conflicts. Though Russia has successfully weakened Georgia and Ukraine through these six strategic methods, Russia has struggled to achieve its long-term goals of limiting Western influence, creating a Russian hegemony, and restoring Russia to great-power status. In pursuing these goals, Russia not only irreparably damaged ethnic relationships in Georgia and Ukraine, but also severely tarnished its international reputation.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

ATO	Antiterrorism Operation
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
DNR	Donetsk People's Republic
EU	European Union
GRU	Main Intelligence Directorate (Russia)
LNR	Luhansk People's Republic
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
UN	United Nations
USSR	Union of Socialist Soviet Republics

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I have been immeasurably lucky during the exploration of this topic to be given the chance to travel to both Georgia and Ukraine. The experience, and the warm people I met in each country, gave me precious insights that I hope enhance the effect of this thesis.

I am also in incredible debt to my wife, Lena, my wonderful traveling companion and executive editor. Without her, this project would have been nothing like the adventure it became. I love you, sweetheart!

I know as scholar you should remain neutral to the subject that you are studying, but know this...I stand with the Ukrainian and Georgian people. In my research I have been moved by the plight and struggle these nations have suffered in their respective wars against numerous destabilizing forces. Both countries face threats that the world cannot ignore, and we, as the West, have abandoned the proud people of the steppe and Caucasus. Now it is too late, politically at least, to provide decisive assistance to these citizens, but what we can do is deny further opportunities to distort and destroy their sense of identity. I wish anyone who reads this thesis will come to better understand what Ukraine and Georgia have to offer the world, and support their freedom to choose their own destiny.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

At [the] bottom of Kremlin's neurotic view of world affairs is [a] traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity.

—George Kennan, *Long Telegram*

A visitor to the Republic of Georgia's capital, Tbilisi, would see little indication of the country's history of ethnic conflict. The city embodies the dynamic character of the Georgian people: they have rejuvenated Tbilisi, restoring cultural sites and a revitalizing a vibrant tourist sector. Its people are welcoming and friendly, as well as eager to be perceived as modern and European. But outside the capital, the harsher truth of Georgia's existence comes into focus. Its infrastructure is in disrepair, its economy still heavily dependent on agriculture, and its territorial integrity at risk. Despite almost a quarter century of independence, large swaths of Georgia is occupied and divided, primarily along ethnic lines. Ethnic Ossetian and Abkhazian minorities hold sway over large portions of the country's north and northwest, supported diplomatically, militarily, and economically by the Russian Federation. These ethnic minorities fought two wars—one in the early 1990s and a second in 2008, both supported by Russia—to gain their current status as de facto independent states. Despite their victory, today these people live in limbo, pawns in a greater game characterized by an exploitative Russian state.

Another former Soviet Socialist Republic, Ukraine, also exists in a state of ethnic disharmony. At one pole are the people of Lviv, in the country's Eurocentric west. This city, like Tbilisi, is also lively, immersed in a festival-like atmosphere where merrymaking can be heard until the early morning hours. But as one moves further east, away from this pole, the Ukrainian language and culture is slowly replaced by Russian. In Kyiv, the geographic, political, and cultural center of the country, the Russian language is just as common as Ukrainian, and although post-Soviet construction in Kyiv evokes a renewed sense of shared ethnonationalistic identity since independence (like Georgia, Ukraine also declared independence from the Soviet Union in 1991), various forces

continue to divide the country along ethnic and linguistic lines. This Ukrainian-Russian cultural and linguistic rupture intensified following the chaos of the Euromaidan, chaos that allowed Russia to annex or directly influence large swaths of Ukrainian territory. Today, the Republic of Crimea is a de facto member of the Russian Federation, and pro-Russian separatists still control two of Ukraine's provincial capitals, Donetsk and Luhansk, in the east. Like in Georgia, the Russian Federation's divisive and exploitative methods rapidly eroded Ukraine's sovereignty in just a few short months.

Ethnic conflict broils at the heart of both these crises, but the escalation in violence seen in Georgia and Ukraine was not solely a domestic phenomenon. It was stoked from without. The Russian Federation fans the flames of ethnic division in Georgia and Ukraine, inciting Ossetians and Abkhazians to fight against the Georgian majority, and driving a wedge between Ukrainian and Russian speakers. This thesis explores the nature of Russia's exploitation, and how in the last twenty-five years Russian ethnic policy has affected the modern Georgian and Ukrainian states.

#### **A. RESEARCH FOCUS: THE EXPLOITATION PREMISE**

Russia has conquered territory by exploiting a country's inhabitants rather than destroying the country's armies. By focusing on a population-centered strategy rather than one based on firepower, Russia has overcome its comparative military and economic weaknesses in the international arena and capitalized on regional strengths. Russia is actively shaping the internal politics of Georgia and Ukraine, but instead of embarking upon a war of steel—a war Russia would most-likely lose through failed occupation or through Western opposition—the country has engaged in a war of identity, pitting ethnicities against one another. By driving a wedge between ethnic groups in Georgia and Ukraine, Russia has achieved real political victory in the post-Soviet space.

#### **B. A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RUSSIA'S EXPLOITATION OF ETHNIC DIVISION IN GEORGIA AND UKRAINE**

Georgia and Ukraine share a unique historical relationship with Russia, but Georgians and Ukrainians have been trying to redefine their futures as Western-aligned states, driving Russia to embark upon a consistent Russian strategic approach to ethnic

conflict. Though their struggle against Russian interference is similar in many ways, the study of the Georgian and Ukrainian cases represent a dichotomy. The Georgians are an absolutely distinct people, with a language and writing system unlike any other in the world, but they also live side-by-side with other unique ethnic groups with roots in the Middle East, Europe, and Eurasia. The Ukrainian experience reveals a different approach. Ukrainians share close Slavic ties with their Russian neighbors, but many are today fighting to break free of centuries of Russification and build their own unique Ukrainian identity.

Ethnic conflict in Europe is not a problem now relegated to the annals of history; it remains an issue central to European security. The Abkhazian, Ossetian, Crimean, and Eastern Ukrainian cases are just four examples among many unresolved ethnic conflicts simmering within the European region. Highly publicized incidents of ethnic conflict in the Balkans are well documented in contemporary academic publications, but studies of other European ethnic conflict zones have all but disappeared. Ethnicity is both the blind spot and the Achilles heel of the west. The European Union (EU), in particular, posits itself as the post-nationalist (and therefore post-ethnic) solution to all of Europe's problems. Reality is something very different, of course, but for having declared the matter done and dusted, the EU literally lacks the vocabulary to talk sensibly about ethnicity or ethnic conflict. As a consequence, it also has no real strategy for it—despite the Yugoslav experience, which doesn't lie nearly far enough back in human memory to have been so resolutely forgotten. If the West continues to undervalue ethnicity as a driving force of foreign policy, then the United States and Europe will continue to be caught off-guard by Russia's exploitation of ethnicity as a pretext to act unilaterally within the post-Soviet space. By studying ethnic division in Georgia and Ukraine through both a policy and ethnic lens, researchers and policy makers can develop alternate strategies—other than arms deliveries or economic sanctions—for countering current Russian aggression. The West has much to lose if Russia's ethnic exploitation baiting gets out of hand, so a better understanding of its nature can lead to more enlightened strategic approaches to Russian brinkmanship.

By using an ethnocentric strategy, Russia is able to operate under the radar of Western normative response. Even in light of Russian diplomatic, economic, and military weakness globally, the country can pursue its foreign policy in innovative (and dangerous) ways designed to exploit ethnic divisions and Russia's cultural and institutional knowledge of the post-Soviet space. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), being a military alliance of twenty-eight states that make decisions by consensus, is poorly suited for responding to Russian exploitative strategies aimed at attacking identity, enhancing the potency of Russia's coercive foreign policies in Georgia and Ukraine. Russia, therefore, has outmaneuvered the West and tempered European and American responses to unilateral aggressive actions in the post-Soviet space.

### **C. LITERATURE REVIEW: CONTEXT OF DIVIDED NATIONS**

Academic studies on the subjects of ethnicity, Russian foreign policy, and Georgian/Ukrainian history are plentiful and immensely beneficial to the research of this subject, but few draw together the disparate aspects of ethnic division and Russian foreign policy. To show a consistent use of specific Russian exploitative tactics, this thesis will combine and modify several conclusions of the authors in the fields of history, anthropology, and foreign relations.

#### **1. Georgian and Ukrainian Cases: Historical and Ethnic Background**

For historical and ethnic background, this thesis cites the writings of Caucasus specialist Thomas De Waal and Ukrainian historian Andrew Wilson. De Waal's *The Caucasus: An Introduction* focuses mainly on the roots of modern conflict of the Caucasus following the collapse of the Soviet Union, but also ties in the complicated and interconnected ethnic roots of the region. The author pays special focus toward the roots of conflict, both in 1991–1994 and in 2008, identifying specific and consistent destabilizing Russian actions, from supplying arms to separatists to claiming acts of genocide. Wilson's *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation* provides a detailed view into the development of the modern Ukrainian State, from the legend of Gog and Magog, to Kyivan Rus, on through the Soviet Union and present day. Wilson's work illuminates Ukraine and Russia's shared history and closely linked Slavic identity, both concepts that

underlie the root causes of the Ukraine Crisis. This book also illustrates the blended nature of Ukrainian ethnic identity (described in great detail in the Ukrainian case study), and its weakness under constant Russian influence. Both of these works tell the narrative of ethnic struggle, and provide vital context to understanding how past identity conflicts have affected the modern Georgian and Ukrainian states. They do not discount the ethnic dimension of conflict, but due to the fact that these books are concerned with history, they do not adequately address the specific ethnically exploitative character of Russian policy in Georgia and Ukraine.

## **2. Ethnicity, Ethnic Division, and Ethnic Conflict Theory**

Ethnic conflict today is generally characterized by societal cleavages in underdeveloped or destabilized states. In most cases, the origins of ethnic violence are easy to define and interpret, and are fueled by domestic struggles among internal groups. But what about the fires of ethnic conflict stoked by outside forces? Using ethnic groups against each other was a principle means of colonial control practiced by nearly every great imperial power, but few all-encompassing and analytical studies of the topic exist today.<sup>1</sup> Russia has developed a consistent and narrowly effective strategy using ethnicity as a means of identity manipulation, taking group differences and fostering internal division.

Understanding the nature of ethnicity, division, and ethnic conflict is vital to the analysis of the Georgian and Ukrainian cases. Walker Conner discusses ethnicity extensively in chapter four of his book *Ethnonationalism*, covering the word in current usage, and parsing out what separates ethnicity from nationality. This understanding is key in achieving the analytical objectives require for this thesis. Ethnicity, when defined narrowly, is simply a group of people with a sense of common ancestry.<sup>2</sup> Max Weber, in his work *Economy and Society*, identifies an additional aspect of ethnicity: ethnic groups possess a shared consciousness and solidarity, especially when confronted by an outside

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Great Britain routinely played India's divided Kingdom's against each other throughout their colonization of the subcontinent. See Lawrence James, *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Walker Conner, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 100–101.

group.<sup>3</sup> Building on this observation, Conner reiterates that ethnic groups “must know ethnically what they *are not* before they know what they *are*.”<sup>4</sup> This definition, focused on identity in the form of an “us versus them” mentality, is critical to understanding how division drives conflict and could provide the opportunity for outside forces to exploit division.

Ethnic conflict theory goes far in clarifying the research direction of this thesis. Donald L. Horowitz penned a robust study of ethnic conflict and unified theories in his work *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. The section “Conflict Theory and Conflict Motives” is especially relevant. In the first chapter of this section, Horowitz analyzes existing theories of ethnic conflict, and concludes that ethnic conflict has certain distinctive characteristics: it links the concerns of elites and the masses; it covers “the role of apprehension and group psychology”; and it discusses “the importance of symbolic controversies.”<sup>5</sup> In subsequent chapters, he discusses group comparisons, group entitlement, secessions, and irredentas, all factors that could lead to ethnic conflict and characteristic the Georgian and Ukrainian cases. Though Horowitz does not explicitly analyze how ethnicity can be exploited in international relations, his theories do show how evident ethnic divides can seriously weaken a society and leave it vulnerable to exploitation. This knowledge is critical in identifying Russia’s strategic methods, discussed in the hypothesis section to follow.

Horowitz provides a holistic study of ethnic conflict theory, whereas the following articles delve into specific aspects of ethnic conflict, which will pertain directly to the Georgian and Ukrainian cases. Each provides an additional framework of understanding critical to the study of the ethnic aspect of conflicts in each country.

James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin seek to explain the likelihood of civil conflict in their article, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War.” They find that likely causes of conflict are “conditions that favor insurgency,” such as politically weak

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<sup>3</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (New York, 1968), 389, cited in Conner, *Ethnonationalism*, 102.

<sup>4</sup> Conner, *Ethnonationalism*, 102.

<sup>5</sup> Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 140.

governments, low per capita income, and favorable terrain. These conditions allow groups with specific ethnic, nationalistic, or religious goals to justify their initiation of conflict.<sup>6</sup> Several (if not all) of the conditions described by Fearon and Laitin resemble the state of affairs in Georgia and Ukraine.<sup>7</sup> This article provides a framework, allowing the construction of the argument that Russia can ignite ethnic conflict because of the country's ability to identify and exploit state weaknesses.

In the article "Ethnicity Matters: Transnational Ethnic Alliances and Foreign Policy Behavior" by David R Davis and Will H. Moore, the authors successfully link ethnic groups and international relations, arguing "that transnational ethnic alliances" such as the Russian Diaspora "influence foreign policy behavior."<sup>8</sup> This line of argument reinforces Russia's common claim, and constitutional mandate, that it is obligated to protect ethnic Russians abroad. Russia has used this reasoning to validate its intervention in the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and its support of Crimean and Eastern Ukrainian separatist movements.

Jerry Z. Muller focuses on resolution of ethnic conflicts in his article "Us and Them," concluding that there are only two "least bad" paths toward resolution of ethnic conflict: disaggregation or partition.<sup>9</sup> Disaggregation was a major feature of the 1992–1993 Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, where approximately 250,000 ethnic Georgians fled their homes in Abkhazia. Four fifths never returned, allowing ethnic Abkhaz, who were an 18-percent minority before the conflict, to exert greater political control over the region. Alternatively, Crimea's independence referendum and subsequent annexation represented a partition resolution to a conflict, although not one the Ukrainian government or its constitution supported. The focus of the Ukrainian conflict did,

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<sup>6</sup> James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," in *Essential Readings in Comparative Politics*, 4th ed, edited by Patrick H. O'Neil and Ronald Rogowski ( New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013), 86.

<sup>7</sup> Fearon and Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," 90.

<sup>8</sup> David R. Davis and Will H. Moore, "Ethnicity Matters: Transnational Ethnic Alliances and Foreign Policy Behavior," *International Studies Quarterly* 41, (1997): 181.

<sup>9</sup> Jerry Z. Muller, "Us and Them," in *Foreign Affairs* 87, (2008), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2008-03-02/us-and-them>.

however, move east to the Donbas after this partition, with little further local conflicts occurring in Crimea since Ukrainian military forces pulled out in early 2014.

Zvi Gitelman's "Nationality and Ethnicity in the Post-Soviet Republics" offers a more specific view into ethnic conditions found in Georgia and Ukraine before, during, and after the breakup of the Soviet Union. Gitelman includes data and analysis of the 1989 Soviet census, including a discussion on language and ethnic groups, and how the Soviet leadership vacillated between embracing ethnic differences and attempting to squash them.<sup>10</sup> The author also studies the civic nature of Ukraine and Georgia; states that lacked a coherent ethnic identity, where minorities felt they were being ostracized by foreign regimes.<sup>11</sup> One such example is over the question of Crimea after Ukrainian independence, where three distinct ethnic groups each desired dissimilar futures: Tartars an independent state, the Ukrainians to remain with Ukraine, and the Russians a return of the peninsula to Russia.<sup>12</sup> Gitelman's analysis, which was published in 1994, correctly identified the similar characteristics of both Georgian and Ukrainian identity which made Russian exploitation in the region a viable foreign policy strategy.

These theoretical examples provide context to the historical view taken in this thesis, which focused on the specific characteristics of Georgian and Ukrainian identity and fit the struggles of those countries into a context centered on Russian strategic methods and objectives.

### **3. Russian Foreign Policy Goals**

This thesis proposes that Russia's exploitation of ethnic divides is used to achieve the country's long term foreign policy objectives. The current consensus among experts in foreign policy is that Russia has three such strategic objectives:

1. Create a regional hegemony
2. Decrease Western influence

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<sup>10</sup> Zvi Gitelman, "Nationality and Ethnicity in the Post-Soviet Republics" in *Developments in Russian and Post-Soviet Politics*, 3rd edition, edited by Stephen White, Alex Pravda, and Zvi Gitelman, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 243; Gitelman, "Nationality and Ethnicity," 244–247.

<sup>11</sup> Gitelman, "Nationality and Ethnicity," 258.

<sup>12</sup> Gitelman, "Nationality and Ethnicity," 260.



### 3. Regain “great power” status

These three strategic objectives are consistently referenced by a variety of political scientists and area experts, though they may state each objective differently. First, Russia intends to create a regional hegemony, which would likely encompass most of the former Soviet territory. This strategic objective, best supported by John J. Mearsheimer in both his book *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* and his article “Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West’s Fault,” would increase Russia’s relative level of power and security and encapsulates the ultimate realist interpretation of Russian international diplomacy.<sup>13</sup> Second, Russia seeks to decrease the influence of the West, specifically NATO and EU expansion, but also western liberal ideals and pro-democracy movements.<sup>14</sup> This objective is best supported by Dmitri Trenin in his publication *Russia’s Breakout from the Post-Cold War System: The Drivers of Putin’s Course*. Trenin adroitly argues that “the centerpiece of [Russia’s] approach is winning full sovereignty for Russia by eliminating foreign political influence in the country and ensuring that Moscow’s special interests in its former borderlands are recognized.”<sup>15</sup> He supports his conclusion through an equal focus on Russia’s historical narrative, policy objectives, and Presidential leadership, culminating in Putin’s decision to annex Crimea and destabilize eastern Ukraine. Third, Russia wishes to regain “great power” status, thus reversing two and half decades of humiliation at the hands of the West. This goal is consistent with the views of Russian specialist Richard Pipes in his article “Craving to Be a Great Power”<sup>16</sup> and characteristic of a constant theme of numerous speeches given by Vladimir Putin.<sup>17</sup> Continued belief of Russia’s “great power” destiny has a definite domestic, public approval dimension important to the continued existence of the Putin

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<sup>13</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault,” *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2014, 9.

<sup>14</sup> Dmitri Trenin, *Russia’s Breakout From the Post-Cold War System: The Drivers of Putin’s Course* (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 2014), 3–4.

<sup>15</sup> Trenin, *Russia’s Breakout*, 1.

<sup>16</sup> Pipes, “Craving Great Power,” 1–2.

<sup>17</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Speech to the Duma,” April 25, 2005, [http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2005/04/25/2031\\_type70029type82912\\_87086.shtml](http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2005/04/25/2031_type70029type82912_87086.shtml) and “Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy,” February 11, 2007, [http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/02/10/0138\\_type82912type82914type82917type84779\\_118123](http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/02/10/0138_type82912type82914type82917type84779_118123).

regime. These three objectives color the decision-making of Russian leaders within the Georgian/Ukrainian comparative context explored here, and provide the major analytical modality against which Russian exploitative strategic methods are compared.

Luke Coffey analyzes the characteristics of Russian foreign activity in the Caucasus within the context of U.S. and NATO policy. In his 2014 article, “Russia and the South Caucasus: A Situation the U.S. Cannot Ignore,” Coffey succinctly reviews both “the political instability in Georgia [and] the possible Russian annexation of Georgian breakaway territories.”<sup>18</sup> Coffey concludes that “Russian influence can be detected behind the scenes” and that “Moscow continues to take advantage of ethnic divisions and tensions in the South Caucasus to advance pro-Russian policies,” the central argument of this thesis.<sup>19</sup> Coffey’s observations are consistent with broader historical accounts by De Waal, and fill several gaps by looking at the problem from an international relations perspective and comparing Russia’s annexation of Crimea in March to the possible future annexation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, also a central point of this thesis.

Russian foreign policy goals in Ukraine—and their ethnic dimension—constitutes a major portion of Roy Allison’s argument in his article “Russian ‘Deniable’ Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules.” In this article, Allison discusses Russia’s three main objectives: “deny territory of Ukraine to NATO and the EU”; decrease Western-leaning tendencies in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and secure Crimea.<sup>20</sup> These three goals conform to the three strategic objectives postulated for this thesis: create a regional hegemony, decrease Western influence, and regain great power status. They refer to more specific policy objectives, however; this thesis takes a broader opinion of Russia’s goals, though Allison’s insights on Russia’s goals forms the basis that led to the development of the three strategic objectives. Allison’s study of the ethnic dimension to Russia’s approach to the Ukraine crisis is also

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<sup>18</sup> Luke Coffey, “Russia and the South Caucasus: A Situation the U.S. Cannot Ignore,” *The Heritage Foundation*, no. 4301, November 26, 2014, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2014/11/russia-and-the-south-caucasus-a-situation-the-us-cannot-ignore>.

<sup>19</sup> Coffey, “Russia and the South Caucasus.”

<sup>20</sup> Roy Allison, “Russian ‘Deniable’ Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules,” *International Affairs* 90, no. 6 (2014), 1268; Allison, “Russian ‘Deniable’ Intervention in Ukraine,” 1269.

of critical importance to this thesis, arguing that there are two major ethnic characteristics of Russian foreign policy. First, ethnicity and identity form “central planks of the Kremlin’s justificatory rhetoric about its actions in Crimea and eastern Ukraine.”<sup>21</sup> Second, appeals to ethnicity and identity articulate “general support for Russian actions within Crimea and eastern (as well as hopefully southern) Ukraine among local populations” as a means of mobilizing anti-Ukrainian opposition.<sup>22</sup> This thesis expands upon Allison’s analysis of the Ukraine crisis and applies it to a wider historical perspective of Ukraine, as well as the Georgian case. Additional research by Allison is central to my goal of linking Russian strategy and exploitation of ethnic division, and complements the historical viewpoints expressed by Wilson’s historical perspective.

