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**NAVAL
POSTGRADUATE
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MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**THE CULT OF REPUTATION: DETERRENT OR A
CAUSE OF WAR?**

by

Hassan Farooq
Ivan Atanasov Zapryanov

December 2014

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THE CULT OF REPUTATION: DETERRENT OR A CAUSE OF WAR?

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ABSTRACT

A reputation for resolve, used to predict an actor's future intentions with reasonable accuracy based on his past actions, is central to many deterrence theories. The assumption is that states use other actors' past behavior as a learning schema for generating expectations, and act according to such expectations. However, there are other powerful determinants in international politics—military capabilities, distribution of power, and interests at stake, etc.—that shape states' policies. Nonetheless, decision makers assign to their states' reputation the status of symbolic capital, in order to add credibility to their future threats and commitments, or to credibly deter adversaries' future threats. They generally believe that their allies and adversaries infer the state's resolve from its past behavior. In this paper we analyze how this belief and the consequent quest for building, preserving, and/or restoring reputation can push decision-makers into the vortex of conflicts.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In international relations, states pay close attention to actions of allies and competitors alike. Statesmen believe a tough response in one crisis gives the state a reputation for resolve that is likely to serve as a deterrent for any future challenger. Conversely, any retreat or weakness displayed by a state under a crisis will leave it with a reputation for irresoluteness that will likely embolden its competitors in the future.

Proponents of this hypothesis believe that a country's reputation has a significant effect on its credibility. Conventional wisdom and much of the deterrence literature assume that a reputation for resolve is often necessary for preventing war, and regime scholars emphasize how a state's reputation influences its ability to form and preserve international institutions. However, some scholars question the validity of the hypothesis. They believe that reputations do not generally influence other states' policies, and that adversaries and allies do not necessarily view the same act by an actor similarly; hence, reputations rarely form and are not worth fighting for.

Most policy-makers, nonetheless, appear influenced by reputation, or the perceived importance of reputation. States have thus reacted strongly even on matters of trivial strategic interests in order to communicate resoluteness to the challenger of the moment, as well as to potential future challengers. In the process, states have actually employed war with the purpose of deterring future wars.

This thesis investigates the perceived role reputation plays in international relations, with special focus on its connection to deterrence outcomes. Discussions of reputation have largely focused on whether and how significantly reputation matters in international relations in general, and whether reputation is worth fighting for. We intend to explore the issue from a different angle: regardless of its significance, states have actually been going to war for the sake of their reputations for resolve with the belief that such reputations supposedly would deter others from initiating hostile actions. We propose through this thesis that states can increasingly employ war itself in order to develop, preserve, and/or restore a reputation for resolve and credibility.

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I. REPUTATION HYPOTHESIS IN PERSPECTIVE

A. INTRODUCTION

Reputational concerns feature heavily in economics. A firm with a poor reputation for quality or delivery of service will soon find itself out of business. Similarly, monopolists and oligopolists discourage potential new entrants into the market through developing a reputation for toughness: “If a monopolist fights the first entrant, it generates a reputation for strong resolve and can deter future challenges.”¹ Likewise, criminal law uses punishment not only to punish the offender, but also essentially to deter potential future offenders. Reputation is equally critical in domestic politics, especially democracies; a reputation for unfulfilled rhetoric and promises will most likely be the cause of the political fall of a leader. States, similarly, respond in differing ways to secessionist movements. While some insurgencies, especially in somewhat ethnically homogeneous societies, are addressed politically, ethnolinguistically heterogeneous and fractionalized states that face the possibility of challenges from multiple other separatist groups are likely to fight against them with ruthless military might with a view to developing reputation of intolerance towards any secessionist ambitions.²

The Mytilenian Debate³ is the best illustration of how reputational concerns impact states’ decisions that can influence other states’ policies in the future. In this debate, Cleon advocated putting to death all the adult male population, and enslaving the women and children of Mytilene, to deter future revolts. Diodotus, on the other hand, argued that such an action would make any future revolt more desperate and, hence, determined. The concept was expanded by Thomas Schelling who “laid the foundation for a reputational theory of conflict behavior, claiming that a state’s reputation for

¹ Joe Clare and Vesna Danilovic, “Multiple Audiences and Reputation Building in International Conflicts,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2010), 864.

² *Ibid.*, 864–5.

³ Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, New York: E. P. Dutton, Book 3, 212–223.

resolve, established through its past behavior, should provide it with bargaining leverage in future conflicts.”⁴

Of great interest to academia in recent years is whether reputations matter in international relations, especially under crises. Opinion is divided on whether and how significantly reputations shape policies and the responses of states. Proponents of reputations advance the concept that if a state fails to punish an aggressor, its reputation will suffer, and, as a result, future deterrent threats will be less believable.⁵ Likewise, accepting “defeat” can be similarly damaging. For example, the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq was opposed, *inter alia*, out of reputational concerns. “For those who oppose a rapid U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, including members of the Bush administration, among the most feared consequences is damage to America’s reputation.”⁶

Others contest this strategic utility of reputation. They believe that decision makers rarely assess the credibility of their adversary’s threats through reference to a history for keeping or breaking commitments, that reputations rarely form, and thus cannot have, strategic utility, and hence reputation is not worth fighting for.⁷

Regardless of which school is closer to reality, there appears to be a tendency among decision makers to take *their own* state’s reputation seriously, and even go to war to earn or maintain it. This strong belief that is pervasive among decision makers has turned it into the cult of reputation—“a belief system holding as its central premise a conviction (or fear) that backing down in a crisis will lead one’s adversaries or allies to underestimate one’s resolve in the next crisis.”⁸ It is this belief that renders reputational considerations important motives for war.

⁴ Joe Clare, “Reputation for Resolve, Interests, and Conflict,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 2012 29: 3.

⁵ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 120.

⁶ Hakan Tunç, “Reputation and U.S. withdrawal from Iraq,” *Orbis* 52, no. 4 (2008): 657–669.

⁷ Jonathan Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 1.

⁸ Shiping Tang, “Reputation, Cult of Reputation, and International Conflict,” *Security Studies*, 14:1, 34–62.

The logic is familiar: based on a state's behavior in one dispute (e.g., giving into Hitler's demands at Munich), potential adversaries and allies make inferences about its likely behavior in future disputes (further appeasement); in anticipation of such reputational consequences, states alter their behavior (stand up to aggressors instead of appeasing them).⁹

Policy-makers worldwide, and more so among the great powers, have been overwhelmed by this assumption, even if it meant going to war to build or preserve a reputation. Thus, the quest for reputation drawn from this assumption, or the cult of reputation, can precipitate more wars.

Against a backdrop of such opposing ideas, we intend to answer the following questions: What do we mean by the term "reputation of states"? What is the reputation hypothesis, and do we have an alternative explanation for states' actions/responses? What is the interplay of reputation and coercion, and to what degree can the reputation of states successfully deter war? Alternatively, can building, maintaining, and restoring a reputation for resolve—the cult of reputation—lead to more wars?

B. DO REPUTATIONS MATTER?

That reputation is a valuable commodity in economics for both individual and firms is established. However, whether it is as valuable in international relations is disputed. But before we discuss the competing hypotheses on the strategic utility of reputation, it is important to know what we actually understand by the term.

1. Reputation

John Hutson defines a man's reputation as "what is said about him. It is the overall response of people to both actor and role performance; an assessment not only of the results achieved but also of the manner in which they were achieved."¹⁰ Similarly, one study in business literature defines reputation as "information about an agent that

⁹ Allan Dafoe and Devin Caughey, "Honor and War: Southern U.S. Presidents and the Effects of Concern for Reputation," in *Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association*, vol. 25. 2012.

¹⁰ John Hutson, "A Politician in Valloire," in *Gifts and Poison: The Politics of Reputation*, ed. F. G. Bailey (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 79.

develops over time from observed behavior about some characteristic of the agent.”¹¹ In a most parsimonious yet comprehensive definition, “a reputation is a judgment of someone’s character (or disposition) that is then used to predict or explain future behavior.”¹² For the purpose of this thesis, we will refer to reputation as an understanding of a state/leader’s past behavior that is used to predict future behavior.

Some scholars treat “reputation” and “credibility” distinctly:

[Reputation is] an umbrella term that refers to any belief about a trait or behavioral tendency of an actor, based on that agent’s past behavior.... [While credibility is] the extent to which an actor’s statement or implicit commitments are believed. Credibility often refers to the extent to which others believe an actor will carry out an explicit or implicit threat.¹³

However, since reputation is (supposedly) employed to either render credibility to coercive threats, or to resist such threats, we will, with a view to avoiding this semantic confusion, use reputation and credibility interchangeably.

2. Reputation Hypothesis

The Reputation Hypothesis posits that a country’s reputation has a significant effect on its credibility in international relations, and its past behavior is used to predict or explain its future behavior. The extrapolation principle supports this hypothesis: “The fundamental appeal and importance of this concept...is that reputations allow actors to predict others’ future moves during strategic interaction according to the ‘extrapolation principle.’”¹⁴

¹¹ Keith Chauvin and James Guthrie, “Labor Market Reputation and the Value of the Firm,” *Managerial and Decision Economics* 15, no. 6 (November–December 1994): 544.

¹² Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*, 6.

¹³ Allan Dafoe, Jonathan Renshon, and Paul Huth, “Reputation and status as motives for war,” *Political Science* 17, no. 1 (2014): 371.

¹⁴ Jason C. Sharman, “Rationalist and Constructivist Perspectives on Reputation,” *Political Studies* 55, no. 1 (2007), 20. C.C. von Weizsacker defines the notion of extrapolation principle as: “the phenomenon that people extrapolate the behaviour of others from past observations and this extrapolation is self-stabilizing, because it provides an incentive to live up to these expectations.... By observing others’ behaviour in the past, one can fairly confidently predict their behaviour in the future without incurring further costs.” C. C. von Weizsacker, *Barriers to Entry* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1980), 72.

There are two possible versions of the hypothesis that have been developed in relation to the role of reputation in international relations. At the broadest level, one version holds that a state's actions in one crisis have long-lasting and broad effects on its credibility far into the future, including in crises under any set of situations that occur anywhere around the world. This argument overwhelmingly focuses on a state's reputation for resolve, based on its past behavior in meeting challenges in international disputes and crises, as well as honoring its commitments. The perception of such resolve and commitment creates strong beliefs in adversaries and allies alike about the state's expected behavior in future crises. The reputation of a state so developed heavily influences an adversary's decisions on whether to challenge the state through coercion, or resist its coercive threats. Likewise, such reputations also influence potential allies' decisions in alliance formation.

Proponents of this version of the Reputation Hypothesis argue that if a state failed to punish an aggressor, the state's reputation would suffer, and, as a result, future deterrent threats would be less believable.¹⁵ States should act out of reputational motivations; past behavior has the power to demonstrate a state's resolve and resoluteness to carry out (or resist) a threat and honor its commitments; other states use this past behavior of a state to predict its future behavior.¹⁶ They fear that any display of irresoluteness in one crisis would seriously erode a state's credibility to act resolutely in future crises.

The second approach is the narrower version of the Reputation Hypothesis. It argues that adversaries and allies are likely to draw reputational inferences about resolve from the past behavior of a state only under certain conditions constrained by the time-period and similarity of the crisis in which the reputation was earned. The insight afforded by this model is the expectation that decision makers will use only certain types of information when drawing inferences about reputations, and an adversary or ally updates and revises its beliefs when the unanticipated behavior of a state cannot be explained by case-specific variables. Table 1 best explains the two versions.

¹⁵ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 35–43.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

Table 1. Versions of Reputation Hypothesis.¹⁷

Condition	Narrower Version of Reputation Hypothesis	Broader Version of Reputation Hypothesis
Geography	Actions in one part of the world affect credibility in <u>that part of the world</u>	Actions in one part of the world affect credibility <u>everywhere</u>
Timings	Actions in one crisis affect credibility <u>for a short period of time</u>	Action in one crisis affect credibility <u>long into the future</u>
Similarity of Issues	Actions in one crisis affect credibility in future crises <u>over similar issues</u>	Action in one crisis affect credibility in future crises <u>over all issues</u>
Similarity of Stakes	Actions in one crisis affect credibility in future crises involving <u>similar stakes</u>	Actions in one crisis affect credibility in future crises involving <u>any level of stakes</u>
Identity of Countries	Actions in one crisis affect credibility in future crises involving the <u>same two countries</u>	Actions in one crisis affect credibility in future crises involving <u>any other countries</u>
Same Leaders #1	Actions in one crisis affect credibility in future crises <u>until one's own leaders change</u>	Actions in one crisis affect credibility in future crises <u>even after one's own leaders change</u>
Same Leaders #2	Actions in one crisis affect credibility in future crises <u>until the leaders of one's new adversary change</u>	Actions in one crisis affect credibility in future crises <u>even after the leaders of one's new adversary change</u>
Volatility of Reputation	Actions in one crisis affect credibility if they create a pattern of repeated behavior (e.g., repeatedly backing down or repeatedly keeping commitments)	Single instances of backing down or keeping commitments substantially affect credibility in future crises