#### **D. HYPOTHESES: RUSSIA’S STRATEGIC METHODS**

Based on a careful analysis of the previously mentioned sources, and a detailed historical study of both the Georgian and Ukrainian cases, this thesis has identified six specific strategic methods Russia uses to exploit ethnicity in its “near abroad,” a phrase coined in the early 1990s to refer to the other fourteen former Soviet Socialist Republics. Similar tactics repeat in both cases, revealing a cohesive and continual Russian strategy aimed specifically at driving a wedge between people of different ethnicities in countries outside of Russia. These six strategic methods are:

- (1) Exporting propaganda—The continual use of the Russian language in the post-Soviet space gives government-owned Russian media a distinct propaganda advantage, allowing the Kremlin to imprint subtle messaging upon the Georgian, Ukrainian, and Russian populations.
- (2) Manipulating identity—Through the use of anthropological treaties, ethnonationalistic appeals, or free citizenship, Russia finds ways to exploit what it means to be Georgian, Ukrainian, or Russian. Weakening identity is a key means of attacking fragile bonds connecting different people.
- (3) Arming insurgents—Neither a new nor nuanced approach to exploiting conflict, arming your enemy’s enemies with the highest quality and most

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<sup>21</sup> Allison, “Russian ‘Deniable’ Intervention,” 1282.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

advanced weapon systems can often be an effective way to influence another country's policy choices.

- (4) Supplying fighters—When arms are not enough, providing the manpower to fight becomes necessary. Russia often employs its own disaffected population, its Muslim minorities, unemployed veterans, and naïve ideologues, as a fighting reserve for separatist forces.
- (5) Exploiting presence—Proximity to the battlefield is a key advantage Russia can exploit in Georgia and Ukraine. Russia has enjoyed the unparalleled ability and freedom to station crack troops directly within the territory of Georgia and Ukraine, giving the country nearly instantaneous access to vital strategic assets.
- (6) Freezing conflicts—After the hot war ends, Russia has mastered the tactic of “piece keeping,” where the country usurps control of the post-conflict phase. Russia burrows itself into the treaty-making process and ensures its enemies come of at an extreme disadvantage at the negotiating table.

In implementing these methods, Russia has demonstrated a specialized strategic understanding of the post-Soviet space, and devising increasingly specific strategies that are now often grouped under the aegis of “hybrid warfare.” A cursory examination of these methods is listed in the following subsections, with a complete examination contained within each case study.

### **1. Exporting Propaganda**

Modern Russia propagandists benefit from the vast trove of experience acquired during the Soviet Union. Today, most Russians and millions of Russophones outside of Russia receive a startlingly high amount of propaganda-laden media from various Kremlin-owned corporations, concentrated primarily around the television broadcast industry. Russian networks, such as RT, Channel One, and Rossiya 1, dominate the information space, and corrupt Russian-speaker's understanding of both domestic and international events.

In Georgia, the use of Russian media is most evident through the continuing prevalence of the Russian language in the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. These lightly populated regions lack the wealth or capacity to produce substantial media in their native languages, and therefore are dependent on Russian

language news sources.<sup>23</sup> This leaves local populations vulnerable to manipulation. To exercise this control, Russian news outlets have commonly repeated Russia's reason for supporting the breakaway regions as their effort to protect the rights of ethnic minorities against genocidal Georgians.<sup>24</sup>

Though similarities exist in the Ukrainian case, the country is not clearly divided like Georgia's quasi-stable border with South Ossetia and Abkhazia, nor is the division purely ethnic in character. Ukraine does not have a clearly defined delineation of ethnic Ukrainians and Russians: the populations are well-mixed, though as one travels further south and east in the country they find fewer and fewer Ukrainian speakers. Because of the similarity of both languages, and the comparatively larger worldwide Russian-speaking population, Russian language media outlets decisively outnumber Ukrainian language outlets, even within the borders of Ukraine. Thus, the under-serving of Ukrainian speakers in their native language makes this population dependent on predominantly Russian language media, a vast majority of which is published in Russia, laden with propaganda, and then exported to Ukraine.

## 2. Manipulating Identity

Russia has warped the legal definition of citizenship in both Georgia and Ukraine, using a manipulative interpretation of Articles 61–63 of Russia's constitution, which define the Russian Federation's obligation to protect its citizens abroad. Article 61.2 states: "The Russian Federation shall guarantee to its citizens protection and patronage abroad."<sup>25</sup> Though this provision does not specifically entail protection of all *ethnic* Russians, (though the short-lived 1999 Compatriot Act did expressly extend Russian citizenship to all Soviet citizens living outside Russia's borders)<sup>26</sup> articles 62 and 63

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<sup>23</sup> George Tarkhan-Mouravi, "Ethnicity and State-Building in Georgia and the Caucasus," *Global Dialogue* 7, no. 3/4, Summer 2005, ProQuest, 49.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas De Waal, *The Caucasus: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 190.

<sup>25</sup> The Constitution of the Russian Federation, accessed September 19, 2015, <http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-01.htm>.

<sup>26</sup> Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What it Means for the West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 85.

make possible the extension citizenship to Russians living abroad.<sup>27</sup> Russia uses this interpretation of its constitution as a means of undermining states with large pro-Russian populations through the possibility of offering citizenship retroactively as a means to justify intervention.

One particularly nefarious means to exploit Article 62 is Russia's occasional issuance passports to citizens of another country. After those citizens receive a Russian passport, they may be recognized as "citizens" of Russia, and the Russian government can claim their interference in the territory of another state is a measure to protection these citizens.<sup>28</sup> The Russian government used this method with great effect in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and may have replicated it in Crimea and the Donbas.<sup>29</sup>

Russia also manipulates identity through the export of their propaganda and "academic" interpretative studies of history, ethnicity, and culture. Dissemination of these academic approaches to ethnicity are aimed specifically at Ukraine, and encompass the analysis of Russia's "neighborhood policy," ethnonationalism, and *Novorossiya*. These manipulative interpretations are designed to undermine Ukrainian identity and exploit Russo-Ukrainian ethnic divisions.

### **3. Arming Insurgents**

Though not as subtle as exporting propaganda or manipulating identity, Russia's arming of pro-Russian forces in separatist regions remains a favorite, enduring tactic. Russia routinely provides weapons to the ethnic minority forces, commonly cutting off arms sales to legitimate governments concurrently. This distinguishes the conflicts in

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<sup>27</sup> The Constitution of the Russian Federation.

<sup>28</sup> Allison, "Russia's Deniable Intervention," 1284–1285.

<sup>29</sup> Thornike Gordadze, "Georgian-Russian Relations in the 1990s," *Studies of Central Asia and the Caucasus: Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*, ed. Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2009), 45; Adrian Blomfield, "Russia 'Distributing passports in Crimes,'" *The Telegraph*, August 17, 2008, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/2575421/Russia-distributing-passports-in-the-Crimea.html>.

Georgia and Ukraine from the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, where Russian arms manufacturers equip both sides.<sup>30</sup>

Russian military forces supplied South Ossetian separatists with military aid early in the Georgian crisis. The officers of local Soviet and Russian military units tended to turn a blind eye to raids on their depots by separatists and their sympathizers, feeling compassion toward the Ossetians and supporting their desire for greater autonomy.<sup>31</sup> When the focus of the conflict shifted to Abkhazia, Russian support notably increased.<sup>32</sup> Aid ranged from captured or gifted Russian heavy weapons to the permissive use of Russian military bases and weapon depots.<sup>33</sup> With new Russian weapons and bases of supply, Abkhazian militias renewed their attack on the Georgian-occupied regional capital of Sukhumi, ultimately driving the government forces from the region.<sup>34</sup>

The arms situation in Ukraine snowballed in a similar manner. In April and May of 2014, pro-Russian separatist made due with weapons provided by local oligarchs and captured from Ukrainian weapons depots.<sup>35</sup> After the success of the Ukrainian government's Anti-Terrorism Operation (ATO) in the mid-summer, however, Russia began to supply arms and equipment directly.<sup>36</sup> Though the exact quantity of military equipment the Russian government provided to the pro-Russian separatists in the Donbas is difficult to quantify, independent sources captured images of equipment crossing into Ukraine at separatist-controlled border checkpoints on several occasions.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Joshua Kucera, "Russia Trying to Maintain 'Parity' In Arms Sales to Armenia, Azerbaijan," *Eurasianet.org*, June 19, 2015, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/73936>.

<sup>31</sup> De Waal, *The Caucasus*, 142–3.

<sup>32</sup> Helen Morris, "Ethnicity and International Relations: Russian Involvement in the Conflict in Georgia," *Slovo* 8, no. 1 (1995): 81.

<sup>33</sup> Jonathan Aves, *Georgia: From Chaos to Stability?* (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1996), 27.

<sup>34</sup> De Waal, *The Caucasus*, 152.

<sup>35</sup> Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis*, 130.

<sup>36</sup> Andrei Illarionov, "The Russian Leadership's Preparation for War, 1999–2008," in *Studies of Central Asia and the Caucasus: Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*, ed. Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc. 2009), 56.

<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Ferguson and N.R. Jenzen-Jones, "Arms and Munitions of the Ongoing Conflict in Ukraine," *Armament Research Services*, November 2014, <http://armamentresearch.com/Uploads/Research%20Report%20No.%203%20-%20Raising%20Red%20Flags.pdf>, 85.

#### 4. Supplying Fighters

Along with arms and equipment, Russia has routinely facilitated the recruitment and insertion of “foreign fighters” to conflict zones. This essay defines “foreign fighters” as free Russian citizens participating in fighting within Georgia and Ukraine. Although piecemeal in the early days of the Georgian crisis, Russia has streamlined and improved its system to supply fighters to Ukraine, creating training bases and tapping into several sources of manpower among its own motivated citizenry.

Though not prevalent in great numbers in South Ossetia, a the large influx of ethnic Russian and Chechen volunteers flowed into Abkhazia when fighting broke out there in 1992. These fighters, motivated by adventure and the desire to aid their Abkhazian brothers in their fight against Georgian ultra-nationalists such as President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, lent significant weight to Abkhazian forces at a desperate point in the battle over Sukhumi.<sup>38</sup>

Foreign fighters played a much larger role in the conflict in the Donbas. Recruiters in Russia supplied the separatist forces with soldiers through two primary sources: military veterans and politicized ideologues.<sup>39</sup> These recruits were promised high pay and were eager for the opportunity to export their nationalistic ideology.<sup>40</sup> As the conflict sank into stalemate after the capture of Debaltseve, the supply of these fighters grew to a trickle, and they were replaced by Russian regular soldiers pressed into “volunteer” service.<sup>41</sup>

#### 5. Exploiting Presence

The presence of well-armed and equipped Russian regular forces based in and around Georgia and Ukraine was essential to the accomplishment of Russian aims in both the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and the ongoing Ukraine crisis. Easy Russian military

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<sup>38</sup> Aves, *From Chaos to Stability?* 27.

<sup>39</sup> Nikolay Mitrokhin, “Infiltration, Instruction, Invasion: Russia’s War in the Donbas,” *Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society* 1, no. 1 (2015): 231.

<sup>40</sup> Mitrokhin, “Infiltration, Instruction, Invasion,” 220–233.

<sup>41</sup> Rękawek, “Neither “NATO’s Foreign Legion” Nor the “Donbas International Brigades:” (Where Are All the) Foreign Fighters in Ukraine?” *The Polish Institute of International Affairs* 6, no. 108, (2015), 6, [https://www.pism.pl/files/?id\\_plik=19434](https://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=19434).



access to Georgian and Ukrainian territory is a remnant of Cold War-era Soviet military infrastructure; a vast network of bases and depots that were sprinkled throughout the post-Soviet space. Russian forces used this infrastructure as a launching point during the armed fighting phases of both conflicts.

Russian peacekeepers have been present in Georgian territory since the early 1990s, first in former Soviet bases in Georgia proper through ongoing basing deals, then in new Russian bases established in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The formation of a three-way but Russian lead peacekeeping force following the ceasefires in 1991 and 1993 was instrumental to this strategy.<sup>42</sup> “Peacekeepers” were some of the first Russian units to counterattack Georgian forces during the 2008 Russo-Georgian War.<sup>43</sup> The situation in Ukraine was slightly different, as the Russian forces stationed in Crimea were there based on mutual Russian-Ukrainian agreement. In addition to these forces, Ukrainian political decision making was also effected by large formations of regular Russian units operating close to its borders during the hard summer fighting in 2014.

## 6. Freezing Conflicts

Russia has made prolific use of frozen conflicts as a means to control regional politics, evidenced by the unusually high number of such conflicts clustered around Russia’s periphery. These undefined and contested regions are characterized by ongoing influence of Russian leadership through diplomatic and military support, especially as a means to exert leverage and foster instability.

The ceasefire agreements that ended the South Ossetian and Abkhazian conflicts, and Russian-dominated peacekeeping mission established by the agreements, left Georgia’s sovereignty in both regions essentially subordinate to Russia.<sup>44</sup> By using their role as peacekeepers, Russian military and security forces built strong ties with the breakaway regions.<sup>45</sup> By 1994, Russia had “succeeded in reasserting its power over

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<sup>42</sup> De Waal, *The Caucasus*, 164.

<sup>43</sup> Charles King, “Managing Moscow After the Georgia Crisis,” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2008, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2008-11-01/five-day-war>.

<sup>44</sup> Aves, *From Chaos to Stability?* 2.

<sup>45</sup> Aves, *From Chaos to Stability?* 30.

Georgia” by using Abkhazia as a means to pry the country apart.<sup>46</sup> This was accomplished through the unorganized self-interest of local military leaders and parties in power back in Moscow. After Georgia’s disastrous attempt to reunify its country in 2008, the situation remains unchanged: Russian peacekeepers are still present and the conflict remains frozen.

The creation of a sustained frozen conflict in Ukraine is not yet established, but Russia and its proxies are laying the groundwork. The Normandy Five continue to negotiate the revision of Ukraine’s constitution, which would give Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts greater autonomy.<sup>47</sup> Though this is unacceptable to the Ukrainian government and people, the conflict in eastern Ukraine seems to be cooling. The battle lines in the Donbas have not changed considerably since the Ukrainian forces’ dramatic retreat from Debaltseve in February 2015 and pro-Russian forces have significantly decreased their artillery barrages of Ukrainian positions and small-arm attacks on Ukrainian checkpoints.<sup>48</sup> If the Ukrainian parliament approves an amended constitution, then in all likelihood the Donbas will become another frozen conflict, with the separatists denying Ukrainian governmental access to their borders with Russia and threatening to rebel given the slightest provocation.<sup>49</sup> This course is decidedly in Russia’s interest, as it can wager its ongoing political, military, and financial support to the Donetsk and Luhansk governments to influence the government in Kyiv. If Kyiv affronts Moscow again, like what happened during the Euromaidan, then Russia can redouble its support for outright separatism in Ukraine’s east as a counter move.

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<sup>46</sup> Morris, “Ethnicity and International Relations,” 93.

<sup>47</sup> Vladimir Socor, “Action Plan to End War in Ukraine Charter at Berlin Meeting,” *Eurasian Daily Monitor* 12, no. 158, September 3, 2015, accessed through The Jamestown Foundation, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=44326&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=27&cHash=8791352b21c9126a338769a7aae1f0d8#.Vf4Z4fViko](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=44326&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=27&cHash=8791352b21c9126a338769a7aae1f0d8#.Vf4Z4fViko).

<sup>48</sup> Socor, “Action Plan.”

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

## E. RESEARCH DESIGN: CASE-BY-CASE, METHOD TO OBJECTIVE

Conner and Weber's definition of ethnicity is beneficial in defining the divisive nature of ethnicity, and grasps at ethnicity's defining characteristic of the separation of "us" and "them," but does not provide sufficient theoretical insight to this thesis's core concept: ethnic *division*. Here, "ethnic division" is defined as the state in which two or more ethnic groups exist in the same general area, from the checkerboard nature of Ossetian and Georgian villages in South Ossetia to the ambiguous Russo-Ukrainian communities of the Donbas. Second, by giving careful consideration to the use of the phrases "ethnic division" and "ethnic conflict," intending to use them to signify different concepts. The first phrase embodies a passive state of being, the second an active "struggle in which the aim is to gain objectives and simultaneously neutralize, injure, or eliminate rivals"<sup>50</sup> (rivals being other ethnic groups). Language provides a final wrinkle to this thesis' discussion of ethnicity, especially in the Ukrainian case. The close relationship between Russia and Ukraine linguistically, culturally, and ethnically, greatly complicates any ethnographic study. Even Ukrainians citizens have trouble expressing their own identity.<sup>51</sup> This understanding of ethnicity and ethnic conflict is reflected in the method of analysis for this thesis.

This thesis is designed to tie together an ethnic and foreign policy dimensions of Russia's exploitation of division in Georgia and Ukraine, using the three foreign policy objectives and the six strategic methods discussed previously as an analytical guide. It looks at methods of ethnic exploitation through a historical comparison of both countries, focusing specifically on events since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The study of each case focuses on strategic choices made by Russian leaders at various critical points in the history of Georgia and Ukraine's post-Soviet history; this format establishes Russia's use of each strategic method as a cogent Russian policy designed to exploit ethnic divisions. In researching each case, this thesis combines several academic fields, focusing on anthropological research on the origins of ethnic conflict, historical studies of ethnic

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<sup>50</sup> Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 95.

<sup>51</sup> Anna Reid, *Borderland: A Journey Through the History of Ukraine* (Basic Books, New York, 2015), 218.

Russians, Ukrainians, Georgians, Abkhazians, and Ossetians, and current journalistic and international relations periodicals concerning the ongoing conflict in Georgia and Ukraine.

Each case study concludes with a summary of the various ethnic exploitative measures used, and an evaluation of the level of foreign policy success that Russia achieved. These conclusions rely on the expertise of several preeminent scholars in the field of foreign policy and international relations, as well as leading institutions. Polling data also provides a unique perspective on the degree of Russian policy success, especially in the determination of changes in pro-Western or pro-Russian leanings, or the level of patriotism in a given country.

The final chapter summarizes the similarities and differences of each case, focusing on the six strategic methods as the principle analytical tool. It includes an assessment of Russian success in exploiting ethnic division to achieve foreign policy goals, contain specific policy suggestions, and make predictions for the future of Russia's post-Soviet space.

#### **F. A NOTE ON PROPER NOUNS AND SPELLINGS**

Choice of spelling is based on the transliterations for the home language. For example: the use of Kyiv, the Ukrainian spelling, for Ukraine's capital, vice Kiev, the Russian spelling. The exception to this rule is the use of South Ossetia in place of Shida Kartli, its Georgian name. This choice was made for the reader's ease, as the region is most commonly referred to in academia and the media by its South Ossetian place name; this choice is not intended to imply a preference or political view.

## II. GEORGIAN CASE: NEITHER NUANCED NOR NORMATIVE

They have always feared foreign penetration, feared direct contact between [the] Western world and their own, feared what would happen if Russians learned [the] truth about [the] world without or if foreigners learned [the] truth about world within. And they have learned to seek security only in patient but deadly struggle for total destruction of rival power, never in compacts and compromises with it.

—George Kennan, *Long Telegram*

Ethnic conflict in the Georgian case is characterized by sharp ethnic differences and unique ethnic identities. Nestled in one the world's throughways, and in a mountainous region, Georgians, Abkhazians, and Ossetians are wholly distinctive ethnic groups, unrelated to Russian Slavs. Though Russia often evokes its obligation to protect Russian minorities as a pretext to intervention in the Caucasus,<sup>52</sup> the actual Russian population is far smaller than in Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, or the Baltic States. Instead, Russia exploits tensions between Georgia's distinct ethnic groups, supporting South Ossetian and Abkhazian separatists politically, economically, and militarily to the point where they are completely dependent on Russian benevolence for their ongoing de facto statehood. By taking advantage of these ethnic divides, and driving the wedge deeper through the use of force and coercion, Russia maintains a strategic advantage over Georgia.

Soviet and Russian exploitation of conflicts between Georgia and South Ossetia and Abkhazia has taken on several forms, wafting from direct military intervention to "piece keeping" (as opposed to "peace keeping").<sup>53</sup> Russian involvement has been characterized specific phases of interference, each defined by various combinations of Russian strategic methods. Splitting up Georgia's recent history into these phases of exploitation provide an organizational framework to analyze Russia's policies piecemeal.

Soviet imperial collapse at the end of the Cold War marked the beginning of the first phase, where Russia, as the heir to the Soviet empire, desperately fought to maintain

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<sup>52</sup> Allison, "Russia's Deniable Intervention," 1262.

<sup>53</sup> Paul Goble quoted in Gordadze, "Georgian-Russian Relations," 34.

political influence over as much territory as possible. This phase occurred between 1989 and 1992, and was indicative of ethnic tensions broiling throughout the Caucasus, from Nagorno-Karabakh to Chechnya. Georgia, once a prosperous Soviet Socialist Republic, could not escape the chaos. During this first phase, individual Soviet (then Russian) leaders acted in disparate and unorganized fashion to undermine the young Georgian state, laying the foundation for future conflict.

The second phase, from 1993–2000, bore witness to the stabilization of the conflict in line with Russian objectives. This achievement was embodied by the establishment of a Russian-dominated peacekeeping regime. Russian policy during this phase was designed to keep South Ossetia and Abkhazia from building closer ties with Georgia, resulting in what the international community now commonly refers to as a “frozen conflict.”

The third and most coercive phase of Russian exploitation occurred between 2000 and the outbreak of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. This phase was defined by a continual, systematic ratcheting up of tensions, prompted by Georgia’s Western-leaning policies and Moscow’s coercive responses.

The fourth and final phase is marked by Russia’s recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states, along the Kosovo model, and the slowing of Saakashvili era Western progress in the region. The end state of the fourth stage has yet to be determined, landmines and detours riddle South Ossetia and Abkhazia’s future path as both de facto states continue their search for sovereignty, stability, prosperity, and most importantly, international recognition. Today only a handful of countries officially recognize the breakaway regions as independent states, but the continued uncertainty of sovereign identity of South Ossetia and Abkhazia hangs heavily over the Georgian people, as the country struggles to cut the ties to its Soviet past and move forward, united, into the future.

Each of these phases mirrored Russia’s domestic economic and diplomatic struggles since the end of the Cold War, through the chaos of Soviet collapse in the 1990s to the economic “miracle” of the 2000s. In Georgia, Russia’s attempts to achieve its



The space bound by Georgia's modern borders has always been a place of diverse people and cultures. In addition to the Ossetians and Abkhazians, Greeks, Armenians, and Azeris all called the current area of Georgia home. The ethnic Georgian nation-state of modern times traces its lineage back thousands of years, to the ancient kingdoms of Colchis and Karli-Iberia.<sup>54</sup> David the Builder unified the disparate regions of Kakheti, Kartli, Imereti, Mingrelia, Meskhia, and Svanti in the eleventh-century, creating the ethnic mashup that is conventionally called the Georgian people that exist today.<sup>55</sup> Ethnic Georgians of every sub-group currently make up 83 percent of Georgia's 4.9 million population.<sup>56</sup>

Ethnic Ossetians are closely related to ethnic Iranians and Scythians from the Caucasus region.<sup>57</sup> The Ossetians that currently inhabit Georgia first settled north of the Caucasus Mountains before moving southward over the range in the eighteenth century, establishing villages alongside the local Georgian population in the Shida Kartli region.<sup>58</sup> The Ossetian population living in Georgia, roughly 65,000, is rather small compared to the 450,000 Ossetians that live within the Russian Federation in the North Ossetia-Alania Republic. Unlike the Circassians of the Black Sea coast, the Ossetians chose to integrate themselves into the Russian Empire, fighting for the tsar and later Soviet dictatorship. Their heroism during World War Two was well documented: the Ossetians produced "more decorated as 'heroes of the Soviet Union' per head of population than any other Soviet ethnic group."<sup>59</sup> Following the collapse of the USSR, this loyalty naturally caused tensions between nationalistic Georgians and the small Ossetian population living among them, despite their integration into Georgian society.<sup>60</sup> Ultimately, it was Georgian

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<sup>54</sup> CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>.

<sup>55</sup> De Waal, *The Caucasus*, 32–33.

<sup>56</sup> CIA World Factbook.

<sup>57</sup> De Waal, *The Caucasus*, 135.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 135

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 137. The Ossetians were by no means anti-Georgian: the two ethnicities had a higher rate of intermarriage than any other group. The Ossetians also tended to speak the Georgian language better than any other minority.



ultranationalists like Zviad Gamsakhurdia, through their xenophobic rhetoric, that drove the wedge between the Ossetian and Georgian people.<sup>61</sup>

The Abkhazians of Georgia's Northwestern region were related to several other Circassian groups of the Caucasus, such as the Kabardins and the Cherkess, though they also shared a close historical bond with the Georgian people. Unlike the Ossetians, the Abkhazians resisted Russian rule following the Tsar Alexander I's 1810 invasion of their region. The Abkhazian population fought with fellow Circassian tribes against tsarist armies for decades, but when Russian generals finally rooted out and defeated the rebellion in 1864, they deported much of the Abkhazians population. This act depopulated much of the Black Sea coast, and prompted the immigration other ethnicities into historically Abkhazian territory, most notably Svans and Mingrelians, two Georgian subgroups.<sup>62</sup>

The remaining Abkhazian population suffered greatly at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Menshevik government of Georgia (May 1918—February 1921) “waged brutal campaigns to incorporate Abkhazia and South Ossetia into their state,”<sup>63</sup> culminating into the killing of thousands of Ossetians by the Menshevik People's Guard in 1920.<sup>64</sup> The Red Army conquered the fledgling state by February 1921, putting an end to much of the ethnic violence, eventually destroying the last vestiges of Georgian resistance with the help of a vengeful Abkhazian population.<sup>65</sup> The alliance between the Bolsheviks and Abkhazians was short-lived, however; the earlier pattern of forced migrations repeated itself in the 1930s under Joseph Stalin's totalitarian regime, ultimately leading to the subordination of Abkhazian culture to the more predominate Georgian one.<sup>66</sup> By the 1990s, after years of deportations and marginal status, the ethnic Abkhaz numbered only 95,000 out of approximately 525,000 residents of their region.

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<sup>61</sup> Morris, “Ethnicity and International Relations,” 81.

<sup>62</sup> De Waal, *The Caucasus*, 149–150.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> De Waal, *The Caucasus*, 69.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

The people of South Ossetia (and to some extent Abkhazia) fared better following the death of Joseph Stalin, and were granted significant levels of autonomy within Georgia during the later Soviet era, which was characterized by relatively low levels of violence. Despite the relative peace of the post-war Soviet era, the Georgians, Abkhazians, and Ossetians did not share the same vision of statehood following the Georgian declaration of independence in 1991: the Ossetians and Abkhazian people were overwhelmingly unified in their desire to remain members of the Soviet Union, having grown used to their special autonomous status.<sup>67</sup> The realization that Georgian nationalists like Zviad Gamsakhurdia may have the power to threaten their very existence, may have crystallized South Ossetian and Abkhazian desire to remain independent of Tbilisi and strengthen their resolve in the conflict ahead.

## **B. PHASE ONE: THE SOUTH OSSETIAN AND ABKHAZIAN WARS**

Hints of Russia's exploitive ethnic policies began to surface almost immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union, first in South Ossetia, then in Abkhazia; however, these policies did not initially represent a cogent international strategy. In his article, "Georgian-Russian Relations in the 1990s," Thronike Gordadze describes Russian meddling in Georgian affairs not as a coordinated effort, but as a product of the chaos of the Soviet collapse:

It would be unfair to argue that Russia was unilaterally initiating all the processes that developed in Georgia and its breakaway territories. At least in the beginning of the 1990s, Russia was subjected to internal turmoil, which left it reacting to events in Georgia rather than initiating them. Even then, Russia was never unresponsive, because it had never, even in the worst times, abandoned the idea of maintaining a special influence outside its borders.<sup>68</sup>

As violence intensified in each conflict, Russia's various ministry and military leaders took the initiative, only to a limited extent in the South Ossetian conflict of 1991–1992 at first, but more predominately in Abkhazian conflict of 1992–1993. The individual goals of various members of the Soviet, then Russian, government and armed forces

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<sup>67</sup> De Waal, *The Caucasus*, 148.

<sup>68</sup> Gordadze, "Georgian-Russian Relations," 29.

characterized Russia's actions during these two crises, amounting to overt support for the South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russian actions in the first phase fall primarily under three of the six Russian strategic methods hypothesized in this thesis: arming insurgents, supplying fighters, and ultimately creating frozen conflicts.

### **1. Early Conflict: South Ossetia War and the Invasion of Abkhazia**

The ethnic conflict in South Ossetia erupted into violence in 1991 after two years of hostility. Armed Georgian bands stalked the Ossetian countryside terrorizing villages, ultimately provoking revenge attacks. The simmering conflict came to a boil in January 1991, when Georgian militias took control of several critical supply routes into Tskhinvali, cutting off electricity, water, and food from the South Ossetian capital.<sup>69</sup> Ossetian villagers armed themselves in response, fighting Georgian bands with weapons scrounged from abandoned Soviet military bases. The fighters from both sides were predominantly amateurs, and even the Georgian militias were under control of the young Georgian government only in theory, not in practice.<sup>70</sup> Undisciplined and poorly lead groups only increased the level of violence. Georgian aggression eventually provoked fighters in the North Ossetian SSR to come to the assistance of their southern brethren, further destabilizing the region.<sup>71</sup> As the fighting continued over the course of eighteen months, Ossetian fighters acquired more advanced weaponry and equipment from corrupt or sympathetic Soviet and Russian military officials.<sup>72</sup> The conflict cooled, however, in June 1992, after a Russian-brokered ceasefire. Georgian officials begrudgingly agreed to a tri-lateral peacekeeping force composed of Russian, Georgian, and South Ossetian troops tasked to establish stability in the region, at least until the opposing sides could strike a lasting deal.<sup>73</sup>

Russia influenced this conflict more in its inaction rather than its action. Though Russia ultimately supplied a majority of Ossetians arms, and allowed the free movement

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<sup>69</sup> De Waal, *The Caucasus*, 140.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 140–1.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 142–3.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

of a considerable number of Russian-born Ossetian fighters, Moscow only marginally involved itself in the South Ossetian War. Russia was able to dictate terms at the ceasefire negotiations, however, enabling later Russian leaders to exploit the conflict achieve broader foreign policy objectives and foreshadowed the looming Abkhazian conflict.

Russia took a more active role in the Abkhazian conflict, which directly followed the violence in South Ossetia. Periodic exchanges of fire between Georgian and Abkhazian militias characterized a conflict that had been brewing in the region since April 1989.<sup>74</sup> This period of low level skirmishes persisted until mid-August 1992, when a force of 2,000 Georgian fighters under the command of Tengiz Kitovani, the leader of the Georgian National Guard, marched on Abkhazia's provincial capital of Sukhumi, reportedly without Georgia's new leader Eduard Shevenardze's (the former Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs and native Georgian) knowledge or consent. The city's defenders and provincial government fled north as intense fighting rippled through the countryside. Sensing imminent victory, Kitovani gave chase. Georgian forces initially pressed their advantage, but experienced a series of military setbacks in mid-September, just when they believed Abkhazian resistance was sure to collapse.<sup>75</sup>

## **2. Support Mustered in Moscow**

This reversal in Georgian fortunes was thanks renewed interest in the region by Russian leaders in both the government and armed forces. These decision makers chose to provide more direct support to Abkhazia as part of a larger foreign policy shift from focus on Central and Western Europe to securing the rapidly dissolving post-Soviet space.<sup>76</sup> This renewed interest in the Russian "near abroad" provided critical motivation toward the deepening of Russian involvement in Georgian domestic affairs. Many Russian leaders hoped to achieve personal enrichment or pursue national vendettas at

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<sup>74</sup> Mikhail Alexseev, "Early Warning, Ethnopolitical Conflicts, and the United Nations: Assessing the Violence in Georgia/Abkhazia," *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 26, no. 2 (1998): 198, doi: 10.1080/00905999808408560.

<sup>75</sup> De Waal, *The Caucasus*, 152.

<sup>76</sup> Morris, "Ethnicity and International Relations," 85.

Georgian expense, and former Communist remnants made up the vanguard of this effort. These Communist “hard-liners” blamed Gorbachev, and by extension Shevardnadze (who served as Gorbachev’s Foreign Minister), for the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent loss of the elite’s personal power. Through their support of the Abkhazian separatists, the “hard-liners” hoped destabilize the young Georgian state and subsequently strengthen Russian control in the region.<sup>77</sup> Shevardnadze’s former position as the Soviet Foreign Minister was now an albatross, garnering the Georgian leader credibility in the West but derision in Moscow where support for the fledgling state was critically needed.<sup>78</sup>

In addition to leaders in the defense and foreign ministries, the Russian parliament also supported intervention in Georgian domestic politics. Like in the ministries, some parliamentarians did so out of spite, others to further their own political goals:

Conservative Nationalists...utilized the “external threat” from non-Russian republics of the former Soviet Union to try and direct the debate over Russia’s national interest towards a more confrontational angle. Towards the end of 1992 and the beginning of 1993 the threat to Russian security was perceived to come from the ethnic conflicts in the republics of the former Soviet Union, rather than from the old Western Cold War enemies. Conservatives accused [Yeltsin] of neglecting Russian relations with the republics of the former Soviet Union and demanded that Russia reassert power there. Conservative politicians and resurgent armed forces increasingly utilized ethnic issues.<sup>79</sup>

One of these parliamentarians was Evgenii Ambartsumov, who vociferously advocated the creation of a Russian vital sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space.<sup>80</sup> Russian President Boris Yeltsin initially wished to leave the conflict in Abkhazia up to those with a ‘special interest in it,’ but opposition demands eventually elicited a Kremlin response. The various North Caucasian nationalists, supporters of the restoration of the USSR, and ‘red and brown’ patriots wore down Yeltsin, forcing him to take a more hardline stance

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<sup>77</sup> Gordadze, “Georgian-Russian Relations,” 32.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Morris, “Ethnicity and International Relations,” 86.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 90.

on the conflicts to maintain at least a modicum of domestic support.<sup>81</sup> In Yeltsin's address to the Civic Union in February 1993, he summed up his new stance by stating that Russia possessed "special jurisdiction over the peace and stability of the republics of the former Soviet Union."<sup>82</sup> Despite rhetoric extorting the importance of Russian involvement in the conflicts, the president had little real control over Russian policy in Abkhazia: that power rested in the hands of the armed forces.

### **3. Arms and Volunteers**

Emboldened by enthusiasm in Moscow, local and central military authorities in the Caucasus increased their support of Abkhazian forces in late summer 1992 when Abkhazian forces were on the brink of defeat.<sup>83</sup> Aid first arrived in the form of "captured" or "gifted" Russian heavy weapons as well as the permissive use of Russian supply depots and operating bases located within Abkhazia.<sup>84</sup> Most damaging to the long-term stability of Georgia, Russian military officials allowed the unrestricted flow of Russian mercenaries and Chechen Muslim fighters over the Russian-Georgian border. These fighters sought to aid the Abkhazians in their struggle against Georgian forces and lent significant weight to Abkhazian militias at a desperate point in the battle. Though pivotal to Abkhazian victory in the conflict, these mercenaries were also indiscriminately violent and undisciplined. They were accused of raping and pillaging both Abkhazian and Georgian populations.<sup>85</sup>

Abkhazian forces, now bolstered by Russian equipment and volunteer fighters, counterattacked in September 1992, forcing the Georgian Army to retreat to the Abkhaz capital of Sukhumi and several key geographic chokepoints in the south and east, such as the narrow pass at Kodori Gorge. By the fall it became obvious to the Georgians that the Abkhazians were receiving prolonged and sustained assistance from Russia.<sup>86</sup> Without

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<sup>81</sup> Gordadze, "Georgian-Russian Relations," 33.

<sup>82</sup> Morris, "Ethnicity and International Relations," 90.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>84</sup> Aves, *From Chaos to Stability?* 27.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Alexseev, "Early Warning," 198.

this assistance, the small contingent of Abkhazian fighters that retreated in the early spring would not have been able to throw back the Georgian forces' advance, especially in a region populated by ethnic Georgians unsympathetic to the Abkhazian cause.

Continued Russian military assistance resulted in the escalation of conflict in spring 1993, most ostensibly in the form of Russian close-air support.<sup>87</sup> That fall, Abkhazian militias, bolstered by Russian weapons, volunteer fighters, and SU-25 bombers, renewed their attack, focusing their effort on the regional capital of Sukhumi.<sup>88</sup> Georgian forces could not withstand the assault and retreated to the Abkhazian-Georgian border and the Kodori Gorge: nearly 250,000 Georgian refugees soon followed.<sup>89</sup> Russian support of Abkhazian separatists was clear and pronounced, with Shevardnadze himself claiming that by 1993 the Abkhazian conflict was essentially a war between Russia and Georgia.<sup>90</sup> Russian political and military support was instrumental to Abkhazian success, leading to the collapse of the poorly trained and lead Georgian forces. Similar to the Ossetian conflict, the armistice in 1993 lead to the formation of a Russian-backed peacekeeping force. Without control of the vast majority of Abkhazian territory, the Georgian government could not rightly declare legitimacy in the region, at least not from the Russian perspective.

#### **4. The War's Aftermath**

By the armistice of 1993, Georgia was on the verge of complete political and economic collapse.<sup>91</sup> Hard-liners in the Russian foreign and defense ministries took advantage of Georgian weakness, and mustered all their remaining diplomatic powers to punish the young state; they were determined "to defend [Russia's] 'national interests' in the former Soviet South" using any means necessary, including armed Russian troops.<sup>92</sup> Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev, a key player during the final ceasefire

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<sup>87</sup> Morris, "Ethnicity and International Relations," 85.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>89</sup> De Waal, *The Caucasus*, 152.

<sup>90</sup> Aves, *From Chaos to Stability? 2*.

<sup>91</sup> Morris, "Ethnicity and International Relations," 92.

<sup>92</sup> Aves, *From Chaos to Stability? 2*.

negotiations, overtly sought to use the conflict as a means to “insert a Russian military presence in both Abkhazia and Georgia.”<sup>93</sup> The ceasefire agreement resembled the framework established following the South Ossetian War: Georgian, Abkhazian, and Russian forces would create a three-way peacekeeping mission, though with several caveats that severely undermined Georgia’s sovereignty. These additional measures included mandatory Russian access to Georgia proper to “assist” in destroying the last vestiges of Zviadist rebels in Mingrelia, a renewal of Russian basing agreements, and Russia’s right to name Georgia’s Defense Minister.<sup>94</sup> Grachev’s intent to punish Georgia was pervasive, and set the tone for Russian-Georgian relations for the rest of the decade.

By 1994, Russia had “succeeded in reasserting its power over Georgia” by using a separatist region as a means to pry the country apart.<sup>95</sup> This division was accomplished primarily through Russian military assistance (provided by local military leaders in piecemeal and unorganized fashion) and pressure Moscow ministers and parliamentarians exerted on President Yeltsin in Moscow. Though effective in destabilizing Georgia, these Russian stakeholders “did not act in unison nor were each department’s activities always consistent or compatible...Russia did not have a coherent foreign policy nor concrete proposals for forming one.”<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, the signing of the Ossetian and Abkhazian ceasefires ushered in a new phase of Russian exploitation of the ethnic conflict, one that codified many of the disparate interests of the Russian government and demonstrated the first examples of Russian strategic methods. Arming insurgents and supplying fighters resembled classic Cold War methods of destabilization through the export of violence, but the follow-through, establishing frozen conflicts, was a new invention. By stoking violence and enforcing destabilizing peace agreements, Russia laid the groundwork for future conflicts, and further exploitation of ethnic divisions.

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<sup>93</sup> De Waal, *The Caucasus*, 162.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>95</sup> Morris, “Ethnicity and International Relations,” 93.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 85–6.



### C. PHASE TWO: PEACEKEEPING IN A FROZEN CONFLICT

The presence of Russian peacekeeping forces and slow “freezing” of both conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia is a chief characteristic of the second period of Russian exploitation of ethnic divides in Georgia. By using this method, Russian diplomats and politicians sought normative appeal to Western practices of peacekeeping, while simultaneously fulfilling Russian strategic objectives. The ceasefires that froze the South Ossetian and Abkhazian conflicts, and Russian-dominated peacekeeping mission established after the cessations of violence, violated Georgia’s sovereignty and left the country essentially subordinate to Russian influence.<sup>97</sup> For example: Russia used the ceasefire negotiations in 1993–1994 as a platform to extent its basing rights in Georgia proper, and later as leverage to force Georgia into joining the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). These and other measures allowed Russia to maintain its hegemonic dominance in the region, at least for the 1990s and early 2000s.<sup>98</sup> Through its role as peacekeepers, Russian military and security forces built strong ties with the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.<sup>99</sup> The ongoing presence of peacekeepers is pivotal to the sustainment of Russian power in the region.

Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev played a critical role in the establishment of persistent Russian presence in Georgia. Minister Kozyrev argued that forces from his country were simply “filling a vacuum...which otherwise quite different forces might rush to fill,” to justify the necessity of Russian troops in Georgia.<sup>100</sup> The Russian Foreign Ministry countered Georgian claims of bias by extolling the international nature of CIS peacekeeping forces, though other members of the commonwealth provided only token support. In an address to the United Nations (UN), Minister Kozyrev further justified Russian control of peacekeeping forces, claiming that Russia “has made peacemaking and the protection of human rights, particularly that of national minorities, the priority of its foreign policy, first of all in the territory of the

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<sup>97</sup> Aves, *From Chaos to Stability?* 2.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Aves, *From Chaos to Stability?* 30.

<sup>100</sup> Roy Allison, “Peacekeeping in the Soviet Successor States,” *Chaillot Papers* 18 (1994): 25.

former USSR.”<sup>101</sup> Muted Western response to these pronouncements spoke volumes, reinforcing Russia’s sense of invincibility and cementing the appearance that other country was willing to confront Russia to protect Georgia’s sovereignty.

This abdication of Georgian and Western responsibility for peacekeeping operations was a result of several Security Council resolutions mandating Russian—through the CIS—dominance of forces in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.<sup>102</sup> Western members of the Security Council agreed to the resolution recognizing “that it is unavoidable that Russia will pursue its own interests in dealing with local or regional conflicts on its peripheries” even though they acknowledged that “Russian leaders may be tempted by revanchism or a softer form of neo-imperialism and that peacekeeping may become an instrument of coercion in the conduct of such a policy.”<sup>103</sup> Yet, the Western powers did nothing. International weakness on the part of the UN, NATO, EU, and United States, all provided cover for Russia to exploit its peacekeeping mission in South Ossetia and Abkhazia to further Russian strategic goals at Georgian expense.