A state's resolve to go to war is private or incomplete information, and states in crises typically resort to signaling and posturing to demonstrate their resolve. However, "signals...are [intended] mainly to influence receiver's perception of the sender.... They do not contain inherent credibility."¹⁸ Hence, besides the observables like the country's

¹⁷ Daryl G. Press, "Power, Reputation, and Assessments of Credibility During the Cuban Missile Crisis," in *Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association*, San Francisco, CA, August 2001, 9.

¹⁸ Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 18, 20–21.

strength, its ability to carry out the threat, and its ability to defend against the other's response, observers fall back on the actor's reputation based on past behavior as

a state's action in one crisis 'commits' it to similar behavior in another crisis, and, in this way, states can show their resolve and overcome the informational problems in crisis bargaining.¹⁹

In addition, states can cultivate a reputation for lowering the costs they are ready to pay in pursuit of their interests more than they actually are.²⁰ States thus fight back against certain challenges of a peripheral nature to prevent additional depredations in the future.²¹ Some scholars, however, argue that a state's behavior towards other states is shaped by other factors, and that reputations do not influence such a behavior in any meaningful way.

3. The Power/Interest Hypothesis

The Power/Interests Hypothesis—in rejecting the Reputation Hypothesis—posits that decision makers assess the credibility of their adversaries' threats by evaluating the current balance of power—specific configuration of military capabilities, interests at stake, and political constraints they face—without reference to the adversary's history for keeping or breaking commitments.

The Cuban Missile Crisis validates this hypothesis. Three main arguments presented to support this claim are as following.²² Bluffing and backing down by the Soviets during 1958 to 1962 did not erode their credibility. To the contrary, U.S. decision makers were remarkably unified in the assessment of Soviet credibility, stemming essentially from the nuclear balance of power, throughout the crisis. While U.S. decision

¹⁹ Joe Clare and Vesna Danilovic. "Reputation for Resolve, Interests, and Conflict," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 29, no. 1 (2012), 5.

²⁰ James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Expansion of War," *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (Summer 1995), 400.

²¹ Todd S. Sechser, "Coercive Threats and Reputation-Building in International Crises," *Manuscript, University of Virginia* (2013), 1.

²² Press, "Power, Reputation, and Assessments of Credibility During the Cuban Missile Crisis." Shiping Tang too echoes the same findings: "a state rarely underestimates its adversary's reputation even if the adversary has backed down in previous standoffs." (Tang, "Reputation, Cult of Reputation, and International Conflict," 42.)

makers were focused on Berlin and obsessed with U.S. credibility and reputation because of the outcome of this crisis, they never discussed the pattern of Soviet withdrawals during the Berlin Crises as an indicator of Soviet credibility. What they discussed, however, was the relative power in the Caribbean and Western Europe, and the Soviet nuclear capability. The Reputation Hypothesis would predict that the Soviet should buckle in response to a blockade or direct U.S. attack on Cuba, and the U.S. needed not concede much to the Soviets. Instead, the U.S. conceded to both of demands of Khrushchev to pledge not to invade Cuba in the future, and for a removal of Jupiter missiles from Turkey.

While the role of power and interests at stake in assessing the credibility of states is hard to dismiss, the claim that past history of keeping or breaking commitments does not altogether inform an actor's future behavior appears specious; hence, the attempt by Sechser to adapt the hypotheses.

4. Common Ground—Reputation-Interest Model

This model is an attempt to adapt the Reputation and Interest hypotheses. The assumption is that

two observable factors—a state's past reputation and its interests at stake in the current crisis—shape an adversary's *ex ante* beliefs about its resolve and, as a result, influence the magnitude of reputational costs a state would pay for backing down.²³

This leads to the hypothesis that with an increase in the interests at stake, states with reputations for irresoluteness are more likely to issue threats; with each increase in their interests at stake, threats by both states with resoluteness and irresoluteness are less likely to be resisted; and with an increase in the interests at stake, states with a reputation for irresoluteness are more likely to send costlier signals when issuing threats.²⁴

²³ Clare and Danilovic. "Reputation for Resolve, Interests, and Conflict," 9.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 14–15.

5. Do Reputations Form? Reputation and Psychology

Since states invest in reputation to deter future challenges, and “reputation building often takes the form of a costly behavior,”²⁵ it is important to understand how reputations are formed, and whether these really are formed. It is also important, as reputations can matter only if these can be built, altered, and “sold.”

Reputation is essentially a second-order belief—one in which a group of observers hold some belief; it can thus be categorized “as a psychological phenomenon because it is rooted in the murky realm of cognitive processes.”²⁶ Thus, it is logical to fall on psychology to understand reputation formation.

Jonathan Mercer’s seminal *Reputation and International Relations*, despite its inherent flaws and some contradictions, is currently the most inclusive work on the formation of reputation. He argues that actions attributed to one’s disposition or nature tend to recur unless a compelling situation demands otherwise, whereas situational attributions—actions necessitated or imposed by circumstances or situation—do not contribute towards reputation building since they “do not have cross-situation validity [these need to be judged for their contextual compatibility].... [Hence] only dispositional attributions can generate reputation.”²⁷ However, since “a dispositional attribution is necessary but not sufficient for a reputation to form,”²⁸ he reasons, “a reputation for resolve forms when two conditions are met: First, an observer must explain the target’s behavior as a function of its character (or disposition) [not situation]; second, the observer *must use this explanation to predict* or explain the target’s future behavior”²⁹ (emphasis added).

²⁵ Sechser, “Coercive Threats and Reputation-Building in International Crises,” 1.

²⁶ McMahon, “Credibility and world power: Exploring the Psychological Dimension in Postwar American Diplomacy,” *Diplomatic History* 15, no. 4 (1991), 457.