Oversight of the peacekeeping mission and reconciliation councils was deeply flawed, favoring Russia and the secessionist members of the councils over Georgian interests. In South Ossetia, this manifested itself in the day-to-day administration of the Joint Control Commission, set up as a forum for negotiation. In this council, Georgia received only one of the four voting seats, the others being Russia, North Ossetia, and South Ossetia, all three clearly aligned against Georgia. Russia further controlled the process by enforcing bylaws that required every member to be present to vote for new resolutions.<sup>104</sup> This requirement gave Russia the ability to slow any progress toward reconciliation by merely neglecting to attend, in the unlikely event that the other three parties actually agreed on any particular measure. Such a dynamic made it more difficult for Georgia to unilaterally and autonomously forward motions pertaining to domestic

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<sup>101</sup> Andrey Kozyrev quoted in Roy Allison, “Peacekeeping in the Soviet Successor States,” *Chaillot Papers* 18 (1994): 25.

<sup>102</sup> Allison, “Peacekeeping,” 36.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Gordadze, “Georgian-Russian Relations,” 31.

policies without first obtaining the support of all the other parties, an unlikely outcome none-the-less.

The maintenance of this status quo waned in the late 1990s, due in part to Russian weaknesses economically and diplomatically coupled with a decline in the strategic advantages South Ossetia and Abkhazia provided. Several conflicts of the mid and late 1990s, specifically the first Chechen War, and the collapse of the ruble in 1998, gave the appearance that Russia was weakening.<sup>105</sup> At the 1999 OSCE Istanbul Summit, Russia found itself under heavy pressure to withdraw its forces in Georgia. Russian neo-imperialists and former Communists began to lose power in the government. Increased support for Georgia from the United States, especially during the first few years of the Bush administration, also played a key role in the decline in Russian “ability to act in and for Abkhazia.”<sup>106</sup> It took the “election” of a new Russian leader with vision and drive to reverse the tide of Russian foreign policy retreat.

Despite the precipitous decline in Russian power throughout the 1990s, its peacekeeping forces and strategic objectives in Georgia remained essentially unchanged, with Russian policy focused on maintaining the status quo. The rise of Vladimir Putin, first as the Russian Prime Minister and then as the President, however, jumpstarted a new approach to Russian-Georgian relations. Putin and his cabinet favored an increase in anti-Georgian policies and rhetoric, while simultaneously pursuing further exploitation of the frozen conflicts. This anti-Georgian policy shift intensified after the 2003 Rose Revolution: Putin and his regime responded to the rise of Mikheil Saakashvili by stepping up punitive measures designed to both injure the Georgian state, and increase Russian domestic standing.

Exploiting presence through peacekeeping and freezing conflicts were the major Russian strategic methods used during this phase of Russian exploitation. Russian actions created an unbalanced and unstable status quo, leaving all participants in a state of

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<sup>105</sup> Gordadze, “Georgian-Russian Relations,” 40.

<sup>106</sup> Rick Fawn, “Russia’s Reluctant Retreat from the Caucasus: Abkhazia, Georgia and the U.S. after 11 September 2001,” *European Security* 11, no. 4 (2007): 143, doi: 10.1080/09662830208407552, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09662830208407552>.

sovereignty limbo. Similar to the first phases, this phase was based on Russian inaction as much as Russian action. Russia did not recognize South Ossetia or Abkhazia's declarations of independence, nor did it acknowledge Georgian complaints about violation of its sovereignty.

#### **D. PHASE THREE: COERCIVE WARMONGERING**

The rise of Putin and Georgia's desire to build closer ties with the West characterized the third phase. The desire to break out of the post-Cold War system and reestablish a hegemonic empire within Russia's former area of influence dominated the Putin Administration's strategic thinking. Putin perceived NATO and EU expansion as threat to Russian power, and sought to politicize any further expansion of either organization as evidence of continued Western anti-Russian aggression.<sup>107</sup> Russian diplomatic and military influence remained limited, however, only occasionally manifesting itself in covert uses of force. The country could not embark on military campaigns without upsetting the global strategic balance, dominated by the United States' war on terror, characterized by military deployments in Afghanistan and Iraq. Instead, the Putin regime carefully weighed its strategic options and molded them into specific political objectives designed to exploit the frozen conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Thus, Russian policy during this period demonstrated patience and willingness to take advantage of political and diplomatic opportunities through the strategic methods of exporting propaganda and manipulating identity.

Revitalizing Russia's Great Power status became the leading motivator of Russian policy objectives in Georgia. Putin addressed this goal directly in his May 2004 address to the Russian Parliament. In this speech, Putin sought the deepening CIS integration as a means to revitalize Russia's standing in the world and offset advances by NATO and EU.<sup>108</sup> The details about how Russia would go about re-establishing itself as a great power remained vague, however, as George Tarkhan-Mouravi reflected in his analysis of Russian foreign policy in the region:

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<sup>107</sup> Mearshiemer, "Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault,"

<sup>108</sup> George Tarkhan-Mouravi, "Ethnicity and State-Building in Georgia and the Caucasus," *Global Dialogue* 7, no. 3/4 (2005), 42–43.

[Russia has] no well-defined long-term general strategy other than the revival of Russian grandeur, actual policies are highly volatile. Instead of a coherent overall strategy in the Caucasus, Russia tends to pursue short- and medium-term tactical goals that focus on regime succession, security, and domination....[T]he thrust of policy is clear: to preserve at all costs Russia's domination of the region, in the vague hope of reviving the empire at some point in the future.<sup>109</sup>

Russia would continue to exploit ethnic tensions to maintain influence in Georgia, especially as the country sought closer ties with the West, coercing the country when it deemed necessary.<sup>110</sup> During this phase Russia's policy implementations were based largely on pretexts. Russia would respond to Georgian actions, each one ratcheting up already tense relations. Georgia's NATO and EU accession aspirations provided a perfect pretext for further exploitation of both conflicts.

### **1. The Alignment Pretext**

The first such pretext was Georgia's desire to pursue a Western alignment with the EU and United States. Georgia joined NATO's Partnership for Peace Program in 1994, and sought active participation with the alliance in 1999 to assist in peacekeeping operations in Kosovo.<sup>111</sup> Also, in 1999, Georgia and the EU signed the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, strengthening political and economic ties to Europe in addition to close military cooperation.<sup>112</sup> In 2002, Georgia voiced interest in joining NATO for the first time, and sought US military aid through the Georgia Train and Equip Program.<sup>113</sup> This first step was important for the professionalization of Georgian defense forces, allowing Georgia to stabilize the Pankisi Gorge and other regions that were under periodic attack by separatist bands. The EU and Georgia intensified relations in 2003 after the Rose Revolution and election of President Mikheil Saakashvili, in a dialogue

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<sup>109</sup> Tarkhan-Mouravi, "Ethnicity and State-Building," 43.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> David S. Yost, *NATO's Balancing Act* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute for Peace Studies Press, 2014), 231–232.

<sup>112</sup> European Union: External Action, "EU-Georgian Relations," accessed March 21, 2015, [http://eeas.europa.eu/georgia/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/georgia/index_en.htm).

<sup>113</sup> De Waal, *The Caucasus*, 190.

that promised “ambitious programmes of political and economic reform.”<sup>114</sup> Saakashvili initially wished to pursue an accelerated EU integration policy “together with Russia,”<sup>115</sup> but a series of abusive Russian policies inevitably drove Georgia to seek an independent path.<sup>116</sup> In part, as a response to Russian policies, NATO and Georgia began an Intensified Dialogue in 2006, further strengthening military ties.<sup>117</sup> Western aspirations were a key component of Saakashvili’s leadership platform, and though it assisted in the spread of Western goodwill and support of the small Caucasian country, these actions would motivate Russian leaders to act against Georgia.

Georgia’s Western aspirations angered and dismayed Russian leaders, who saw NATO and EU expansion, especially into Russia’s area of interest, as a direct threat to Russia’s goals of hegemonic dominance and the creation of a pro-Russian economic and political structure. Under the backdrop of stronger Western ties, Georgia soon was exposed to the full weight of Russia’s exploitative strategy: through military alliances and aid (arming insurgents), coercive diplomacy (exporting propaganda and manipulating identity), and war (exploiting presence).

## **2. Military Alliances and Aid**

First, Moscow encouraged military and diplomatic unions among the separatist states, finalizing the first major agreement in September 2002. This 2002 agreement cemented an alliance between South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the event of Georgian aggression, also acknowledging the need for continued Russian leadership and military support.<sup>118</sup> Additional agreements between South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Moldova’s breakaway region of Transnistria were signed in 2006. These agreements were entitled “the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Support and Declaration on the Creation of a Commonwealth for Democracy and the Rights of Nations” and further

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<sup>114</sup> European Union, “EU-Georgian Relations.”

<sup>115</sup> Thomas De Waal, “Saakashvili Eyes Presidency, IWPR Caucasus Reporting Service, no. 206, November 26, 2003, quoted in Thomas De Waal, *The Caucasus: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 197.

<sup>116</sup> De Waal, *The Caucasus*, 205.

<sup>117</sup> Yost, *NATO’s Balancing Act*, 232.

<sup>118</sup> Illarionov, “The Russian Leadership’s Preparation,” 53.

solidified concepts of military cooperation and promises of support “in case of emergency.” As a final dismissal of Georgian sovereignty, both agreements included a statement acknowledging the region’s loyalty to Moscow.<sup>119</sup> Russia acted as both the arbiter and mentor during these negotiations, seeking to isolate Georgia and strengthen the bonds between the breakaway regions and their combined pursuit of autonomy or eventual independence.

Russia rewarded South Ossetian subservience with direct military aid, primarily in the form of heavy equipment, basing deals, and financial assistance. Between February 2003 and June 2004, the Russian government supplied South Ossetia with twelve T-55 and seventy-five T-72 battle tanks.<sup>120</sup> The Russian military also expanded its “military and administrative control” over the region:

These [measures] included the construction of military bases near Java (Iziugomi) and in Tskhinvali, opening a special department at the military academy in Vladikavkaz for cadets from South Ossetia, and sending several dozen Russian military instructors to the territory. Moreover, it included transferring Russian officers to South Ossetia for routine military service, as well as the appointment of Russians to head South Ossetia’s ministries of defense, security, and law enforcement.<sup>121</sup>

In addition to tanks, on June 2–6, 2004, Russia supplied South Ossetia with “Grad” multiple-launch rocket systems, self-propelled artillery systems, and anti-aircraft weapons.<sup>122</sup> By 2008, Russian supply of weapons to Abkhazia and South Ossetia exceeded Georgian military materials; the two regions essentially “had received at no cost more than twice the military equipment possessed by Georgia.”<sup>123</sup> Though not a particularly nuanced strategy, the concentration of Russian arms in both regions assured their survival in the event of a Georgian attack, limiting the options available to Saakashvili in his pursuit of South Ossetian and Abkhazian reconciliation, and establishing a clear example for Russia’s strategic method of arming insurgents.

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<sup>119</sup> Illarionov, “The Russian Leadership’s Preparation,” 61.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

While increasing South Ossetian and Abkhazian military reliance on Russia, Putin's administration also sought to bind the regions to Russia economically. Enforcing compliance was easy, however, due to the continued deplorable state of development in both regions. Abkhazia was especially hard-hit by the conflicts of the early 1990s. A region once populated by 525,000 inhabitants had been reduced to 240,000, a slight majority ethnic Abkhazians, who are desperately impoverished and widely unemployed. Abkhazia was "too weak on its own to maintain its de facto independence without Russian assistance."<sup>124</sup> Russia propped up both regions through generous subsidies and the payment of pensions. To this day, both South Ossetia and Abkhazia are wholly dependent on Russian financial support.<sup>125</sup> By accepting Russian assistance the breakaway regions have surrendered their independence, their very future, to Russian benevolence, without much thought given to their position in a larger foreign policy strategy.

### **3. Coercive Diplomacy**

Russia also sought to muddy the waters of citizenship within the region. This campaign began in 2000 when the Russian Parliament passed a law exempting South Ossetian and Abkhazian residents from Russian visa requirements.<sup>126</sup> In June 2002, Russia expanded this policy to the direct issuance of passports to residents of both regions, a program Moscow accelerated in May 2004.<sup>127</sup> By July 7, 2006, 98 percent of South Ossetians had essentially been granted Russian citizenship through the issuance of Russian passports. This passport policy was especially worrying to Georgian officials, not only because it contributed greatly to smuggling of Georgian goods into Russia tariff free, but also because it creates "a pretext for the future 'protection' of [Russia's] new citizens."<sup>128</sup> This measure, which Russia often blends with its self-proclaimed obligation

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<sup>124</sup> Fawn, "Russia's Reluctant Retreat," 135

<sup>125</sup> Illarionov, "The Russian Leadership's Preparation," 59.

<sup>126</sup> De Waal, *The Caucasus*, 198.

<sup>127</sup> Illarionov, "The Russian Leadership's Preparation," 56.

<sup>128</sup> Tarkhan-Mouravi, "Ethnicity and State-Building," 49.



to protect the ethnic Russian diaspora, was a pretext for Russian involvement in the conflicts of the early 1990s and 2008.

Russia's exploitative measures were not limited to the punishment of Georgia, but were focused on the breakaway regions themselves, especially when they began to drift away from Moscow's orbit. This manifested itself first in South Ossetia during the 2001 presidential elections. Russia sponsored the creation of the "Meeting of Four" consisting of "the most radical South Ossetian leaders."<sup>129</sup> These men met to work out a way to prevent Ludvig Chivirov from winning re-election. Chivirov was the incumbent president, and was avidly pursuing a settlement with Shevardnadze that would normalize relations and put an end to the conflict. With Russian political and financial support, a member of the "Meeting of Four," Eduard Kokoity, managed to win the election, and proceeded to chase out, arrest, or "disappear" all major challengers to his regime, setting the region on a course of further separation with Georgia and into Russia's cold embrace.<sup>130</sup> Russian meddling also permeated the political process in Abkhazia, a telling example of Russian interference occurred in October 2004:

The first-ever contested presidential election in Abkhazia... was marred by the Kremlin's open support for one of the candidates, Raul Khadzhimba, a security service man fully loyal to Moscow. When Abkhaz voters rejected Khadzhimba in favour of the more popular opposition leader Sergei Bagapsh, Abkhazia was hit by two months of political crisis, which verged on the brink of mass violence. As Bagapsh announced his forthcoming inauguration, Moscow exerted enormous direct pressure, sending officials to Sukhumi and even blackmailing the population by closing the border. This unprecedented bullying led to a bizarre compromise: new elections in January 2005 were won by an alliance of recent rivals—"President" Bagapsh and "Vice-President" Khadzhimba.<sup>131</sup>

This level of political manipulation reflects Russia view of its role in the region: secessionist leaders are simply tools used to divide and weaken Georgia. Russia does not act solely as the legitimate protector of South Ossetia's and Abkhazia's independence, but seeks to manipulate all sides of the conflict for Russian gain.

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<sup>129</sup> Illarionov, "The Russian Leadership's Preparation," 51–52.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>131</sup> Tarkhan-Mouravi, "Ethnicity and State-Building," 46.

#### 4. 2008 Russo-Georgian War

By the fourth year of his presidency, Saakashvili was utterly frustrated with Russia's desire to pursue stronger South Ossetian and Abkhazian military, political, and economic ties. Instead of promoting peace, "Moscow strives to keep conflicts unresolved, while posting 'peace-keepers' who are actually peace-blockers."<sup>132</sup> Saakashvili's attitude toward the two regions turned hawkish, a feeling perhaps engendered by an increasing belief in his cabinet that the United States and Europe would provide the military and diplomatic cover needed to prevent Russian involvement.<sup>133</sup> Following a Russian provocation of dubious origin, Georgian troops shelled Tskhinvali on the night of August 7, 2008. The next day, Georgian troops launched their invasion, occupying several Ossetian villages with the stated goal of forcefully reuniting the breakaway region with the Georgian state. But the Georgians overplayed their hand. Already conducting training operations north of the Russo-Georgian border, Russian combat forces quickly mobilized, and launched a rapid counteroffensive through the Roki Tunnel, linking up with Russian peacekeepers already present in the region. Russia initiated a second offensive through Abkhazia and, with overwhelming air support, was able to push Georgian forces out of the Upper Kodori Gorge, an area within Abkhazia that the Georgian military had occupied since the 1990s.<sup>134</sup> The Russian military completely routed the Georgian army after just five days of fighting, and advanced into Georgian territory, occupying roadways, railways, and ports throughout central and western Georgia.<sup>135</sup>

The Russian propaganda machine kicked into high gear almost immediately. Among several other legalistic arguments, Russia claimed that it was forced to respond to the Georgian attack in order to defend Russian and Ossetian citizens in danger of becoming victims of genocide. Russian media outlets were quick to report the Georgian shelling of Tskhinvali had resulted in more than two thousand dead.<sup>136</sup> South Ossetian leaders used this claim "to help justify their actions in driving the Georgian civilian

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<sup>132</sup> Tarkhan-Mouravi, "Ethnicity and State-Building," 49.

<sup>133</sup> De Waal, *The Caucasus*, 219–220.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>135</sup> Allison, "Russia Resurgent?" 1157–1158.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 1153.

population out of South Ossetia [resulting in the] destruction of Georgian villages and the forced displacement of thousands of ethnic Georgians by South Ossetian militia.”<sup>137</sup> This example shows the power of Russian propaganda in driving the belligerents in a conflict into actions which ultimately increase the effectiveness of Russia’s position. In this case the displacement of ethnic Georgians from South Ossetian territory, further homogenizing the breakaway region and limiting Georgian power during post-conflict negotiations.

This phase of Russian ethnic exploitation was characterized by those methods used in the first two phases (arming insurgents, supplying fighters, exploiting presence, and freezing conflicts) with exporting propaganda and manipulating identity added. This phase then holistically captured the full force of Russian exploitation of ethnicity, and a crystallization of a cohesive Russian strategy aimed at accomplishing Russian strategic objectives.

#### **E. PHASE FOUR: WITH RUSSIA OR ALONE?**

The status quo established following the 2008 War has changed little since the short but brutal war and Russia’s recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states.<sup>138</sup> Exploiting presence and freezing conflicts is the main theme of this phase, as Russia expands its dominance South Ossetian and Abkhazian politics, economics, and military,<sup>139</sup> possibly moving toward outright annexation of the two regions in the near future.<sup>140</sup>

Russia continues to strengthen its presence in the region. Today, more than 5,000 Russian personnel are stationed in Abkhazia, with \$465 million earmarked in the past

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<sup>137</sup> Allison, “Russia Resurgent?” 1153.

<sup>138</sup> RFE/RL, “Russia Recognizes Abkhazia, South Ossetia,” August 26, 2008, [http://www.rferl.org/content/Russia\\_Recognizes\\_Abkhazia\\_South\\_Ossetia/1193932.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/Russia_Recognizes_Abkhazia_South_Ossetia/1193932.html).

<sup>139</sup> International Crisis Group, “Abkhazia: The Long Road to Reconciliation,” *Europe Report* N°224, April 10, 2013, I, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/south-caucasus/georgia/224-abkhazia-the-long-road-to-reconciliation.aspx>

<sup>140</sup> Maia Otarashvili, “Russia’s Quiet Annexation of South Ossetia,” *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, February 2015, <http://www.fpri.org/articles/2015/02/russias-quiet-annexation-south-ossetia>.

four years for “rehabilitation and construction of military infrastructure.”<sup>141</sup> Russia has also stationed ten security patrol boats in Ochamchire and four fighter aircraft in Bombora. Base construction is ongoing, as Russian engineers have also recently completed numerous additional military housing facilities within the region. Abkhazian forces no longer control their own borders: Russian troops have even taken over control of the Abkhazia’s single link to Georgia, the bridge over the Inguri River. This crossing had been manned by Abkhazian militia, but in September 2012, Russian border guards replaced the Abkhazian soldiers.<sup>142</sup>

Other than military support, Abkhazia’s government receives annual financial aid packages from Russia, money that Sukhymy has grown dependent on. In 2012, approximately a fifth of the Abkhazian government’s operating expenses were provided for by Russia, accounting for \$61–\$67 million a year, in addition to Russia’s \$350 million, three-year infrastructure project designed to rebuild “roads, schools, government buildings and agriculture.”<sup>143</sup> Yearly negotiations between Russia’s foreign ministry and Abkhazia’s parliament often dependent upon the successful dispersal of Russian funding.

Russia also seems poised to officially annex both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. On November 24, 2014, a Russian-Abkhazian dialogue concluded with the “Russian-Abkhazian Agreement On Alliance and Strategic Partnerships,” and included clauses concerning the reconstruction of the Transcaucasus railway, further increases in Russian security presence, and creation of a Russian-Abkhazian “joint group of forces.”<sup>144</sup> Putin signed a similar agreement with South Ossetia on March 18, 2014, ostensibly on “the first anniversary of the Russian annexation of Crimea.”<sup>145</sup> This agreement, entitled the “Treaty of Alliance and Integration,” went “well beyond the matters of military

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<sup>141</sup> International Crisis Group, “Abkhazia: The Long Road,” 3.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 4–5.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>144</sup> Giorgi Menabde, “Russian-Abkhaz Agreement: What Is Moscow’s Plan for Georgia?” *Eurasian Daily Monitor* 11, no. 214, December 2, 2014, accessed through The Jamestown Foundation, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=43138&cHash=d1ead24b3b7ad8b1ccc8ee7a27ef500c#.Vm8kDEorJaQ](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=43138&cHash=d1ead24b3b7ad8b1ccc8ee7a27ef500c#.Vm8kDEorJaQ).

<sup>145</sup> Tracy German, “Heading West? Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic Path,” *International Affairs* 91, no. 3 (2015), 605, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/ia/heading-west-georgia-s-euro-atlantic-path>.

integration and include the Russian takeover of South Ossetia's border control, finances, economy, education, healthcare, and social welfare systems.”<sup>146</sup> Obviously international recognition of South Ossetia's annexation, if the annexation is finalized, will be slow, but whereas coverage of the Crimean Anschluss was widespread, Russia's agreement with South Ossetia, after nearly a quarter century of conflict, quietly took place with little international media attention.

Despite these moves toward dependence and annexation, everything is not sunny in Russo-Abkhazian relations:

Some clear areas of discord exist between the Abkhaz and Russians as well. Russia would like more opportunities for its citizens to buy property and invest in the development of tourist infrastructure but has faced legal obstacles and public discontent. Relations between the Orthodox Church in Moscow and Sukhumi, the capital of Abkhazia, are strained. Disputes over territory and a new road to the North Caucasus demonstrate the Abkhaz leadership's unwillingness to hand over all authority.<sup>147</sup>

Recent protests in June of 2015 in Abkhazia show the country is continuing to experience domestic schisms.<sup>148</sup> The root of the June demonstrations was a result of Russia's renegeing on an expected \$90-million financial aid package, which Russia justified based on Abkhazia's parliamentary foot dragging concerning some tenants of the previously mentioned “Agreement on Alliance and Strategic Partnership.”<sup>149</sup> The region's manic desire to retain actual independence while simultaneously reliant on continued Russian support explains Abkhazian delaying tactics.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Otarashvili, “Russia's Quiet Annexation.”

<sup>147</sup> International Crisis Group, “Abkhazia: The Long Road,” i.

<sup>148</sup> Vasili Rukhadze, “In the Face of Recent Russian-Abkhaz Disagreements, is Georgian-Abkhaz Dialogue Possible?” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 12, no. 128, July 9, 2015, accessed through *The Jamestown Foundation*, [http://www.jamestown.org/regions/thecaucasus/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Bpointer%5D=1&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=44139&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=641&cHash=928d131d05cfc406aff9d9f7d55c71c7#.Vi8ia7eRrRaQ](http://www.jamestown.org/regions/thecaucasus/single/?tx_ttnews%5Bpointer%5D=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=44139&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=641&cHash=928d131d05cfc406aff9d9f7d55c71c7#.Vi8ia7eRrRaQ).

<sup>149</sup> Rukhadze, “Recent Russian-Abkhaz Disagreements.”

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

## **F. CONCLUSION**

Though Russian policy had not been consistent in its applications, it has remained consistent in its overall goals: to establish a regional hegemony, decrease Western influence, and increase Russia's great power status. Every method that Russia has undertaken in Georgia in the last twenty-five years has been implemented with those three goals in mind. There is no evidence that Russia will give up achieving these goals anytime soon.

Arming insurgents and supplying fighters along its frontiers is the most aggressive course Russia has taken in Georgia in the last quarter century. Russia has perfected these strategic methods during its nearly constant involvement in the Georgian crisis, though its use is neither nuanced nor particularly innovative. Russia enjoys an enormous military advantage along all its western borders, and possesses enough military hardware to provide South Ossetian and Abkhazian separatists with marginal military advantage over their Georgian rivals indefinitely. Georgian defeat in the disastrous 2008 war cemented the realization that the country could no longer hope to unify its territory by force. Russian military interventionist policy, in the context of arming insurgents and supplying fighters has proven to be overwhelmingly effective.

Exploiting presence and freezing conflicts, through the use of peacekeeping forces, has been Russia's second major avenue of coercive foreign policy in Georgia. The presence of ground forces in disputed territories, especially if those forces are better trained and equipped than the locals, gives Russia greater regional control. The longer these forces are in place, the more the local inhabitants become accustomed to the status quo. This normalizes the conflict psychologically. Russia can also call upon these forces on short notice to intervene in defense of Russia's own self-interests, not necessarily in the interest of maintain unbiased peace. In the end, presence matters.

In Phase Three, coercive policies of propaganda and identity manipulation typify Russia's patient, long-term approach to maintaining their power over Georgia. In the 2000s, Russia implemented a series of policy changes that slowly ratcheted up tensions between Russia and Georgia while simultaneously building stronger ties with South

Ossetians and Abkhazians. Economic subsidies, military training, and travel privileges were all carrots Russia provided to the populations of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as a means of securing their loyalty. The added supply of Russian passports, along with coercive and divisive manipulative policies further destabilized the region. Russian support of local political campaigns further ensured Moscow's choice of South Ossetian and Abkhazian national leaders took precedence over possible future conflict resolution.

The outcome of the Fourth Phase remains to be seen, but it will probably reflect the path taken over the last twenty-five years: a disorderly and inconsistent Russian foreign policy vis-à-vis Georgia, but one that still relies on taking advantage of an existing ethnic divisions. For now crisis seems distant, especially if Georgia's post-Saakashvili government continues to drag its heels on issues of reform and European integration.<sup>151</sup> Russia's actions in the 2008 War were largely in reaction to Georgian attempts to align closer to the West and forcefully re-assume its sovereignty, so if Georgian progress towards further Western ties slows, then so should exploitative Russian actions.

Russian goals of hegemonic dominance, countering pro-Western sentiments, and a return of Russia to great power status were largely achieved in the Caucasus, especially during the period of 1994–2000, but achievement has become harder to quantify since Putin's rise to power. Georgia may have to accept the permanent loss of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, but the remaining Georgian territory is far more cohesive than it was in 1989, politically and ethnically. Perhaps in the end the country can find strength in its struggles against Russia, and pursue its own path toward whichever future the Georgian people feel will suit them best.

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<sup>151</sup> Michael Cecire, "Georgia's Pro-Western Policy Looks to Weather Government Shakeups," *World Politics Review*, November 11, 2014, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/14407/georgia-s-pro-western-policy-looks-to-weather-government-shakeups>.

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### III. UKRAINIAN CASE: NATO MADE ME DO IT

All persons with grievances, whether economic or racial, will be urged to spelt redress not in mediation and compromise, but in defiant violent struggle for destruction of other elements of society. Here poor will be set against rich, black against white, young against old, newcomers against established residents, etc.

—George Kennan, *Long Telegram*

Ukraine's case is categorically different than the Georgian one for two primary reasons. First, in contrast with the Georgian case, Ukraine is a state with a weak nationalistic identity with ambiguous lines of ethnic division, though one that has been strengthened following subsequent Orange Revolution and Euromaidan. Second, Ukrainians share substantial ethnic and nationalistic ties with Russia, along Slavic, historical, and linguistic lines, unlike the Georgian case. Both these conditions make Ukrainians vulnerable to ethnic exploitation practiced by Russia, especially in areas with large ethnic Russian populations, such as Crimea and the Donbas, and in areas with Russian-speaking majorities, as in most of the east and south of the country. This interwoven cultural relationship, and the theories which attempt to explain the consequences of that history, are discussed in the first subsection

The remaining subsections analyze Russia's exploitative methods from a resent historical perspective, demonstrating Russia definitive short-term political and military victory in Ukraine. Like in the Georgian case, several distinct phases of operation characterize Russia's exploitative strategy in Ukraine. Phase one encompasses the era of Viktor Yanukovich, beginning with his first successful presidential bid in 2010 and ending in 2014 when he and the Party of Regions left power. Phase Two begins immediately after Yanukovich's late-night flight, and deals exclusively with Russia's intervention in Crimea, culminating in the annexation of the peninsula March 18th, 2014. The Third Phase encompasses the uprising in the Donbas and ends following the signing of the Minsk II agreement. Events since Minsk II will be discussed this chapter's conclusion.

## A. BACKGROUND: A NEW NATION

As previously stated, a long historical perspective is the key to understanding the complicated ethnic, cultural, and linguistic relationships that exist within Ukraine today. Russia and Ukraine's conjoined history essentially begins with the founding of Kyivan Rus, an early medieval kingdom with a primarily Slavic population that reached its height in the eleventh century. Kyivan Rus flourished for two centuries under the rule of provincial princes until the Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century effectively dismantled the kingdom, setting Kyiv and Muscovy on divergent developmental paths. By the time the Mongolian Horde's power had withered in the fifteenth century, Kyiv and what today is western Ukraine was integrated into the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, while Muscovy, and later the Russian Empire, slowly expanded throughout the Eurasian steppes.<sup>152</sup> Most of eastern Ukraine was finally absorbed into the Russian Empire in the eighteenth century, partially closing a long period of divergent development.

Colonial rule and policies of Russification characterized Tsarist Russia's administration of Ukrainian territory. Martin Malia states the importance of understanding Russia's imperial past may provide the key to explaining its modern behavior: "one of the basic reasons for the tenacity with which Russians have managed to hold on to conquered territories lies in the fact that their political absorption was and to this day continues to be accompanied by colonization."<sup>153</sup> The Ukrainian people were a target of this colonization policy, their concept of a unique Ukrainian identity often undermined by large influxes of ethnic Russian populations into Ukrainian lands and Tsarist edicts delegitimizing the spoken or written Ukrainian language.<sup>154</sup> After a brief period of independence following the collapse of Romanov Dynasty, Soviet Socialism brought with it new and often manic approaches to explaining Ukrainian identity, beginning with mostly open support for minority nationalities in the Soviet space, but

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<sup>152</sup> CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/up.html>.

<sup>153</sup> Martin Malia, *Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991* (New York: The Free Press, 2008), 15.

<sup>154</sup> Malia, *Soviet Tragedy*, 15–16.

tilting back toward suppression and repression as Stalin's regime amassed the resources of a powerful nation-state.<sup>155</sup> The 'terror famine' of 1932–1933 punctuated the process of Russification in dour terms. The death of six to eleven million Ukrainians served as an effective deterrent against defiance of Soviet power, as well as a means to dilute the Ukrainian majority in the Soviet Socialist Republic.<sup>156</sup> Smaller terrors, such as the purging of the Ukrainian Communist Party in 1938 further sapped the region of the political resolve.<sup>157</sup> Despite these tragedies, Ukrainians of the Soviet era were torn over how to respond to Soviet rule. While Socialist Empire-building was alienating for some nationalities, "for the Ukrainians (as under the Romanovs) the privileging of Russian was both attractive and repellent. It helped some identify more easily with the new 'imperial' culture, while for others the very insidious news of this temptation produced a backlash against the dangers of 'Russification.'"<sup>158</sup> This theme of "attractive and repellent" appeal of Russian influence would permeate Ukrainian society all the way through present day.

Two events dominated Ukraine's national formation after the beginning of the Second World War: the formation of a Ukrainian nationalist army under German occupation and the large and continually expanding Ukrainian diaspora. Ukraine's second glimpse of freedom in twenty years came following the Red Army's disastrous retreat ahead of the Wehrmacht onslaught in 1941. The newly "liberated" regions under German control sparked the short-lived success of the *Ukrayins'ka Povstans'ka Armiya* (UPA), or Ukrainian Insurgent Army. Vestiges of this force fought the returning Soviet army for almost a decade, but ultimately their resistance failed, resulting in the death or deportation of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians.<sup>159</sup> These deported Ukrainians eventually formed a large community in eastern Siberia, and were part of a larger population of the inner-Soviet Ukrainian diaspora of between 6.8 million and 20 million

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<sup>155</sup> Wilson, *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2009), 147.

<sup>156</sup> Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 57.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>158</sup> Wilson, *Unexpected Nation*, 147.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

Ukrainians living in other regions of the Soviet Union by 1991.<sup>160</sup> The outflow of Ukrainians to other parts of the USSR (as well as more than 1.6 million living in North America) and inflow of ethnic Russians to the major urban and industrial centers of the country, and Khrushchev's "gift" of the Crimean peninsula to the Ukrainian SSR, created a distinct balance in Ukrainian and Russian cultural influences in the Socialist State. Russian was the dominant culture of the east and south, while Ukrainian still survived in the west. As a result, by 1989 "the number in Ukrainian language schools [in Galicia, Ukraine's western region] was around 90 percent, in the Donbas [the country's east] it was less than 10 percent and in Crimea zero."<sup>161</sup>

### **1. Russia's Neighborhood Policy, Ethnonationalism, and *Novorossiya***

Russian politicians and academics have produced numerous strategic, philosophical, and historical models to explain the current relationship between Russia and Ukraine. The Neighborhood Policy, Slavic Ethnonationalism, and *Novorossiya* are three such examples, and clearly influenced Russia's 21st-century strategic approach. They fully embody Russia's strategic methods of manipulating identity and exporting propaganda. These Russian tendencies grew especially pronounced after the turn of the twenty-first century, when following the Orange Revolution in 2004 it became apparent that Russia's Slavic brother had an increasing desire to Europeanize.

Russia devised its Neighborhood Policy to cope with Ukraine's perceived "Western" treachery. The Neighborhood Policy was a popular, coercive strategy that appealed to a wide audience of Russian scholars and political leaders.<sup>162</sup> Unlike Western policy initiatives which focused on soft power diplomacy, Russian adherents to the Neighborhood Policy leaders believe they can influence countries in their "near abroad" by creating geopolitical instability and coercion. Russian leaders determined they could exert power by attacking weak points in Ukrainian identity, effectively demonstrating Russia's soft power prowess combined with belittling theories of ethnic assimilation and cooption. Instead of focusing on cultural or economic cooperation, Russia creates "points

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<sup>160</sup> Wilson, *Unexpected Nation*, 117.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>162</sup> Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis*, 34.

of pressure...Points of infiltration, networks of influence....‘Soft power’ for Russia seemed to be any means of coercion not involving tanks.”<sup>163</sup> According to Andrew Wilson, Russia’s “neighborhood policy” of soft power methods “meant bribing local politicians and setting up pro-Russian front parties and sending shadowy funding to pro-Russian NGOs. It meant spending at least \$8 billion a year on PR. It meant working through shadowy front companies like RosUkrEnergo in Ukraine.”<sup>164</sup> It was through these techniques that Russia operated in anti-Western circles, and promoted further concepts of ethnonationalism and *Novorossiia*.

Slavic ethnonationalists emphasize the strong ties between all Slavic people, specifically the Eastern Slavic nations of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, and their eventual unity under one nation-state.<sup>165</sup> Russian leaders, academics, and media repeated ethnonational ideals throughout the spring of 2014, during the turbulent months between Yanukovich’s departure in February and Petro Poroshenko’s Presidential inauguration on June 7, 2014.<sup>166</sup> Vice News reporters captured several examples of this feeling while covering the rising tensions in Crimea prior to Russia’s annexation. Following the capture of his base by pro-Russian separatists, a Ukrainian Marine says he continues to believe in a fraternal bond between Ukraine and Russia, calling Russians his Slavic Brothers, even despite their coercive actions.<sup>167</sup> The same Vice News reporters also interview a group of Serbian volunteers who have come to Crimea to show their support for the Crimean referendum. During the interviews these Serbian volunteers often repeat their ethnonationalistic desire to support their Slavic Russian cousins and counter the forces of Western Fascism by which they meant the interim Ukrainian government.<sup>168</sup> According to a later study of foreign fighters in the Donbas, many Serbian volunteers

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<sup>163</sup> Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis*, 34.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>165</sup> Wilson, *Unexpected Nation*, 301–303.

<sup>166</sup> Paul Goble, “Moscow has More Levers in Ukraine than It is Using, Russian Analysts Say,” *Window on Eurasia Blog*, February 24, 2014, <http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.com/2014/02/window-on-eurasia-moscow-has-more.html>.

<sup>167</sup> “Russian Roulette: The Invasion of Ukraine (Dispatch Nineteen),” *Vice News*, March 29, 2014, <https://news.vice.com/video/russian-roulette-the-invasion-of-ukraine-dispatch-nineteen>.

<sup>168</sup> “Russian Roulette: The Invasion of Ukraine (Dispatch Five),” *Vice News*, March 10, 2014, <https://news.vice.com/video/russian-roulette-the-invasion-of-ukraine-dispatch-five>.

declared a close affinity for the Russian nation, they perceive “Ukraine as a fake, buffer, Kosovo-lite state that only exists to prevent Russian expansion and greatness, common amongst the Eurasianists, is also a potential mobilizing factor for the Serbs.”<sup>169</sup> Though enlightening to the study of ethnic tensions in the region, ethnonationalistic thoughts are perhaps limited to those who would have already supported Russia’s actions in Crimea and the Donbas, and therefore not a significant motivating factor but rather a medium through which disaffected Slavs could verbalize their feelings of frustration.

Russian leaders, academics, and media outlets also repeated the concept of *Novorossiya* during the chaotic spring of 2014, commonly along with claims that during this period of instability Ukraine could disintegrate into two or more pro-European or pro-Russian regional blocs.<sup>170</sup> *Novorossiya*, or simply “new Russia,” is a nationalistic concept which came into common usage during the reign of Catherine the Great, and loosely referred to the geographic region conquered under her rule, specifically the northern coast of the Black Sea, which now includes land surrounding the present day cities of Kharkov, Lugansk, Donetsk, Kherson, Nikolayev, and Odessa.<sup>171</sup> The tsars opened this sparsely populated region up to Russian settlement in the 1780s, encouraging migration through remittances from serfdom and promises of tenable land.<sup>172</sup>

Although common usage of the term *Novorossiya* dwindled during the twentieth century, it came back into common Russian parlance following the annexation of Crimea. Putin publically addressed a question about *Novorossiya* during a *Direct Line* interview on April 17, 2014, saying he supported the concept, and going further to promise that Russia “would ‘fight for’ these people to be able ‘to defend their rights and determine their fate on their own.’”<sup>173</sup> With endorsement by Putin, *Novorossiya* became “increasingly a part of Kremlin discourse” in 2014, but with the lack of further rebellion

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<sup>169</sup> Reĳawek, “Neither Legion nor International Brigades,” 11.

<sup>170</sup> Paul Goble, “Putin Commits Himself to ‘Novorossiya,’” *Window on Eurasia*, August 29, 2014, <http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.com/2014/08/window-on-eurasia-putin-commits-himself.html>.

<sup>171</sup> Allison, “Russia’s ‘Deniable’ Intervention,” 1287.

<sup>172</sup> Reid, *Borderland*, 55–57.

<sup>173</sup> Quote from Vladimir Putin, Interview by Kirill Kleymenov, “Direct Line with Vladimir Putin,” *Channel One*, April 17, 2014, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/transcripts/7034> quoted in Allison, “Russia’s ‘Deniable’ Intervention,” 1287.

in central and southern Ukraine in the summer of 2014, and the partial success of Ukraine's Antiterrorism Operation (ATO), the likelihood of a *Novorossiya* revival in Ukraine is slim.<sup>174</sup> Failure of pro-Russian forces to replicate Crimea-like rebellions in central and southern Ukraine effectively ended any real possibility of creating a new Russian contiguous territory, which also would have connected another breakaway region in Moldova, Transnistria, to the Russian Federation.<sup>175</sup>

Support of Russia's Neighborhood Policy, ethnonationalism, and *Novorossiya* cut to the core of Russian President Vladimir Putin's vision of a Russian-dominated pole in the post-Soviet space. Putin summed up this perspective during his 2005 address on the State of the Federation, promoting the idea that today's Russia is a nation divided: "Above all, we should acknowledge that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster of the century. As for the Russian nation, it became a genuine drama. Tens of millions of our co-citizens and compatriots found themselves outside Russian territory. Moreover, the epidemic of disintegration infected Russia itself."<sup>176</sup> Obviously, Putin is attempting to evoke feeling of nostalgia for the old regime, but he is also describing the disenfranchisement of millions of people, in this case ethnic Russians. Their separation from the Russian homeland is an international humiliation Russia continues to suffer, and one that was alleviated following the annexation of Crimea and return of one million of these waylaid citizens. Putin's statement fully embodies the appeal of ethnonationalism and *Novorossiya*, and the power these concepts have over those who are now determining the future of the Ukrainian state.

## **2. A Blended State and its Impact on Propaganda**

As stated in the introduction of this chapter, the ethnic makeup of Ukraine is not clearly divided along defined borders. Granted, Lviv is staunchly pro-Ukrainian and Crimea and the Donbas have supported pro-Russia politicians since the collapse of the

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<sup>174</sup> Allison, "Russia's 'Deniable' Intervention," 1287.

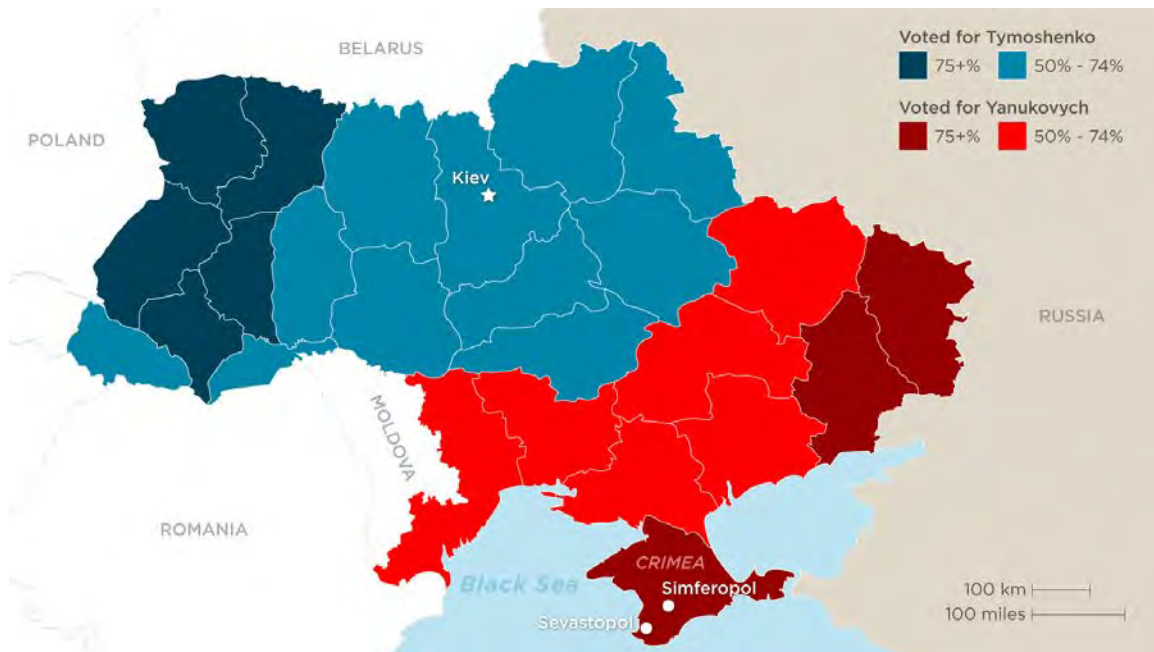
<sup>175</sup> Mitrokhin, "Infiltration, Instruction, Invasion," 231.