²⁷ Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*, 7. Edward John, while agreeing that situational attributions do not have cross-situation validity, however, dismisses situational attributions altogether, and opines that “the notion that situations can cause action is abstract and derivative, almost metaphoric in its implications.” (Edward E. Jones, “The Rocky Road from Acts to Dispositions,” *American Psychologist* 34, no. 2 (1979): 107–117.

²⁸ Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*, 6.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

Applying psychology, Mercer builds on these two propositions and advances his Desire Hypothesis, which posits that desirability or undesirability of behavior affects the interpretation of the same behavior. He postulates that, “desirable out-group behavior elicits situational explanations, and undesirable out-group behavior elicits dispositional explanations.”³⁰ Thus, adversaries can only get a reputation for resolve, since their standing firm, being undesirable, will elicit dispositional explanations while backing down and being desirable will elicit situational explanations and will be wished away. On the other hand, allies can only get a reputation for lacking resolve since their backing down or being undesirable will elicit dispositional explanations while standing firm and being desirable will elicit situational explanations. As a result, “...while adversaries can get reputations for having resolve, they rarely get reputations for lacking resolve; and while allies can get reputations for lacking resolve, they rarely get reputations for having resolve.”³¹ Accordingly, states are predisposed to always judge adversaries as resolute, while viewing allies with suspicion.

Such an approach toward formation of reputation has a fundamental limitation of its rigidity and a strict categorization of adversaries and allies (while making no allowance for the neutral actors).³² Nonetheless, the arguments presented are based on human nature—how actors assimilate information. Deep-seated perceptions and beliefs are difficult to alter; there is a general “tendency for people to assimilate new information to their preexisting beliefs, to see what they expect to be present. Ambiguous or even discrepant information is ignored, misperceived, or reinterpreted so that it does minimum damage to what the person already believes.”³³ Thus, from a psychological standpoint, the claim that reputations rarely form may not be entirely incorrect—at least among

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 10.

³² Dale C. Copeland, “Do Reputations Matter?,” *Security Studies* 7, no. 1 (1997): 33–71. Copeland proceeds to propose an alternative framework that allows for beginning with neutral belief. Herein an actor learns about the other sequentially by observing the other’s past behavior (tied to its regime type and leaders), and the its geopolitical position, including its relative power, its geographic proximity, and the polarity and military technology of the system, that leads, in turn, to an evaluation of the other’s character or disposition (its cost and risk-tolerance, its motives) as well as of the other’s situation, including opportunities and threats, causally shaping it into either adversary or ally.

³³ Jervis, “Deterrence and Perception,” 24.

adversaries. We already discussed in the previous section that bluffing and backing down during the Berlin Crises did not in any way impact Soviet reputation.

Whether reputations form, “all states worry about their reputation for resolve to some degree.”³⁴ The Prospect Theory may help explain the tendency.

C. PROSPECT THEORY AND REPUTATION

Originally developed in the field of economics as an alternative to the expected utility as a theory of decision under risk, Prospect Theory has emerged as a leading behavioral theory applied in international relations and political science to explain choices that other theories found hard to rationally explain. The theory is functional given the finding that “individual choices are as much a function of consistent heuristics and biases as they are the result of calculated costs and benefits.”³⁵

1. Prospect Theory

This theory posits that,

individuals evaluate outcomes with respect to deviations from a reference point rather than with respect to net asset levels, that their identification of this reference point is a critical variable, that they give more weight to losses than to comparable gains, and that they are generally risk-averse with respect to gains and risk-acceptant with respect to losses.³⁶

2. Reputation—A Prospect Theoretical Analysis

Purely from the definition, Prospect Theory would *prima facie* predict that states with reputations for strong resolve developed through their past actions should be risk-acceptant towards any attempted erosion of their credibility, as it pushes them into the losses frame. Conversely, states with weak reputations may tend to be risk-averse towards building a reputation for resolve, as that puts them into the gains frame. There is,

³⁴ Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*, 10.

³⁵ Jeffrey D. Berejikian, “A cognitive theory of deterrence,” *Journal of Peace Research* 39, no. 2 (2002): 166.

³⁶ Jack Levy, “An Introduction to Prospect Theory,” *Political Psychology*, Vol. 13, no. 2, Special Issue (1992), 171.

however, more to this problem than meets the eye. Visiting the descriptive foundations of the theory can help unravel the complexities.

a. *The Reference Point*

“People think in terms of gains and losses, and encode choices in terms of deviations from a reference point.”³⁷ In terms of international order, it implies states may either feel satisfied with a strategic equation vis their credibility, or they may view the existing order as somehow impinging on their reputation and credibility, in which case, the continuation of such order is encoded as a loss, tempting them to endeavor to reverse or alter it.

b. *The Reflection Effect*

“People treat gains differently than losses: they tend to be risk-averse with respect to gains and risk-acceptant with respect to losses.”³⁸ This is one of the most interesting anchors of Prospect Theory. Since “reputation affects future utilities, and future losses hurt more than future gains gratify,”³⁹ and reputation for irresoluteness is perceived to invite, or at least encourage, future depredation by revisionist states, leaders and policy makers factor reputation for resoluteness as a central component into their security strategies. Thus, “although states generally are more willing to defend high-value items in crisis situations, low-value items might also be worth defending if doing so would bolster one’s reputation and deter future threats.”⁴⁰ This is quite natural, as “fear is usually a more potent motivator than the desire for expansion.”⁴¹ The reflection effect will thus motivate states to be risk-acceptant while investing in reputation in order to avoid future losses.

³⁷ Ibid., 174.

³⁸ Levy, “An introduction to prospect theory,” 174.

³⁹ Jack S. Levy, “Prospect theory and international relations: Theoretical applications and analytical problems,” *Political Psychology* (1992), 285.

⁴⁰ Sechser, “Coercive Threats and Reputation-Building in International Crises,” 5.