<sup>176</sup> Vladimir Putin, "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation," President of Russia, April 25, 2005, [http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2005/04/25/2031\\_type70029type82912\\_87086.shtml](http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2005/04/25/2031_type70029type82912_87086.shtml)

Soviet Union, but these regions represent the poles of the Ukrainian consciousness. In between these two poles, the country is a mix of ethnic and linguistic groups of primarily composed of Ukrainians and Russians, a mix made more confusing by the predominance of the Russian language among ethnic Ukrainians. By exploiting these characteristics of Ukrainian society, Russia can more easily export pro-Russian propaganda and manipulate Ukraine’s weak sense of identity.

The definitive existence of geographically separated political and linguistic poles, between Ukraine’s European northwest and Eurasian southeast, forms the foundation of Ukraine’s ongoing identity crisis. Figure 2 shows how these poles have manifested themselves politically, through an electoral map of the 2010 presidential race between Yulia Tymoshenko, of the staunchly nationalistic All-Ukrainian Union “Fatherland” party, and Viktor Yanukovich, of the historically pro-Russian Party of Regions.

Figure 2. 2010 Ukrainian Presidential Election Results



Ukrainian electoral map showing east-west blurring of political poles between Yulia Tymoshenko’s All Ukrainian Party to the west and Viktor Yanukovich’s Party of Regions to the east and south. Source: “A divided Ukraine,” *CNN*, March 3, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/interactive/2014/02/world/ukraine-divided/>, source Ukraine Central Election Commission.



Tymoshenko won over 75 percent of the vote in the far western regions of the country while Yanukovich won over 75 percent of the vote in Crimea and the Donbas. Political preference becomes less defined as one moves away from the extreme northwest and southeast regions, essentially blending from one pole to the other, with central Ukraine acting as a mixed buffer of identity and political ideals. Russia's constant attacks on the identity of the country along this ethnic no-mans-land is critical to the understanding of this thesis.

Ukraine's blended nature is also apparent in the ongoing prevalence of spoken and written Russian. Russian is used in Ukraine so extensively that it could be classified as a majority language:

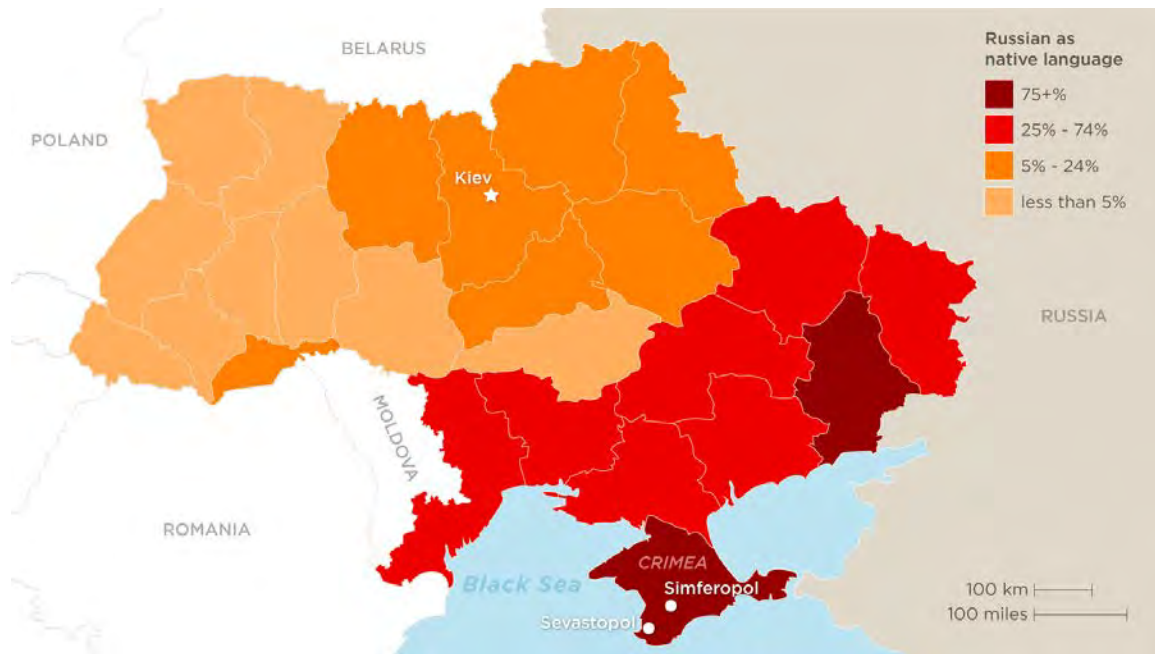
In Ukraine as a whole, the Ukrainian language is underused. The population is 79 per cent Ukrainian, but many speak Russian. There are various ways of measuring the prevalence of the two languages, but one yardstick is that 43 per cent speak Ukrainian at home and 39 per cent Russian, with 17 per cent saying both (data for 2011). But even the Ukrainian-speaking population is underserved. As of 2011, the top eight TV channels only had 22 per cent of their primetime content in Ukrainian; only 30 per cent of total newspaper circulation was in Ukrainian.<sup>177</sup>

The predominance of Ukrainian and Russian language is concentrated in the same approximate northwest and southeast regional divide as the 2010 election results, as can be seen in Figure 3. Spoken Ukrainian is more prevalent in the northwest while Russian language dominates in the country's southeast.

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<sup>177</sup> Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis*, 148.

Figure 3. Language Map of Ukraine



Clearly shows the concentration of Russian speakers in the east and south of the country.  
Source: “A divided Ukraine,” *CNN*, March 3, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/interactive/2014/02/world/ukraine-divided/>, source 2001 Ukraine Census.

Even in the Ukrainian-speaking west the language is underserved in visual, audio, and print media, making the population of Ukraine dependent on information sources published and exported from Russia in the Russian language. Russians take full advantage of this access by inundating Ukraine with propaganda-laden Russian language media.<sup>178</sup> Through this propaganda Russia can accomplish two objectives: manipulate identity by co-opting sympathetic Russian-speakers (and introduce them to a pro-Russian mindset) or coerce an opposition government by threatening its sense of identity by exporting propaganda. Both fall under the manipulate identity strategic method and form the foundation for Russia’s exploitation strategy in Ukraine.

The pull of Russian language and culture reaches into Ukraine through its airwaves, cables, and newsreels. In terms of identity politics in Ukraine, Russia has a clear edge in information warfare; and at little cost, Russian government owned and

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<sup>178</sup> Stephen Velychenko, *Ukraine, the EU and Russia: History, Culture and International Relations* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1–2.

controlled news corporations bombard vast audiences of Ukrainian citizens with propaganda.<sup>179</sup> Information warfare as a form of ‘soft power’ is wielded differently in Russia than it is in the West. It is based on the application of pressure: “It involves not just the competition of ideas and information, but also the ‘latent information management of the opponent’s internal, economic and cultural processes’ and ‘information-psychological aggression based on economic, political and diplomatic pressure.’ The stress is therefore more on ‘war’ than it is on ‘information.’”<sup>180</sup> Ukraine, due to its weakened sense of identity, is particularly vulnerable to Russian pressures in this type of attack.

One example of Russia’s exploitation of latent political pressures is through the echoing and amplification of Ukrainian political rhetoric, such as the Party of Regions’ constant denigration of opponents in Ukrainian media. The Party’s political ads commonly resorted to name-calling, labelling their rivals “extremists” and “fascists.” The use of “fascist” was particularly effective as a divisive label, as it “drew on a long-term Soviet legacy of ideological tirades against Ukrainian ‘bourgeois nationalists’ and ‘Nazi collaborators.’”<sup>181</sup> Russia media outlets repeated this labelling and applied fabricated evidence, claiming to link pro-Western Ukrainian nationalists to ultra-conservative fascist groups in Europe and the United States.<sup>182</sup> Oversimplification, embellishment, or simple fabrication of complicated Ukrainian political and social issues is a common Russian tactic, effectively bombarding the target audience with a corrupt and distorted message that creates tension and division.

Another example of divisive media bombardment is Russia’s constant denigration of the Ukrainian people as unique ethnic group. These Russian claims vary from denials of the existence of ethnic Ukrainians (“Ukrainians are simply Russians”) to relegation of Ukrainians to a small Russian ethnic subgroup, or “little Russians.”<sup>183</sup> This Russian

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<sup>179</sup> Matt Rojansky and Michael Kofman, “A Closer Look at Russia’s ‘Hybrid War,’” *Wilson Center Kennan Cable* no. 7, April 2015.

<sup>180</sup> Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis*, 36.

<sup>181</sup> Kuzio, “Rise and Fall,” 181.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> Wilson, *Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*, 301.

messaging, which is repeated on Russian language media and often by President Putin himself, attacks the already weakened bonds of identity that hold the Ukrainian nation together.<sup>184</sup> Russia's belittling of Ukrainian ethnicity is an enveloping maneuver that targets the flanks of Ukrainian identity while subversive support of ethnonationalism assaults the vanguard. One seeks to deny a people's existence, and the other to unite it with a greater whole. By using both in tandem, Russia can strengthen its support within Ukraine. This cultural denigration also creates toxic in-groups and out-groups, and serves to dehumanize Russia's political and civil opposition within Ukraine.

Russia also exploits Ukrainian political blunders. Shortly after Yanukovich's downfall, the Ukrainian Parliament passed a measure aimed at appeasing local nationalists and limiting Russia's 'soft power' influence: The Ukrainian government would repeal a 2012 law that allowed regions to make Russian an official second language.<sup>185</sup> Though this measure was not approved by interim President Oleksandr Turchynov, Russia media outlets seized upon this perfect opportunity, using the legislation's passage in the Ukrainian Parliament as evidence that the Ukrainian government was trying to forcibly assimilate its ethnic Russian minority. Russian leaders and media outlets duly covered the political event as the drama unfolded in Kyiv,<sup>186</sup> spinning it by claiming its passage would mean "ethnic Russians would become second-class citizens in Ukraine."<sup>187</sup> In Crimea, media coverage of the debacle corresponded with an immediate decline for support of the Euromaidan and jump in support for joining Russia.<sup>188</sup> The narrative of threatened ethnic minorities resembles Russian justification for its intervention in the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, and plays into a common appeal painting Russia as the victim of Western aggression, and not as the aggressor itself.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> James Marson, "Putin to the West: Hands off Ukraine," *Time*, May 25, 2009, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1900838,00.html>.

<sup>185</sup> Wilson, *Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*, 148.

<sup>186</sup> Allison, "Russia's 'Deniable' intervention," 1262.

<sup>187</sup> John O'Loughlin and Gerard Toal, "The Crimean Conundrum," *Johnson's Russia List Blog*, March 3, 2015, <http://russialist.org/the-crimean-conundrum/>.

<sup>188</sup> O'Loughlin and Toal, "The Crimean Conundrum."

<sup>189</sup> Paul Goble, "Putin Using 'New Kind of War' In Ukraine, Latynina," *Window on Eurasia*, April 24, 2014, <http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.com/2014/04/window-on-eurasia-putin-using-new-kind.html>

The provocation tactic is another popular Russian propaganda tool, and one that Russia has used since 1917. Provocation works like this: an undercover agent will pose as an opposition member, then encourage the activists to “issue statements or take actions that discredit Ukraine, and then [the provocateur sits] back as other Ukrainians and more important media in other countries blame Ukrainians for what the Russians are doing.”<sup>190</sup> Pro-Russian provocateurs launched these attacks numerous times during the crisis, notably during the Euromaidan as a means of delegitimizing the peaceful protestors there, and sowing distrust among various pro-Ukrainian political organizations.

All these unique characteristics of the Ukrainian state make it incredibly vulnerable to Russian exploitation. The societal splits, illustrated in a distinct divide between the northwest and southeast, are dulled by the vast area of central Ukraine that represents a mix of both Ukrainian and Russian political views and language usage. The political chaos of Yanukovich’s departure combined with a weak and divided sense of identity assisted Russia in its exportation of propaganda and manipulation of identity. This section illustrated several complex variables of Ukraine’s ethnic identity: the following sections will demonstrate the historical perspective at Russia’s ethnic exploitation following the departure of Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko.

## **B. PHASE ONE: THE YANUKOVYCH FAMILY’S REIGN**

Yanukovich’s four years as Ukraine’s president laid the groundwork for Russia’s mostly successful exploitative attack on ethnic divides within the country, once direct control through the corrupt politician ultimately failed. Yanukovich and his allies received substantial political support from the Russian government, through cash payouts and reciprocating clientelistic schemes, mostly regarding the Natural Gas industry.<sup>191</sup> Russia essentially used Yanukovich to weaken and corrupt the Ukrainian government, and keep it on track for continued support of Russian foreign policy objectives. Russia’s ability to infiltrate Ukraine in this manner, through the corrupting of the Yanukovich

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<sup>190</sup> Paul Goble, Russian Provocations in Ukraine Follow Classic Soviet Model,” *Window on Eurasia*, October 11, 2014, <http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.com/2014/10/window-on-eurasia-russian-provocations.html>.

<sup>191</sup> Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis*, 46

Administration, cuts to the core of Ukraine's identity weakness, and its propensity toward exploitation. Identity manipulation and propaganda were also central tenants to the Yanukovich Administration's hold to power, as its leaders succumbed to Russian usurpation of the Ukrainian state and its population's ethnic identity.

Yanukovich's family background perfectly embodies the diverse cultural, ethnic, and linguistic character of Ukrainian society. Yanukovich descends from Russian, Polish, and Belarusian ancestors, and although born in Ukraine, he is a native Russian speaker.<sup>192</sup> He grew up a criminal and local tough in eastern Ukraine, involved heavily in the ethnically centered gang wars which raged across the region in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>193</sup> By his thirties, Yanukovich began working for legitimate enterprises in the transportation industry, eventually taking up in politics following the collapse of the Soviet Union. He rose through the ranks of the Party of Regions, which dominated the politics of the Russian-speaking east of the country, becoming the official party leader in 2004.<sup>194</sup> From these eastern roots, Yanukovich created his network of political and criminal power, which increased significantly following his election to President in 2010. This network consisted of both his fellow Party of Regions politicians and the corrupt and powerful mafia-like 'family' that developed around his criminal administration.

The Party of Regional Revival of Ukraine, Labor Party, Party of Pensioners, Party of Ukrainian Solidarity, and For a Beautiful Ukraine Party merged in 2000, forming the Party of Regions. All five parties depended on Ukraine's southeast for their base of support, and instead of representing the left or right, the newly formed Party of Regions set its policy positions around the basic interests of Ukrainian Russophiles.<sup>195</sup> Well known cronyism and criminal behavior, the party "bribed, blackmailed, or coerced opposition deputies into defecting to the government coalition. When opponents could not be pressured to switch sides, they were denigrated in the media and subjected to

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<sup>192</sup> *The Moscow Times*, "Victor Yanukovich," last accessed September 18, 2015, [http://www.themoscowtimes.com/mt\\_profile/viktor\\_yanukovich/433767.html](http://www.themoscowtimes.com/mt_profile/viktor_yanukovich/433767.html).

<sup>193</sup> Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis*, 121.

<sup>194</sup> *The Moscow Times*. "Yanukovich."

<sup>195</sup> Taras Kuzio, "Rise and Fall of the Party of Regions Political Machine," *Problems of Post-Communism* 62, no. 3, DOI: 10.1080/10758216.2015.1020127, 176.

intimidation and repression.”<sup>196</sup> The party also “relied on a highly divisive internal identity narrative, constantly inflaming domestic divisions to win elections.”<sup>197</sup> Russia supported this policy, and as discussed previously, would often repeat and rebroadcast divisive language to Russian-speaking residents of Ukraine.<sup>198</sup> In this way, the party acted as a pro-Russian megaphone allowing Russian propagandists to gain access to the Ukrainian people through ostensibly “legitimate” governmental institutions. The Party of Regions also dominated Crimea’s Parliament in the lead-up to the March 16 referendum, and their unity and pro-Russian support during the crisis was instrumental to Russia’s successful exploitation of ethnic divides on the peninsula.<sup>199</sup>

The Yanukovich crime family which developed around the party network was also instrumental in achieving Russia’s goal of cutting off Ukrainian support for Western integration. The “family” consisted of Yanukovich’s kin and many of the key power brokers in eastern Ukraine. These political and entrepreneurial compatriots created a clientelistic system based on the region’s industrial resources of coal, steel, and gas. During Yanukovich’s presidency these “family” members increased their wealth through various forms of government theft and bribery.<sup>200</sup> Several gangs of local toughs, or *titushki*, stirred up violence in the Maidan in late 2013, appearing as counter-protestors and provocateurs, regularly assaulting pro-European activists.<sup>201</sup> Russia’s support of Yanukovich politically ultimately empowered the “family,” which continued to eat away at the country’s economic livelihood through corruption and clientelism.<sup>202</sup> By 2014, Yanukovich had amassed an enormous personal fortune amounting to approximately

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<sup>196</sup> Kuzio, “Rise and Fall,” 179.

<sup>197</sup> Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis*, 60.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>199</sup> Vladimir Socor, “Russia Retakes Crimea: Political Implications,” *Eurasian Daily Monitor* 12, no. 158, September 3, 2015, accessed through The Jamestown Foundation, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=42130&no\\_cache=1#.Vm8Q4EorJaQ](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=42130&no_cache=1#.Vm8Q4EorJaQ).

<sup>200</sup> Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis*, 51.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

\$100 billion dollars,<sup>203</sup> on the backs of the Ukrainian people and with the direct support of the Russian government.

The protests of the Euromaidan represented many aspects of Ukrainian life, and an outlet of severe frustration and disappointment with the Yanukovich Administration. It was an extension of the feelings of the Orange Revolution in 2004, and a clear vote for closer ties with the West. It represented the Ukrainian people's ability to unite as one majority, a majority of Ukrainians who supported a Western-aligned future, not a Russian one. This was a dangerous proposition for the Putin Administration, and could have been the catalyst that would solidify most of the country around a single ideal of Ukrainian national feeling. So when the crowds would not disperse even after snipers bullets killed 50–100 protestors,<sup>204</sup> the then-leaders of Ukraine and Russia made two critical decisions. First, Yanukovich decided to flee Ukraine, leaving with billions of dollars of stolen wealth, and Putin decided to set in motion a plan to annex Crimea and potentially much more of southern and eastern Ukraine

The Party of Regions and Yanukovich crime family both collapsed following Viktor Yanukovich's late-night flight from the capital on February 22, 2014. By the May presidential elections, many of the Party of Regions' parliamentarians had defected to other parties. Its Presidential candidate, Mykhailo Dobkin, won just three percent of the national vote during the 2014 presidential elections.<sup>205</sup> Similarly, much of Yanukovich's "family" followed the ex-President's lead and fled the country. Yanukovich's networks, and their Russophile culture, had weakened Ukraine through "heightened regional and ethnocultural tension," creating regional rifts that were exacerbated during the Euromaidan.<sup>206</sup> These weaknesses, and Russia's longtime support of the Party of Regions and the 'family', were instrumental in dividing the country. The graft and ineptitude fostered by Russia's support degraded the bonds of society in Ukraine and lead many

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<sup>203</sup> Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis*, 93.

<sup>204</sup> Lower limit produced by BBC. <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-31359021> Upper limit by Kyiv Post <http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/a-year-after-yanukovich-flees-power-still-no-justice-for-euromaidan-victims-381304.html>.

<sup>205</sup> Kuzio, "Rise and Fall," 183.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.



ethnic Russians to believe that they would be better off under the Putin Regime, where at least there was economic opportunity and nationalistic unity. Ultimately, Russia could not prop up Yanukovich's faltering regime with the networks of support it laid in place during most of the 2000s.

### **C. PHASE TWO: THE SECOND CRIMEAN WAR AND THE LITTLE GREEN MEN WHO WON IT**

Foreign armed and financed guerrillas are a favored weapon of states wishing to wage war below the radar of armed conflict. It creates ambiguity and plausible deniability, key components to Russia's exploitative ethnic strategy, which went into full swing in early 2014. In Crimea, Russian strategy was focused on exploiting presence, specifically the presence of the Russian Black Sea Fleet.

Russian officials often deny obvious facts to an absurd degree. The sudden appearance of "little green men" throughout Crimea in February and March 2014 provides a fitting example. When asked about these masked and mysterious men in uniform, President Vladimir Putin claimed they were merely local defense militias, organized by concerned Crimeans.<sup>207</sup> In reality, these armed men "were actually from the military units of the Black Sea Fleet; from [the] East Chechen battalion, the 31st Guards brigade, the 22nd brigade of special GRU [Main Intelligence Directorate] troops, and other military units."<sup>208</sup> In early 2014, these soldiers played a major role in destabilizing the situation in Crimea, primarily by protecting and emboldening pro-Russian separatists and coordinating with their attacks.

In Crimea, these "little green men" undermined the Ukrainian Armed Forces' ability to respond decisively to protestor occupations of key administrative centers and prevent the staging of a separatist referendum. The masked men also provided an assuring presence to pro-Russian protestors that rallied outside of Ukrainian military

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<sup>207</sup> Vitaly Shevchenko, "Little green men or Russian invaders?" *BBC*, March 11, 2014, March 11, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26532154>.

<sup>208</sup> Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What it Means for the West*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 111.

bases, acting as armed security.<sup>209</sup> When the time was right to occupy a Ukrainian military base, the protestors and “little green men” joined forces. After protestors destroyed security gates or other obstacles, the armed men used the chaos of the crowd as cover to secure the compound.<sup>210</sup> The coordination between the “little green men” and pro-Russian protestors is a key component of Russia’s exploitative strategy; and as long as doubt lingered as to the identity of the “little green men”, the tactic helped establish a consistent storyline of an organic, cohesive, and determined pro-Russian movement that acted outside of Moscow’s control.

Exploiting presence was key to the employment of the “little green men.” These units were able to rapidly deploy to trouble spots thanks to Russia’s basing agreements, allowing thousands of well-trained and equipped Russian troops near instantaneous access to the region if the need for action presented itself. In January of 2014, approximately 35,000 Russian Federation troops were stationed in Crimea, outnumbering the 20,000 Ukrainian service members also stationed on the peninsula.<sup>211</sup> The presence of major Russian military installations on Crimea, as well as the large proportion of ethnic Russians serving in Ukrainian military units on the peninsula, proved instrumental to Russia’s exploitation of ethnic division in Ukraine. Proximity to major metropolitan areas not only allowed swift movement of Russian forces, it provided cover for those forces among the friendly ethnic Russian population. The Ukrainian servicemen experienced the opposite: receiving no orders to counter Russian military moves and remaining sequestered in their bases.<sup>212</sup> Disenchanted by their government’s response, and perhaps sympathetic to Russia’s annexation of Crimea, many ethnically Russian members of Ukraine’s armed services, including the head of Ukraine’s Navy, Rear

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<sup>209</sup> “Russian Roulette: The Invasion of Ukraine (Dispatch 3),” *Vice News*, March 7, 2014, <https://news.vice.com/video/russian-roulette-the-invasion-of-ukraine-dispatch-3>.

<sup>210</sup> “Russian Roulette: The Invasion of Ukraine (Dispatch 18),” *Vice News*, March 23 2014, <https://news.vice.com/video/russian-roulette-the-invasion-of-ukraine-dispatch-eighteen>.

<sup>211</sup> Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis*, 111.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

Admiral Denys Berezovsky, defected to the Russian side.<sup>213</sup> Using masked and unidentified “little green men” in combination with close proximity to regular Russian troops, gave pro-Russian forces decisive local superiority. Bluntly denying that these men were regular Russian forces was an audacious touch aimed at degrading the ability of the West (specifically the United States and EU member states) to effectively intervene.

#### **D. PHASE THREE: BOMBAST IN THE DONBAS**

While effective in Crimea, Russia could not replicate the same strategy of using “little green men” in the Donbas. Russian troops did not enjoy the same level of access and legitimacy they did in Crimea, where per their lease agreement with Ukraine, Russian forces were authorized to enact protective measures if the local commander deemed it necessary.<sup>214</sup> In the Donbas, circumstances forced Russia to turn to a more classic mix of irregular warfare tactics, to include the strategic methods of exporting propaganda, arming insurgents, supplying fighters, and exploiting presence.

In the early days of unrest in the Donbas, the initial agitators were genuine Ukrainian citizens, though they did receive some assistance from Russian government advisors. Most of the separatists were ethnic Russians, who made up approximately 38.5 percent of the population of the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, concentrated primarily in larger urban centers. The Russian language also dominates, with 72 percent of residents reporting their “native language” is Russian.<sup>215</sup> These Russophiles provided a potentially large pool of fighters. Early in the crisis in eastern Ukraine, anti-Ukrainian Russian media served a central role in motivating a minority of the eastern population to rebel. One method used by pro-Russian media outlets was to exaggerate the threat posed by Ukrainian ultranationalist groups such as Right Sector to the Russian-speaking east:

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<sup>213</sup> David M. Herszenhorn, “Crimean Premier Says Ukrainian Military Units Have Started to Surrender,” *The New York Times*, March 4, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/05/world/europe/crimea-ukraine-russia.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/05/world/europe/crimea-ukraine-russia.html?_r=0); “New Head of Ukraine’s Navy Defects in Crimea,” March 2, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26410431>.

<sup>214</sup> Eric Posner, “the 1997 Black Sea Fleet Agreement Between Russia and Ukraine,” *Eric Posner Blog*, March 5, 2015, <http://ericposner.com/the-1997-black-sea-fleet-agreement-between-russia-and-ukraine/>.

<sup>215</sup> Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis*, 118.

According to April data from the Donetsk Institute for Social Research and Policy Analysis, 60% of Donetsk residents feared “Bandera supporters” [Right Sector] and 50% dreaded the Kiev authorities. Irrational terror has become the main source of the renewal of separatist sentiments in the Donbass region throughout April-May 2014.<sup>216</sup>

Motivated by calls to action, small and moderately armed groups began to organize in April and May of 2014, taking advantage of early Kyivan government. These forces managed to capture several cities and towns in the region, relying primarily on arms provided by local oligarchs and captured weapons depots.<sup>217</sup> These forces achieved several embarrassing successes in the early spring, including the highly publicized surrender of an entire platoon of Ukrainian armored personnel carriers to an unarmed crowd of pro-Russian protestors.<sup>218</sup> Motivated and idealistic, the early pro-Russian separatists rallied around the belief that they were fighting against an illegitimate fascist government in Kyiv that had overthrown their favored candidates, effectively undermining their political voice.<sup>219</sup>

The wholesale influx of Russian equipment, and later personnel, did not begin until summer 2014. In the months of June and July, the Ukrainian Government offensive started to build momentum, capturing Slovyansk and besieging the separatist strongholds of Donetsk and Luhansk. After the success of the Ukrainian government’s ATO, evidence began to mount of vast quantities of Russian equipment flowing into the country through checkpoints not controlled by the Ukrainian government.<sup>220</sup> Despite the fact that Russia and Ukraine share the use of several weapon systems, Armament Research Services identified several “tagged” weapons systems used by the separatists that could only have originated from Russian arsenals, including modern and updated variants of the MT-LB Armored Personnel Carrier, T-72B Main Battle Tank, and

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<sup>216</sup> Oleg Grytsaienko, “The Crisis in Ukraine: An Insider’s View,” *Russie.Nei.Visions*, no. 78, Russia/NIS Center, Paris, 2014, 10, [https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ifri\\_mv\\_78\\_ukraine\\_oleg\\_grytsaienko\\_june\\_2014\\_eng\\_0.pdf](https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ifri_mv_78_ukraine_oleg_grytsaienko_june_2014_eng_0.pdf).

<sup>217</sup> Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis*, 130.

<sup>218</sup> “Ukraine Crisis: Military Vehicles ‘Seized’ in Kramatorsk.” *BBC*, April 16, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27045534>.

<sup>219</sup> Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis*, 221

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

1RL239 Battlefield Surveillance Radar Vehicle.<sup>221</sup> Several examples of Russian-supplied heavy equipment now sit in Kyiv's Museum of the Great Patriotic War, with placards indicating their manufacturing numbers as proof of their Russian origin. Without additional military equipment the rebellion would have fallen apart. Russia maintained a steady stream of material support for the separatists, but even that was not enough to prevent their capitulation. There simply were too few Ukrainian fighters to stand up to the government forces.

When local manpower could no longer fill the requirement for fighters, and failed to hold back the onslaught of the ATO, Russia sent its own citizens into the breach. These legions of Russian volunteer fighters flowed into the Donbas in the summer of 2014, made up of both disgruntled Russian veterans and radical political ideologues. Many were veterans of Russia's wars in Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Georgia, but others were simply politicized rightist nationalists eager to export their ideology.<sup>222</sup> These volunteers were invaluable in the early stages of Russia's wholesale commitment to the rebellion.

To fill the ranks of fighters, Russian conscription officers looked for military veterans with a very specific background:

The ideal candidate was a seasoned and battle-hardened veteran who was now eking out a living as a security guard, in construction or as a driver, preferably with debts and/or an unhappy home life; or alternatively, a young man who had recently completed his military service and was experiencing difficulty in re-adjusting and finding a niche in the civilian world.<sup>223</sup>

These recruits were promised high pay, the equivalent of hundreds of U.S. dollars a day, to fight and operate the heavy weaponry that began to flow into Ukraine from border checkpoints controlled by separatist forces.<sup>224</sup> By August, these military veterans numbered 6,500, providing valuable combat experience and tactical know-how to the

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<sup>221</sup> Jonathan Ferguson and N.R. Jenzen-Jones, "Arms and Munitions of the Ongoing Conflict in Ukraine," *Armament Research Services*, November 2014, <http://armamentresearch.com/Uploads/Research%20Report%20No.%203%20-%20Raising%20Red%20Flags.pdf>, 85.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 232–233.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

local Donbas fighters, many of whom came from the steel and coal industry and had little practical military experience.<sup>225</sup> It is important to differentiate these veterans, who had left military service prior to volunteering, from the regular Russian forces, which were persuaded or coerced to fight in Ukraine at a later stage in the conflict.

The second pool of recruits came from Russia's network of "politicized supporters of Russian neo-imperialist organizations."<sup>226</sup> After they signed up, these recruits headed to a series of paramilitary training camps—many set up by Viktor Yanukovich's son, Oleksander<sup>227</sup>—established near the Ukrainian border.<sup>228</sup> Those that survived the intense fighting of 2014 managed to form "powerful fraternal combat bonds and networks with men whom they would otherwise never have met."<sup>229</sup> Politicized fighters also hailed from other countries throughout the world (from neighboring Belarus to faraway Brazil), but these volunteers never numbered more than a few hundred.<sup>230</sup> Today, Russian soldiers make up approximately one-third (nearly 10,000) of the fighters in the Donbas, as the prevalence of veteran and ideologue fighter networks continues to diminish.<sup>231</sup>

The Russian strategic method of exploiting presence was also in play during this phase. During the increase in fighting in the summer of 2014, 42,000 Russian troops participated in exercises mere miles from the Ukrainian border.<sup>232</sup> The presence of Russian regular forces operating along Ukraine's borders during the insurgency played a deterrent role, representing a conventional threat. Their presence aggressive and decisive military action on behalf of the ATO, thus enabling Russia to extend the conflict and draw effective forces away from the Donbas.

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225 Rękawek, "Neither Legion nor International Brigades," 6.

226 Mitrokhin, "Infiltration, Instruction, Invasion," 220–221.

227 Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis*, 126–127.

228 Mitrokhin, "Infiltration, Instruction, Invasion," 236.

229 *Ibid.*, 247.

230 Rękawek, "Neither Legion nor International Brigade," 5

231 *Ibid.*, 6.

232 Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis*, 129.

In this phase, which is still ongoing though noticeably cooling, Russia heavily employed its strategic methods of exporting propaganda, arming insurgents, supplying fighters, and exploiting presence. These methods, though less covert as the conflict dragged on, kept the Ukrainian state unstable and reactionary, unable to coalesce effectively and fight an urban insurgency.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

Russia was able to exploit linguistic and ethnic divides in Ukraine systematically, beginning with a wide-ranging information warfare campaign composed of both ideological and propaganda elements, and ending with a classic irregular warfare strategy. By using these methods, Russia successfully knocked Ukraine off its balance in early 2014, allowing it to easily annex Crimea in March, and establish a powerful foothold in the Donbas by the fall. Russia's approach also knocked the West off-balance., Russian and pro-Russian forces blended sufficiently within the background of legitimate public discontent to create a situation that stymied the West's ability to act decisively. Russia created enough doubt and ambiguity to discourage an early unified Western response, and more comprehensive sanctions were leveled only after separatists (or perhaps Russian forces under the guise as separatists) brought down Malaysian Airlines Flight 17.

### **1. Minsk II and Beyond**

The long-term consequences of Russia's exploitative ethnic strategy in Ukraine are yet to be seen. As of the beginning of September 2015 it appears as though violence in the Donbas is subsiding, with the Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko begrudgingly accepting the terms of the Minsk II agreement.<sup>233</sup> The predicted separatist counter-offensive toward Mariupol and Slovyansk has yet to materialize. The most likely result of the current stalemate is another frozen conflict along Russia's periphery, but NATO's initial refusal (or inability) to become directly involved in the Ukraine crisis may end up being a stroke of incredible luck. Russia can ill-afford further drags on its bank accounts

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<sup>233</sup> Socor, "Action Plan."

in the form of another needy breakaway region. Western sanctions remain in place, and oil has fallen well below the \$110-a-barrel price tag required to keep the Russian government solvent.<sup>234</sup> As Russia drifts into recession there may be enough impetus to spark another round of anti-Putin demonstrations, endangering the regime.

The Ukrainian crisis shows that the West is not well suited to counter Russian exploitative attacks, relegating them and the Ukrainian government to a reactive position, wherein both must spend vast resources in both time and treasure to counter every Russian method.<sup>235</sup> Defensive strategies, if forced into play in this manner, are time consuming and inefficient. In this “hybrid warfare” domain, Russia (acting offensively) has a decisive advantage, as it can use its local, cultural influence, specifically the prevalence of the Russian language, as a means to manipulate foreign populations in real time and from within those populations. Therefore:

Putin is doing an end run around the West which ‘condemns any application of force by the state but does not take note of force if it comes from ‘activists,’ ‘social organizations’ or ‘the people.’ That Western failure opens the way for those using Putin’s tactics to use them ever more widely.<sup>236</sup>

But this exploitation of ethnic divides can be, and has been, countered. In the Baltic States, governments have established their own media networks designed to satiate the need for Russian language media in their Russian-speaking citizens.<sup>237</sup> This counter-‘end around’ circumvents the ability of Russian news outlets to penetrate other countries. NATO and other international organizations can assist Ukraine by providing a means of establishing Russian content media for the Ukrainian population that fulfills the need for information, while screening out Russian propaganda.

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<sup>234</sup> Louis Woodhill, “It’s Time To Drive Russia Bankrupt – Again,” *Forbes*, March 3, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/louiswoodhill/2014/03/03/its-time-to-drive-russia-bankrupt-again/>.

<sup>235</sup> “NATO-Russia, Setting the Record Straight,” <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/115204.htm>.

<sup>236</sup> Goble, “Putin Using New War.”

<sup>237</sup> Paul Goble, “Moscow TV Threatening Stability of Post-Soviet States, Mitrokhin Says,” *Window on Eurasia*, April 9, 2014, <http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.com/2014/04/window-on-eurasia-moscow-tv-threatening.html>.



## 2. Ethnic Conflict, Insurgency, or Hybrid War?

The ethnic dimension of the Ukraine Crisis makes the understanding of Russia's involvement of major difficulty for outsiders to comprehend. Is it an ethnic conflict, insurgency, or something else?

Given the research conducted for this thesis, one might expect the author to argue that the Ukraine Crisis falls under the category of ethnic conflict. The disparate fighting groups in the country, especially nationalistic "volunteer battalions," are often ethnically vague, adhering to no strong "code" or pure concept of self. There is no clear distinction between the "us" and the "them" which divides ethnic and nationalistic identities. If one recalls, the definition used in this thesis for ethnic conflict is "a struggle in which the aim is to gain objectives and simultaneously neutralize, injure, or eliminate rivals."<sup>238</sup> Therefore it is difficult to ascertain which rivals each group is struggling against. Are the separatists fighting an illegitimate government, subversive fascist elements, or ethnic Ukrainians? It is simply unclear, making the labeling of the conflict as an ethnic war dubious. Despite this ambiguity, what is apparent is that language and identity do play a major role in the reasons for fighting, but not to the extent to which it can be defined as an ethnic conflict.

What about an insurgency? Defined as "an organized rebellion aimed at overthrowing a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict."<sup>239</sup> Often, the definition of insurgency is refined to imply internal, not external actors. If the orchestrators of the Ukraine Crisis were Ukrainian citizens, then this definition would fit perfectly within the context of an insurgency; however, Russia is attempting to use violence to change the political order. Russia is an *external* entity. Russia is using manipulation and violence *internally* within Ukraine. Granted a sizeable contingent of the fighters in Ukraine are in fact Ukrainian, but they only make up a third of the total fighters, and are entirely dependent on Russian reinforcements, command and

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<sup>238</sup> Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 95.

<sup>239</sup> Vocabulary.com, accessed December 14, 2015, <http://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/insurgency>.

control, and equipment.<sup>240</sup> The Crimean Republic, Donetsk People’s Republic, or Luhansk People’s Republic share few common characteristics with the guerrilla organizations established by Mao, Min, or Che.

The term “hybrid war” seems appropriate to define the ballet being performed in Ukraine today. Frank G. Hoffman defines the hybrid threat as “any adversary that simultaneously and adaptively employs a fused mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism, and criminal behavior in the battlespace to obtain their political objectives.”<sup>241</sup> He lists four principle modes and means of hybrid warfare: conventional warfare, irregular warfare, terror/violence, and criminal behavior. Richard M. Crowell expands upon Hoffman’s “fused mix” definition, adding three additional modes and means: networks, coercion/co-opting, and information warfare.<sup>242</sup> This thesis focused on at least four of these modes and means, and additional study of the conflict would absolutely uncover evidence of the remaining three. Using this definition, it is clear that Russia is engaged in hybrid war where exploitation of Ukrainian and Russian ethnic and linguistic groups is a key element. Without the already present divides in Ukraine, Russia’s ability to wage hybrid war would have been severely limited, possibly resulting in a more dangerous, at least for the international world, conflict.

### **3. A Successful Gambit?**

Though a thorough discussion of the power of each Russian strategic method to exploit ethnic divides will be revealed in the following chapter, three general observations vis-à-vis Russia’s ability to achieve its strategic objectives are illuminated below.

Russia was able to build a slight increase in regional hegemony through their assault on Ukraine. Annexation of Crimea, long believed to have been part of Russia since the reign of the Romanovs, added two million citizens to Russia’s population and

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<sup>240</sup> Reĳkawek, “Neither Legion nor International Brigade,” 6; Mitrokhin, “Infiltration, Instruction, Invasion,” 238–239.

<sup>241</sup> F. G. Hoffman, “Hybrid Threats: Neither Omnipotent Nor Unbeatable,” *Orbis* (2010), doi:10.1016/j.orbis.2010.04.009, 3.

<sup>242</sup> Richard Crowell, “Analyzing Hybrid Warfare,” *The United States Naval War College, Joint Military Operations Department*, November 2013, 5.

ten thousand square miles to its country. Russia now, especially after Minsk II, exercises incredible influence over the fate of the DNR and LNR, and is setting itself up as the arbiter of peace in the region, similar to the end result in Georgia's ethnic conflicts. Ukraine also remains an unstable country, still fighting rampant corruption and outdated institutional structures. All signs point to a new frozen conflict in Ukraine, which will increase Russia's power and control within its area of interest.

As in the Georgian case, Russia did not decrease the Ukrainian government and people's desire to more closely align with the West. Russia, through its aggression has actually done more to accelerating this move, at least in the short term, then to stymie it. Ukraine is experiencing a painful but promising period of nationalism and unity, potentially unlike any other period in the country's short history. By annexing Crimea, Russia has absorbed the most pro-Russian region of the country, one that proclaimed unceasing support for Russia. Without representatives of Crimea in the Ukrainian Parliament, the country is more unified. Partition does make NATO and EU accession problematic, however, as the alliances are unlikely to admit members with unresolved territorial disputes, not to mention the unwillingness of some states toward provoking Russia further.

Finally, Russia actually decreased its perception as a great power, at least internationally. Russia is now more isolated than at any other time since the Bolshevik Revolution. This can no more clearly be seen as through the ongoing sanctions and Russia's ejection from the G8. Domestically, however, the Putin regime continues to ride a wave of popular support and revived national pride.

Ultimately the costs of Russian intervention in Ukraine will outweigh the benefits, and will prove to be a culminating point in Russia's ability to shape world and domestic affairs. The country's strategic objectives of creating a regional hegemony, decreasing Western influence, and regaining great power status are by no means within grasping distance.

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## **IV. CONCLUSION: STRATEGIC APTITUDE OR MISGUIDED INEPTITUDE**

We must formulate and put forward for other nations a much more positive and constructive picture of [the] sort of world we would like to see than we have put forward in past. It is not enough to urge people to develop political processes similar to our own. Many foreign peoples, in Europe at least, are tired and frightened by experiences of past, and are less interested in abstract freedom than in security. They are seeking guidance rather than responsibilities. We should be better able than Russians to give them this. And unless we do, Russians certainly will.

—George Kennan, *Long Telegram*

### **A. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

Russia has used consistent strategic methods in both the Georgian and Ukrainian cases, demonstrating a historical perspective and an ability to replicate the successes of the past. The similar use of these six strategic methods in both the Georgian and Ukrainian case demonstrate Russia's consistent and quantifiable exploitation of ethnic divides as part and parcel to the country's achievement of its strategic objectives. Their use also demonstrates a logical process of strategic thinking on behalf of Russian policy makers, though the long-term impact of this approach to foreign policy is problematic.

#### **1. Exporting Propaganda**

Exporting propaganda is Russia's most efficient, affordable, and impenetrable means of achieving its three main strategic objectives, and has been exercised in a way that puts independent and democratic Western media at a distinct disadvantage.

Russian propaganda is efficient in that Russian remains the lingua franca of a large (though declining) diaspora of post-Soviet peoples. Efficiency also reflects the short time it takes for Russian media outlets to release an anti-Western or anti-Georgian/Ukrainian story. Meanwhile, the need to form a cogent and reasonable response often slows effective Western counterpoints from reputable media sources. As long as the governments opposing Russia remain in a reactive posture, Russian outlets, which are not

abashed of embellishing, lying, or manipulating, will maintain a distinct strategic advantage.

Exporting propaganda is also affordable. Though the Russian Government pays approximately \$8 billion a year on its government-owned news networks, this money goes to serve numerous purposes.<sup>243</sup> It represents a coercive/cooptive tool in the “near abroad” surely, but also a way to maintain an air of purpose for the Russian population. This is an important means of creating the impression that Russia remains a great power, crediting the Putin Regime with repeated international successes. Domestic propaganda, in this regard, remains incredibly important.