⁴¹ Jervis, “Political implications of loss aversion,” 194.

c. Loss Aversion

“Losses loom larger than gains.”⁴² Thus, Jimmy Conner’s exclamation that “I hate to lose more than I like to win”⁴³ about summarizes this phenomenon. Loss aversion generates some powerful effects. One such effect is the endowment effect: It is the “over-evaluation of current possessions that determines how people value what they have more than “comparable” things they do not have.”⁴⁴ This generally leads states to value what they are asked to concede more than what they are offered in return, causing *concession aversion*. The removal of Jupiter missiles from Turkey appeared to the U.S. leaders to count more significantly than the negotiated exchange for the removal of Russian missiles from Cuba; hence, the administration demurred at making the former public. States would thus invest in a reputation for resolve as a powerful tool, essentially to minimize the prospects of concessions in any future bargaining. Another interesting prediction of the Prospect Theory is it “leads us to expect people to persevere in losing ventures much longer than standard rationality would lead one to expect.”⁴⁵ Thus, “sunk costs...loom large in the secret deliberations.”⁴⁶ This effect powers the tendency among states that once back down to be much more firm the next time around, even if the interests involved are trivial. It also motivates actors, in order to recoup or regain a recent loss, to invest against the possibility of losing again, or to reinforce failure. Progressive escalation and expansion of operations in Vietnam and Afghanistan by the USSR bear testimony to this effect.

Another compelling product of loss aversion is the domino effect, or the chain reaction. It is the belief of decision makers that small losses, in terms of reputation and credibility, multiply via the domino effect, while gains are not expected to have such consequences.⁴⁷ Thus,

⁴² Levy, “An introduction to prospect theory,” 175.

⁴³ Quoted in Jack Levy, “An introduction to prospect theory,” *Political Psychology*, Vol. 13, No. 2, Special Issue (1992), 175.

⁴⁴ Levy, “An Introduction to Prospect Theory,” 175.

⁴⁵ Jervis, “Political Implications of Loss Aversion,” 190.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 188.

a rational statesman would not be willing to run the risk in order to secure a moderate gain, but would accept much higher risks to avoid a short-run loss of the same magnitude because it would lead to greater losses over a longer period of time.⁴⁸

West Berlin had no intrinsic value for the West. The U.S. response to the Soviet ultimatum was as such influenced by the fear of losing face and falling dominoes. Johnson succinctly expressed the fear that, “surrender anywhere threatens defeat every where.”⁴⁹ Eisenhower evinced the same fear in his letter to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, when he stated that, “there comes a point where constantly giving in only encourages further belligerence.”⁵⁰ The British response to the Argentinian adventure in the Falklands was driven by concern for falling dominoes, manifested in a senior British defense official’s comments, “If we cannot get the Argentinians out of the Falklands, how long do you think it will be before the Spaniards take a crack at Gibraltar?”⁵¹

d. The Framing

“Because of the encoding of outcomes in terms of a reference point and the differential treatment of gains and losses, identification of the reference point becomes critical.”⁵² The identification is not only critical, but also extremely complex. Usually status quo is viewed as the reference point. Conventionally, when a distinction between the defender and challenger of the status is clear, deterrence is effective as the challenger is seeking gains. However, “if the other [challenger] is driven by fear of losses, threats and coercion are likely to backfire, producing a spiral of greater hostility.”⁵³ The effect is the security dilemma. Under such circumstances both of the antagonists believe they are defending the status quo and tend to view themselves in the losses frame; the chances of

⁴⁸ Ibid., 189.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 211.

⁵⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957* (Washington, 1986), 2:294.

⁵¹ Quoted in Richard Ned Lebow, “Miscalculation in the South Atlantic: The Origin of the Falklands War,” *Psychology and Deterrence*, 117.

⁵² Levy, “An introduction to prospect theory,” 178.

⁵³ Ibid.

the deterrence failing thus become increasingly real: “Conflicts and wars are more likely when each side believes it is defending the status quo.”⁵⁴ Thus, when the contenders are satisfied with the status quo, “states seem to make greater efforts to preserve the status quo against a threatened loss than to improve their position by a comparable amount.”⁵⁵

The status quo itself is problematic in the abstract realm of reputation and credibility. Levy believes that the initial threat of military action in itself changes the status quo in terms of utilities because of the reputational and, perhaps, domestic political costs involved, putting a challenger into *a retreat from status quo* which induces more risk-seeking behavior, as opposed to *a retreat to status quo*.⁵⁶ On the other hand, the defender, as the endowment effect predicts, will not be able to come to terms with the new status quo—a *fait accompli*—hence, he is more likely to be risk-acceptant to revive the old status quo, challenging to alter the new one in the process. The issue becomes even more complex when a challenger state sets its aspiration level as the reference point. The Russian policy towards Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 can be explained in terms of Russia setting its aspiration level—restoring the glory of the Soviet—as the reference point.

While most of the effects discussed above tend to encourage states to develop strong deterrent reputations against future challenges that are likely to push them into a losses frame, the reference point is peculiarly troublesome with regards to compellent reputations. *Faits accomplis* and threats aimed at compellence may potentially set a new status quo, a new reference point for the challenger, and the prospect of retreat to the old status quo consequently may push the revisionist state into the losses frame. The equation becomes more acute with the endowment effect, wherein the defender takes a long time to reconcile to the new status quo and remains in the losses frame longer, while the revisionist state quickly accommodates the *fait accompli*, views it as the new reference point, and a backwards deviation potentially pushes him into the losses frame. In such

⁵⁴ Jervis, “Political Implications of Loss Aversion,” 192.

⁵⁵ Levy, “Prospect Theory and International Relations: Theoretical Applications and Analytical Problems,” 284.

⁵⁶ Jack S. Levy, “Quantitative studies of deterrence success and failure,” *Perspectives on deterrence* (1989), 126–27.

particular circumstances, both the defender and the challenger tend to fight for the status quo: the defender for the old status quo, while the challenger for the new one.

Thus, far we provided the introduction to the thesis and built a theoretical framework for the research questions. Next we shall discuss how the obsession of decision-makers with reputation has turned it into a cult that is frequently invoked to justify war.

II. THE CULT OF REPUTATION—A CAUSE OF CRISIS

A. THE CULT OF REPUTATION

While scholars debate how much reputations matter in international relations, and whether these matter at all, leaders and policy makers overwhelmingly subscribe to the broad version of reputation hypothesis. They believe that people “support conflict today in order to avoid conflict tomorrow,”⁵⁷ as “it is easier to stop a snowball before it begins to roll downhill than to intervene after it has started to gain momentum.”⁵⁸ Consequently, “contrary to the utilitarian theories of war for security (*homo politicus*), or war for profit (*homo economicus*), ... state leaders also seek to cultivate a certain image of themselves and their collectivity (*homo symbolicus*).”⁵⁹ The difference between reputation (what others think of you) and self-image (what you *think* others think of you) appears to be lost on decision makers. They assume others—adversaries and allies alike—to be thinking precisely what they themselves think, effectively confusing in the process reputation with self-image.

Another source of this cult of reputation is leaders’ misplaced belief that bargaining a reputation acquired through one crisis can translate into behavioral reputation for potential future crises. Leaders, thus, not only attempt to be resolute because their states’ vital interests are at stake; they often view reputation for resolve itself as a vital interest.⁶⁰ For reasons of domestic audience costs, the cult is more pervasive in democracies. American foreign policy makers believe that “...actors around the world stage, both friendly and unfriendly, invariably draw inferences about America’s strength, determination, and reliability—and thus its likely future behavior—from the broad range of its foreign policy decisions.”⁶¹ Thus, according to Kennedy, the U.S.

⁵⁷ Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*, 1.

⁵⁸ Copeland, “Do Reputations Matter?,” 43.

⁵⁹ Thomas Lindemann, *Causes of war: The struggle for recognition*, ECPR Press, 2011, 85.

⁶⁰ Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*, 15.

⁶¹ McMahon, “Credibility and world power: Exploring the psychological dimension in postwar American diplomacy,” 455.

actions during Vietnam War would be “examined on both sides of the Iron Curtain ... as a measure of the administration’s intentions and determination.”⁶² Such concerns have pushed great powers to war over areas of marginal national interest.

B. REPUTATIONAL CONCERNS—A CAUSE OF CRISIS

The cult of reputation is pervasive among policy-makers, especially those of great powers. A cursory study of the post-World War II major crises and conflict demonstrates how repeatedly leaders explained or justified initiation or continuation of conflicts in terms of building or preserving their credibility and reputation.

1. The Cold War Period

From post-World War II until 1991, international order revolved around two powers: the USSR and the U.S. Besides other features, the system rested on two competing ideologies; and ideological competition pushes issues of reputation and image to the fore.⁶³ While it is hard to measure the Soviet concern for reputation due to the closed nature of their decision-making process, the U.S. strategists construed the communist prodding actions as an attempt at building a risk-acceptant reputation. In 1950s, National Security Council Paper 68 warned that the Soviet Union wanted to “demonstrate that force, and the will to use it, are on the side of the Kremlin, [and] that those who lacked it are decadent and doomed.”⁶⁴ Secretary Dulles feared that, if left uncontested, this would have grim implications for the Western alliance: “if our conduct indicates a continuing disposition to fall back and allow doubtful areas to fall under Soviet Communist control, then many nations will feel confirmed in the impression ... that we do not expect to stand firm short of the North Atlantic area.”⁶⁵

⁶² Quoted in George C. Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States And Vietnam, 1950–1975*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York, 1986), 83.

⁶³ McMahon, “Credibility and world power: Exploring the psychological dimension in postwar American diplomacy,” 470.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁶⁵ Quoted in John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 103.

Concern for reputation during the Cold War was particularly conspicuous in Washington where the policy makers believed that “in an inherently dangerous and unstable world...peace and order depend to a greater extent on Washington’s ability to convince adversaries and allies alike of its firmness, determination, and dependability.”⁶⁶ The obvious consequences were that crises “occurred with greatest frequency in areas of demonstrably marginal value to the core U.S. economic and security interests; and...American officials have often evinced as much concern for generalized perceptions of power, reputation, and prestige as they have with the preservation of more tangible interests.”⁶⁷

West Berlin had no intrinsic value in and of itself, and the loss of Berlin would not have complicated Western Europe’s defense in any significant way. However, “American policy makers were faced with the problem of making both communist adversaries and Western allies believe that the U.S. would live up to its promises in defending disparate and far-flung allies, even to the point of initiating a nuclear conflagration.”⁶⁸ Berlin became a symbol of the willingness of the U.S. to come to the defense of the Western European allies.⁶⁹

The Cuban Missile Crisis is another instance where the world was brought to the brink of nuclear holocaust out of concerns for “optics.” President Kennedy later admitted that Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba would not have significantly altered the nuclear balance between the United States and the Soviet Union; however, he added, “it would have appeared to, and appearances contribute to reality.”⁷⁰

⁶⁶ McMahon, “Credibility and world power: Exploring the psychological dimension in postwar American diplomacy,” 455.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 458.

⁶⁸ Jason C. Sharman, “Rationalist and constructivist perspectives on reputation,” *Political Studies* 55, no. 1 (2007), 22.

⁶⁹ Copeland, “Do reputations matter?,” 41.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 213.

The U.S. was physically drawn into the Korean War in 1950, apparently out of reputational concerns.⁷¹ “The decision to intervene...was the product not of a reassessment of the Korean peninsula’s intrinsic importance to the U.S., but of its symbolic relevance, especially in view of the lessons friends and foes alike might draw from Washington’s response to what U.S. diplomats, reflexively interpreted as a test of American resolve.”⁷² A State Department’s intelligence estimate underlining that Soviet success in Korea “will cause significant damage to U.S. prestige in Western Europe”⁷³ supported this assessment.

Thucydides had famously pronounced that nations go to war out of “fear, honor, or interest.”⁷⁴ Honor, or “the desire for prestige, still persists in a modified form in that there are still superpowers that are concerned with a reputation of firmness.”⁷⁵ Vietnam represents this concern in the starkest form: “American leaders explained, justified, and defended the U.S. commitment to South Vietnam so frequently in terms of the need to prove U.S. credibility that their statements resemble ritualistic incantations.”⁷⁶ Successive presidents raised the stakes in Vietnam as demonstration of their resolve, which “... intended to deter Soviet aggression in Western Europe.”⁷⁷ The rationale presented to Secretary of Defense McNamara for committing troops to Vietnam in 1965 is instructive:

- 70 percent—To avoid a humiliating U.S. defeat (to our reputation as guarantor).
- 20 percent—To keep SVN [South Vietnam] (and adjacent) territory from Chinese hands.

⁷¹ William Whitney Stueck, *The road to confrontation: American policy toward China and Korea, 1947–1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 7–8, 75, 174, 186, 231.

⁷² McMahon, “Credibility and world power: Exploring the psychological dimension in postwar American diplomacy,” 459.

⁷³ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950* (Washington, 1976), 7:154.