Finally, exporting propaganda is impenetrable, in that it alone does not elicit a powerful or united diplomatic counterattack, especially from the Western powers. It is difficult for organizations such as the EU and NATO to justify anything other than counter-messaging campaigns, essentially their own propaganda, which does not endanger the Russian government in the same manner Russian propaganda weakens Georgia’s or Ukraine’s society. This is primarily because the cost of creating falsehoods and mischaracterizations is considerably cheaper (in both time and money) than the cost of refuting them. Vitriolic rhetoric alone does not justify any sort of coherent international response, diplomatically or militarily, to Russia’s revanchist storyline.

In these contexts, exporting propaganda to Georgia and Ukraine is and will remain a powerful and consistent strategic method for dividing Russian-speaking populations weakened by a poor sense of identity. The export of propaganda has created pockets of pro-Russian sentiment outside of Russia proper, assisting in the establishment of a regional zone of influence. By dominating the message in these areas, with consistent anti-Western rhetoric, Russian media has simultaneously expanded its status as a regional hegemon and limited Western influence. Finally, by the dual-use nature of propaganda, Russia is able to build its own case, at least domestically, that it is working to regain its great power status.

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<sup>243</sup> Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis*, 35.

## 2. Manipulating Identity

Manipulating identity manifested itself in Georgia through of the issuance of passports in Georgia's breakaway regions, but Russia took a different route in Ukraine (it is unclear if Russia actually replicated passport issuance in Ukraine prior to the crisis). The manipulation of Ukrainian identity is mostly a condition of similar culture and shared history. Often-extolled concepts of ethnonationalism and *Novorossiya* are clear examples of the permeability of Ukrainian society, and its weakness to identity manipulation. Russian propagandists focused on the Crimean referendum as its precedence, using a basic appeal to Crimean popular support for unification with Russia as a manipulative tool to undermine Ukrainian identity.

Manipulating identity serves the purpose of gaining an axis of attack or *casus belli*, but does not necessarily facilitate the achievement of Russia's three main objectives. If anything, Russia placed itself at odds with those countries that feel most threatened by Russian revanchism, notably the Baltic States, Kazakhstan, and to some extent Belarus, when it began taking coercive measures designed to manipulate the definition of a Russian citizen. More generally, a Russophile strategy does not work if the goal is ultimately to recreate a multinational sphere of influence with some claim to general credibility. It is difficult for Russia to set itself up as the natural guardian and protector of Eurasia if its policy is concerned principally with protecting Russians from the other inhabitants in that very region! Because of an overly specific focus on Russian citizens, the country's intent is unclear, and therefore the surrounding states have taken measures to blunt Russian attempts to undermine their own people: by firming up their own definitions of citizenship or by limiting the density or control ethnic Russians have within their borders.<sup>244</sup> Therefore, Russia's strategy of manipulating identity, though a small part of their exploitative policies in Georgia and Ukraine, have served as a warning that their own Russian populations may be targeted in similar fashion, and allowing them to take actions to prevent the same fate from befalling them. By appeasing the ethnic

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<sup>244</sup> Paul Goble, "Window on Eurasia: Astana Shifting Ethnic Kazakhs to Norther Kazakhstan to Block Any Russian Threat," *Window on Eurasia*, April 2, 2014, <http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.com/2014/04/window-on-eurasia-astana-shifting.html>.

Russian audience to the expense of all other ethnicities and nationalities, Russia has reduced its ability to interfere in other countries in their neighborhood, thereby reducing their regional power.

There is also a weak case that manipulating identity degrades pro-Western sentiment. Even during the takeover of eastern Ukrainian administrative centers, polls of the general population revealed that most citizens, even in the Donbas, preferred reimagining part of Ukraine.<sup>245</sup> Polling has shown Russian manipulation of identity in Georgia and Ukraine have unified the majority populations of each country, and accelerated their desire to align with the West.

Finally, Russia has not been able to translate the possible inclusion of small populations of new citizens into an increase in their great power status. The populations of South Ossetia and Abkhazia (with few ethnic Russians) number less than 350,000, and Crimea only approximately 2.5 million (a majority ethnic Russian).<sup>246</sup> Though these are sizeable populations relative to their home countries of Georgia and Ukraine, these potentially new citizens comprise less than a two percent increase in Russia's current population of 147 million (population is significant because it represents is an important metric of international power), but this small increase in citizens pales in comparison to the overall decline in Russia's population, which some experts predict could dip below 100 million by 2050.<sup>247</sup> Russia has also taken away potentially powerful "internal lobbies" by supporting independence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and annexation in Crimea. Had these regions remained part of their mother countries, they could have acted as powerful political blocks that promote pro-Russian policies. Once separated, Russia no longer wields that ability to influence internal politics of Georgia and Ukraine.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Yulia Tyshchenko, "The Ukrainian Crisis: between the Identity Policy and Confrontation to the 'Russian World,'" *Fondation pour la Recherche Strategique* no. 05, February 15, 2015.

<sup>246</sup> CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>.

<sup>247</sup> Paul Goble, "Window on Eurasia: Astana Shifting Ethnic Kazakhs to Northern Kazakhstan to Block Any Russian Threat," *Window on Eurasia*, April 2, 2014, <http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.com/2014/04/window-on-eurasia-astana-shifting.html>.

<sup>248</sup> Allison, "Russia's 'Deniable' Intervention," 1283.



By manipulating identity, Russia only achieved minor foreign policy gains, establishing a *casus belli* for action in its “near abroad.” Thus, this particular strategic method is considerably less effective than many of the others in a broad foreign policy perspective, though better at influencing Russia’s policies in the Russian diaspora.

### **3. Arming Insurgents**

Arming separatists alone has not been a successful method of achieving Russian strategic objectives. In both cases, the Russian-armed separatist forces were unable to defeat Georgian and Ukrainian government troops without additional direct support from regular Russian military units. Arming separatists does, however, provide enough cover to allow Russia’s actions to fly under the radar of Western willingness to decisively respond to aggression by muddying the waters of what constitutes an aggressive action. It is difficult to postulate what the Western response would have been if Russia unilaterally and conventionally invaded either country without first establishing enough “cover” for their action.

Superior arms do grant the ability of one group to monopolize the use of force within a territory, a characteristic of government control, thus giving separatist regimes the appearance of unified legitimacy and strengthening their argument for the right for self-rule. Where those groups received their weapons does not mean much to the civilians living under them. To this effect, arming insurgents has allowed Russia to expand its area of influence into the regions held by its proxies, marginally increasing Russia’s status as a regional hegemon, and limiting Western access to the region through military force. But influence over the armed men of a few breakaway regions, who’s forces in Ukraine number less than 20,000 fighters, does not bolster Russia’s power status, not unless those forces are eventually converted into regular Russian soldiers. Instead, the drain on finances over the long run may have a negative effect on Russia’s ability to demonstrate its power. With each new frozen conflict the Russian government hemorrhages a bit more treasure.

#### **4. Supplying Fighters**

Similar to supplying arms, facilitating the recruitment, travel, and training of fighters has not substantially contributed to any direct gains in Russian strategic objectives in Georgia or Ukraine, but the use of this strategic method has acted to confuse the true nature of Russian assistance by providing plausible deniability. Russian leaders can claim they are taking no part in the conflicts and that those doing the fighting are not under their control or jurisdiction once they cross Russia's borders. Again, this gives Russia sufficient cover to use violence without serious Western military retaliation.

Russia has facilitated the influx of foreign fighters to serve as a coercive measure meant to destabilize another country, not necessarily as a means to achieve a decisive outcome. The likelihood any of the separatist armies to win outright military victory in Georgia or Ukraine is low, even with the aid of foreign Russian fighters; but by keeping the manpower tap open, a trickle of trained and experienced foreign guerrillas could indefinitely prolong a conflict. Therefore, foreign fighters do help to increase Russia's regional influence and undermine the pro-Western governments under attack.

Sending her citizens abroad to fight in foreign conflicts may actually weaken Putin's Regime in the long run. As these Russians, especially the politicized ideologues, return home from the fighting they bring with them numerous useful tools for a possible future insurgency. Ironically this seems to be a factor the Russian government has chosen to ignore. Many of the same soldiers recruited to fight in the Donbas were radical rightist nationalists protesting Putin's third presidential run in 2011, so they clearly do not demonstrate any particularly strong allegiance to the regime.<sup>249</sup> As Russia's economic situation worsens, the likelihood of more protests and instability increases, and in turn these possibly disillusioned radicals may take the lessons they learned fighting in Georgia and Ukraine and apply them to a future struggle against the Russian government.

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<sup>249</sup> Mitrokhin, "Infiltration, Instruction, Invasion," 247.

## 5. Exploiting Presence

Close proximity to vital areas granted Russian military forces a decisive advantage in both the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and in the Crimean Anschluss. Rapidly deployed Russian troops were able to take key objectives and reinforce pro-Russian resistance within short timeframes, overwhelming Georgian and Ukrainian government forces on the ground, and demonstrating Russia's unique ability to project power. South Ossetia's control of the Roki tunnel and the comparatively long and open Russian-Ukrainian border gives Russian forces a decisive logistic advantage, one that can be leveraged at any time to deter Georgian or Ukrainian action. Russia's rapid deployment capability also supports the viewpoint that Russia has increased its hegemonic power in Eurasia.

Presence of Russian forces has also effectively limited the West's ability to penetrate these regions. Not even the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe has access to hundreds of miles of the Russian-Ukrainian border, simply because separatists control access.<sup>250</sup> By dominating the security environment on the ground through proxies, Russia essentially controls the levers of power.

Russia also leverages its peacekeeping mission as a means to insert combat forces on to adversary territory. Russia's continuing contribution of "peacekeepers" to South Ossetia and Abkhazia gives credence to Russia's claim as a great power, one able to "stabilize" countries through the provision of security forces, like the U.S. in Afghanistan or French in Mali. The ability to provide peace keepers is generally seen in the international community as a means to enhance one's country's status, and in the Georgian case this may be a significant effect among Russia's allies and its own loyal people.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> Socor, "Action Plan."

<sup>251</sup> United Nations Peacekeeping, "What is Peacekeeping?" *United Nations*, accessed November 18, 2015, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/operations/peacekeeping.shtml>.

## 6. Freezing Conflicts

Through creating frozen conflicts, Russia achieved its primary goal of building a regional hegemony, for now the country can leverage its control over the breakaway governments in response to actions by Georgia and Ukraine. Russia can also use continued economic and military superiority to back separatist armed forces, therefore ensuring ongoing Russian hegemonic dominance in the region, at least for the foreseeable future.<sup>252</sup>

Despite this advantage, Russia failed significantly in its attempt to decrease Western influence in Georgia and Ukraine by perpetuating frozen conflicts. Instead, Russian meddling has solidified the anti-Russian and pro-Western leanings of a majority of each country's population. Though this desire is a far cry from assuring either's ascendance into the Western security and economic order, the populations of both governments have continually expressed their desire to align their political future with the West. Unless serious electoral upheaval occurs, there is little chance either country will begin to drift back into Russia's orbit.

What long-term effect sustaining frozen conflicts has had on Russia's great power status remains unseen. None of Russia's satellite regions contribute to Russia economically, all draining funds from Moscow's already overstretched treasury. The regions' attitudes toward Russia also waft from full allegiance to temperamental insolence; Russia has had to intervene into South Ossetian and Abkhazian affairs directly on several occasions to ensure its interests, and not those of the regions' inhabitants, were protected. In all reality, after Russia has frozen a conflict, it no longer has much direct effect on the power equation, since each region is so small and contributes very little economically. Obviously, Crimea's annexation contributed greatly to heightened Russian nationalism and impression of Russian power, but Crimea never entered the lexicon as a frozen conflict.

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<sup>252</sup> Aves, *From Chaos to Stability?* 2.

## **B. OVERALL ASSESSMENT**

The annexation of Crimea and support of South Ossetian and Abkhazian independence are seen favorably in Russia, and by supporting these policies, the Putin regime has been able to demonstrate power at home. Putin has achieved his goal of regaining the trust of the Russian people and depicting himself as a leader who can bring honor, power, and dignity back to the country, but domestic support does not directly translate into foreign policy success. Exploitative policies in Georgia and Ukraine have served as a unifying force, solidifying the anti-Russian opinions of each population. Instead of strengthening a regional hegemonic bloc to counter the West, Russia's control of its own pole is essentially limited to the current members of the Eurasian Economic Union: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. Georgian and Ukraine continue to drift West, despite Russia's vast investment of diplomatic, military, and economic capital.

Though effective in achieving strategic objectives in the near term, Russia's divide and rule ethnic exploitation strategy has not been paying off. Russia today is more isolated than ever, and is suffering under the heel of economic sanctions and the global slump in oil prices. Despite isolation and economic hardship, Putin remains in power. So, if these strategies arise from the simple purpose of maintaining his seat in the Kremlin, then they are doing their part. Further isolation of Putin's regime, however, may cause it to lower the bar for provocation, increasing the possibility of another dangerous Crimean adventure.

Exploiting ethnic conflict can only produce results through sustained and enthusiastic support of local populations. Support in Crimea was more than sufficient toward the relatively peaceful (though illegal and internationally condemned) transfer of sovereignty from Ukraine to Russian, but Crimea is the exception, and not the rule. As shown in the case studies, South Ossetia and Abkhazia do not bend in every Russian wind, they tend to defy Moscow occasionally. Though they are dependent on Russia's financial and military backing, the people of South Ossetia and Abkhazia do not necessarily crave Russian citizenship. The domestic Russian population also has a vote.

The thousands who gathered demonstrations in March 2015 after the murder of Boris Nemtsov were clearly upset about something.

Russia does not exploit ethnic conflict elegantly, like a doctor with a scalpel. Russia uses it like a blunt object, bashing their foes over the head, then jollily pointing out their deeds to a minority international and majority national audience. Recognizing South Ossetian and Abkhazian independence in 2008 was a mistake, only three other countries followed Russia's lead (Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Nauru). Following Crimea, Russia was expelled from the G8. These actions have produced little in exchange for Russia's sacrifice.

Russia's exploitative policies will have limited effectiveness outside the former Soviet Bloc. The Baltic States, Belorussia, and Kazakhstan are all at risk of the same ethnic manipulation, though it not likely the world will see similar tactics used in the near or medium term. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania enjoy membership in both NATO and the EU. NATO will meet any influx of Russian insurgents and weapons along the hybrid warfare model of the Donbas crisis with armed force. Belarus remains safe as long as Alexander Lukashenko remains in power, but could be vulnerable after his departure. Kazakhstan's native population is outgrowing its Russian minority by a large margin, and its government has undertaken a program of volunteer internal migration, moving ethnic Kazakhs to areas with large Russian populations.<sup>253</sup>

### **C. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The common worldwide perception is that Western, Georgian, and Ukrainian policymakers have been completely unprepared to respond to Russian actions in its "near abroad." Though this point has some merit, the intent of this thesis is to show that while Russia's exploitation of ethnic division is systemic, it is not unstoppable. Leaders in the West, as well as Georgia and Ukraine, can implement numerous policies to counter subversive Russian strategic methods.

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<sup>253</sup> Paul Goble, "Astana Shifting Ethnic Kazakhs to Northern Kazakhstan to Block Any Russian Threat," *Window on Eurasia*, April 4, 2014, <http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.com/2014/04/window-on-eurasia-astana-shifting.html>.

## **1. For Western Policymakers**

Given Russia's obvious tendencies to use and abuse international law, engage in realist discourse, and treat its "near abroad" with open contempt, the move to invite Ukraine and Georgia into a closer relationship with Europe and the West should have been tempered. The United States and its European partners could have achieved their normative goals, such as the spread of democracy and normalization of markets, without unilaterally declaring Ukraine and Georgia inevitable members of Western institutions, thus giving Russia the pretext needed to enflame ethnic conflict.

In the future, proactive Western action can limit the effectiveness of Russia's war on ethnicity and identity, but it would entail a decidedly non-military approach to strategy. Strengthening of Georgia, Ukraine, and other post-Soviet states' sense of civic nationalism, over regional or ethnic nationalism, is the single best means of preventing further Russian interference. But, achieving such a state is easier said than done, and could take years, if not decades, of competent civic leadership. By conquering corruption and championing reform, countries in the post-Soviet space can strengthen their sense of civic pride; this is an area where future Western aid should focus. Georgia and Ukraine have both begun to tackle corruption and government waste, and have had peaceful transferences of power, so there is some momentum for internal change.

Ultimately the most powerful actor in the region is still Russia. No other entity has the same level of interest in the European portion of the post-Soviet space. If the situation in Russia destabilizes disastrously, NATO must stand ready to respond to future hybrid threats. Putin may try to boost his popularity by once again inciting Russian patriotism, the quickest way of which would be uniting another group of "lost" Russians with the Russian Federation. Russia has clearly demonstrated that it does not intend to align to the Western way of the world. Though Russia has succeeded in the near term with what appear to be fewer negative repercussions, few paths toward a fruitful future remain. NATO must be prepared for the possibility of not only a revisionist Russia, but a massive collapsed state.

Putin's strategy in his "near abroad" also remains consistent in its dependence on the continuing supplication of its neighbors to Moscow's will. In Moscow's modern worldview, Russia is always the victim: there must be some pretext to intervention. The better the pretext, the more legal ground countries like Russia have to interfere in foreign policy. Without a pretext, Russia cannot go in shooting. Such an action, at least in Russia's eyes, would result in decisive Western action. This gives the West an opportunity to shape events by being proactive in the region, and denying any attempts for Russia to claim *casus belli*. The general approach in Washington is to appease Russia by trying to find a common ground, but this approach is not sustainable as Russia's international goals of great power status and regional hegemony are not compatible with the current status quo which the U.S. and Europe is seeking to uphold. Instead the West should send clear diplomatic, military, and economic messages to the Russian government that their provocative actions will be met with decisive action.

It is also critical for Western policymakers to confront Russia's role as a mediator in Georgian and Ukrainian negotiations. Instead of viewing Russia as a concerned outsider, Western powers should refer to their representation at the negotiation table as one of the belligerents in an armed conflict, straightforwardly and unrelentingly. Evidence of their instigation of both crisis, as shown in this thesis and in countless other journalistic and academic publications, is overwhelming and unquestionable, it is therefore procedurally incorrect to treat Russia as a mediator. The country clearly has no interest in compromise.

## **2. For Georgian and Ukrainian Policymakers**

Georgia's secessionist regions may be all but lost to Russian influence, as no solution appears immediately apparent; however, there is room to use the lessons learned in the Georgian case and apply them to other potential conflict zones around Russia's periphery. Obviously Russia's annexation of Crimea exemplifies a modified and evolved dimension to its exploitation of ethnic division, but it is too late to change the outcome of the 2014 Anschluss. Ukrainian leaders may be able to learn from the Georgian case, and apply these historical lessons to the ongoing conflict in the Donbas. Once a level of



stability establishes itself in the region, Ukrainian leaders can act to counter two of Russia's strategies, that of peacekeeping (or piece-keeping) and identity manipulation. Unfortunately, one can apply few lessons from Russia's direct military interference in the South Ossetia and Abkhazia conflicts and apply those to the Ukrainian case. Russia is simply too powerful and controls too much of the Ukrainian side of the Russo-Ukrainian border to prevent continued Russian military assistance. Obviously, military operations must first run their course. Only after Ukraine, Luhansk and Donetsk establish their dividing lines can Ukraine regain the initiative. As long as Russian-backed separatists and pro-Ukrainian forces remain engaged in active combat operations, little can be done to limit Russia's exploitation of the conflict.

Russia froze the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia primarily through their control of peacekeeping forces in both regions. They established a status quo where Russian forces, and their secessionist proxies, outnumbered Georgian forces. Any peace deal struck to bring a more-permanent end to fighting in the Donbas must be negotiated with this reality in mind. Russian direct influence in any peacekeeping process causes a dramatic decline in the possibility of eventual agreement. Ukrainian negotiators must do everything they can to stave off the legal stationing of Russian peacekeeping forces in Ukrainian territory. The Donetsk and Luhansk Republics and their armed forces are unlikely to willingly lay down their arms, but as long as Russian peacekeepers are kept off of Ukrainian territory, the Ukrainian government has a chance of avoiding a status quo situation where citizens of the Donbas grow accustomed to continued Russian armed presence, such as that which developed in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Diminishing the power and strength of Russia's coercive tactics should be another key Ukrainian goal following the secession of armed conflict. In the Georgian case, the Putin regime was able to continue to support Abkhazia and South Ossetia after relative stability was established. This military, economic, and political aid served to bind the breakaway regions closer to Russia, making them entirely dependent on Russia. Ukrainian officials should do all they can to limit Russian military support of the Donbas, and secure their own borders if possible. Economically, Ukraine should spearhead the reconstruction of the Donbas, and take the lead on repairing the devastation there. With

Western help, this could undermine Russian efforts to appear as the guarantor of economic aid. Finally, Ukraine should take every step to limit Russian efforts to absorb the Donbas civically. Kyiv should carefully monitor the issuance of passports, and circumvent Russian attempts at issuing their own passports to Ukrainian citizens at every opportunity. This once again counts on Ukraine's ability to secure its own borders and prevent the infiltration of Russian passport-issuing bureaucrats.

#### **D. FINAL THOUGHTS**

There are numerous reasons to be optimistic about the future of humanity. More people have been lifted out of poverty in the last quarter century than at any other time in history. Advances in telecommunication technology have linked essentially every person on the planet to each other, allowing near simultaneous communication to every corner of the globe. But despite these revolutions, humanity cannot escape certain simple truths: one society tends to distrust another that does not look, talk, or behave like it. There will always be an "us versus them" mentality in the human condition. Instead of ignoring this truth, world leaders should seek out ways to prevent the calamities that take place because of this lack of trust. They should find ways to understand and minimize needless violence, because, unfortunately, there will always be those that will exploit what makes humanity diverse. There will always be those that manipulate what humanity is to achieve their own nefarious goals. To make a better world, global leaders must strive to understand the motivations behind ethnic conflict, and counter those that manipulate it.

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