⁷⁴ Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, New York: E. P. Dutton, Book 1, Chapter 76, Section 2.

⁷⁵ Lindemann, *Causes of war*, 3–4.

⁷⁶ McMahon, “Credibility and world power: Exploring the psychological dimension in postwar American diplomacy,” 466.

⁷⁷ Lindemann, *Causes of war*, 75.

- 10 percent—To permit the people of SVN to enjoy a better, freer way of life.⁷⁸

Even as the mounting casualties and increased domestic pressure rendered continued U.S. engagement in the conflict prohibitively costly, decision makers were haunted by the potential reputational repercussions of a sudden disengagement. Kissinger thus voiced his woes at the prospects of any abrupt withdrawal from Vietnam: “Scores of countries and millions of people relied for their security on our willingness to stand by allies.... No serious policymaker could allow himself to succumb to the fashionable debunking of ‘prestige,’ ‘or ‘honor,’ or ‘credibility.’”⁷⁹

Later, President Reagan invoked the same credibility logic in 1983 for intervention in Grenada: “if we cannot defend ourselves [in Central America], then we cannot expect to prevail elsewhere.... Our credibility will collapse and our alliances will crumble.”⁸⁰

2. The Post-Cold War Period

With the collapse of the Soviet Union on December 26, 1991, the U.S. emerged as the unchallenged superpower. Such a status carries its associated demands—the principal one being ensuring at least some semblance of world stability. Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990 was thus a test of the U.S. resolve to establish itself as a world stabilizer. Former U.S. President Richard Nixon thus stressed, “if we fail to roll back [Saddam’s] aggression—peacefully if possible, by force if necessary—no potential aggressor in the future will be deterred by warnings from the U.S. or by U.N. resolutions.”⁸¹ At the time of the invasion, President George H. W. Bush declared that dislodging Saddam from Kuwait would reinforce the U.S.’s credibility: “when we prevail, there will be a renewed credibility for the United States.”⁸²

⁷⁸ Quoted in R. Axelrod, *Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 154.

⁷⁹ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston, 1979), 228.

⁸⁰ *New York Times*, April 28, 1983.

⁸¹ Quoted in William Safire column, *New York Times*, December 14, 1990.

⁸² *New York Times*, February 10, 1991.

Reputational concerns were in large part instrumental in the Second Gulf War. The U.S. government's official policy of regime change in Iraq was sanctified in the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998. By the end of December 2002, the U.S. had deployed some 20,000 troops on the Iraqi border, and even if the regime change was preferred through coercion, when President Bush asked his National Security Adviser, Condoleezza Rice, whether it was necessary to engage in war, "she insisted on the fact that the United States was engaged in coercive diplomacy and the president should carry out his threat to remain credible."⁸³ It was not possible to recall the troops without losing reputation. Reputational concerns again gripped U.S. policy makers even after the overthrow of the Saddam regime. Without achieving the objective of a stable democracy in the country, it was feared, a quick exit from Iraq would be a major blow to U.S. credibility and reputation, with serious consequences for its war on terror. President Bush repeatedly noted that, "extremists of all strains would be emboldened by the knowledge that they forced America to retreat."⁸⁴ Brent Scowcroft, the former National Security Advisor of President George H.W. Bush, saw a premature U.S. withdrawal from Iraq as creating "the perception, worldwide...that the American colossus had stumbled, was losing its resolve, and could no longer be considered a reliable ally or friend—or the guarantor of peace and stability in this critical region."⁸⁵

Great power status generates innate hubristic sensitivities, which potentially engender a resort to use force: "far from being an international relations epiphenomenon, non-recognition, as defined by attacks (real or imaginary) on an actor's self-image, can have very real effects on the fuelling and legitimizing of physical violence."⁸⁶ The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the twin towers and Pentagon were the first attacks on the U.S. homeland after Pearl Harbor. The psychological effects on the

⁸³ Lindemann, *Causes of war*, 109.

⁸⁴ President Bush Addresses the 89th Annual National Convention of the American Legion, August 28, 2007, Reno, Nevada, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/08/20070828-2.html>

⁸⁵ Brent Scowcroft, "Getting the Middle East Back on Our Side," *New York Times*, January 4, 2007. Hakan Tunç separately argued that "For those who oppose a rapid U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, including members of the Bush administration, however, among the most feared consequences is damage to America's reputation." (Hakan Tunç, "Reputation and U.S. withdrawal from Iraq," *Orbis* 52, no. 4 (2008), 1-2.)

⁸⁶ Lindemann, *Causes of war*, 3.

American public and leadership were enormous, and the response was both quick and intense. According to Lindemann, “The quest for recognition can be the determinant factor in armed confrontation, above all when ‘narcissistic wounds’ [injury to one’s dignity, or self-image] (such as the destruction of the World Trade Centre on September 11) are associated with *hubristic* self-images (inflated self-description).”⁸⁷ The U.S. spurned the Taliban’s offer of surrendering Osama bin Laden to a third country if the U.S. shared evidence of his involvement in the attacks.⁸⁸ On October 14, President Bush rejected another Taliban offer to give bin Laden to a neutral third country by adding, “[T]here is no negotiation, period.”⁸⁹ This stern position was the outcome of, in addition the loss of precious lives, the narcissist injuries the sole superpower had suffered. Symbolic motivations were in large part at play in the outbreak of war and did not permit diplomacy to run its course, and Just War Theorists believe the *jus ad bellum* criterion of last resort was not met in case of Afghanistan.⁹⁰

Using these theories, in the next chapter we will take a single a case study to explain Russian policies in the near abroad, with special reference to Georgia, employed as a means by which Russia could regain the reputation it lost with the collapse of the USSR. Specifically our examination will address whether Russia deliberately initiated war against Georgia as a costly signal to Ukraine and the West, and if that action was “closely connected to subsequent dispute initiation and that the effects of reputation generalize beyond the immediate circumstances of the past dispute.”⁹¹ We will draw some conclusions whether the violence in this case could have been curtailed were the factor of reputation taken out of the strategic calculus.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸⁸ On September 21, 2001, the Taliban ambassador to Pakistan, Abdul Salam Zaef, said, “Our position on this is that if America has proof, we are ready for the trial of Osama bin Laden in light of the evidence.” Helen Kennedy, Taliban balks, won’t hand over bin Laden: Demands proof he was involved. *New York Daily News*, September 22, 2001.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Elisabeth Bumiller, . 2001. President rejects offer by Taliban for negotiations: Demands surrender of bin Laden—U.S. bombs fall in Kabul. *New York Times*, October 15, 2001.

⁹⁰ Neta C. Crawford, “Just war theory and the U.S. counterterror war,” *Perspective on Politics* 1, no. 01 (2003), 15.

⁹¹ Alex Weisiger and Keren Yarhi-Milo. “Revisiting Reputation: How Past Actions Matter in International Politics,” *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 1 (2011): 101–113.

As a single case study, by no means, does this thesis prove or disprove any theory. Instead, the case study is offered as a single in-depth example of the phenomenon discussed.

III. THE RUSSO-GEORGIAN WAR, AUGUST 2008

A. INTRODUCTION

But, there is also the more serious kind of “face,” the kind that in modern jargon is known as a country’s “image,” consisting of other countries’ beliefs (their leaders’ beliefs) about how the country can be expected to behave. It relates not to a country’s “worth” or “status” or even “honor,” but to its reputation for action

–Thomas C. Schelling

The purpose of this study is to explore, through the conceptual lenses of the Prospect Theory, the first action, taken by Russia in its quest to restore its lost reputation on the international arena. Besides power and security, there are other factors driving a state-actor to certain behaviors and certain actions. For Russia, these other factors are namely its prestige and its reputation. As discussed earlier, reputation is defined as someone’s identity (words and actions), seen by the others, and reflected through their opinions, attitudes, behaviors, and actions toward the very same person. Those others include allies, enemies, and neutrals – three different categories. Each one of these categories - ally enemy or neutral - may develop actions toward an individual based on an assessment of his reputation. At the same time, the individual estimates his reputation by attempting to see himself through the eyes of the three different categories previously mentioned. For Russia, reputation rests upon what Moscow perceives of its ties with the rest of the world, specifically the West and the United States.

We argue the war against Georgia was the indispensable condition by which Russia challenged the status quo of western dominance, regardless the potential risk. If Russia retreated once again, it could likely reach a point of no return on the geopolitical stage; therefore, although Russia was aware of the U.S. and Western support for Georgia, and Russia’s risk acceptance was very high, as determined by 17-year losing period on the global stage. At the same time, the West was not willing to go to war against a desperate and wounded, but nuclear armed Russia. The fact that Russia did not retreat as usual broke the expectations of the West.

We will offer a retrospective analysis of the events that caused Russia's loss of prestige; moreover, we will focus on the geopolitical factors and conditions that forced Russia to react militarily against Georgia.

Jeremy Kotkin, a U.S. Army strategist, argues, "yet without understanding Russian psyche and perceptions, the stream of history both recent and further afield, and finally, how the system of geopolitics is never linear and unitary, we will automatically be drawn into handling the situation poorly."⁹² As Kotkin further argues, empathy is "the experience of understanding another person's condition from their perspective."⁹³ Therefore, with empathy, we will explore the events through the lenses of Russia's policymakers, Russian mentality, and psychology.

With the end of the Cold War in 1989, followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the grand chessboard of nations underwent a total transfiguration. Instead of two major geopolitical players, there remained only one. Many were convinced this was the end of the Soviet versus Western ideological, political, and military rivalry worldwide.

Former General Secretary of the Soviet Union Mikhail S. Gorbachev later would say, "in the West, the breakup of the Soviet Union was viewed as a total victory . . . Western leaders were convinced that they were at the helm of the right system and of a well-functioning, almost perfect economic model. Scholars opined that history had ended."⁹⁴

It was the American political scientist, Francis Fukuyama, who proclaimed the "end of history" in the "realm of ideas," implying the better political and social system, had proven victorious after the end of the Cold War. According to Fukuyama, the "end of history" was an end of sociocultural evolution, whereupon Western liberal democracy became the paramount achievement and the final form of development of human government; it was seen by him as the system that would "govern the material world in

⁹² Jeremy Kotkin, "Crimea: Russia is harvesting the seeds sown in the 1990s," *Medium*, March 3, 2014.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Mikhail Gorbachev, "Time for a Global Perestroika," *The Washington Post*, June 7, 2009.

the long run.”⁹⁵ What is interesting, and often neglected, is the fact that Fukuyama wrote his essay, *The End of History* in 1989, two full years before the collapse of the Soviet Union. His book, *The End of History and the Last Man*, was published in 1992. This led many to perceive the “the end of history” as a victory over the Soviet Union because of the end of the Cold War.

A few years later, Samuel Huntington opposed the end-of-history concept presented by his student Fukuyama. In his article, “The Clash of Civilizations,” developed in 1993, the author argued that nation-states would remain the major actors on the international arena; however, the conflicts would be between nations which belong to different civilizations. “The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.”⁹⁶ Civilization is a cultural entity. The ideological division would be replaced with cultural one. The main parties in the post-Cold War conflicts would be Western Christianity or Western Civilization on one side, and Orthodox Christianity and Islam, on the other.⁹⁷ Huntington proved his hypothesis through the religious/ethnic and culturally-based armed conflicts which were to happen in former Yugoslavia, and in the post-Soviet space.

Today, Fukuyama’s view is rejected; he failed to recognize the U.S. realpolitik, power politics as doctrine in international relations, which became more unambiguous, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union. During the last three decades of the Cold War, both superpowers deterred each other because of the retaliatory nuclear strike capabilities they possessed. With the economic and military decline of Russia, however, the United States stopped taking into consideration Russia’s position on major international matters, such as the NATO proliferation and the war against Serbia, followed by U.S. recognition of Kosovo’s independence, the war waged against Iraq without U.N Security Council approval, the U.S. unilateral withdrawal from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, “which Moscow regarded as the linchpin of its nuclear

⁹⁵ Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest* (Summer 1989).

⁹⁶ Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?,” *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

security,”⁹⁸ as well as the U.S. overt involvement in the “color revolutions” in the former Soviet republics of Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan,⁹⁹ followed by the support for Georgia and Ukraine to join NATO. All of these, as the last U.S. Ambassador in the Soviet Union, Jack F. Matlock Jr., said, constituted a “diplomatic equivalent of swift kicks to the groin.”¹⁰⁰ All these steps mentioned above created the preconditions for the United States-Russia relations to reach the lowest point since the 1962 Cuba Missile Crisis during the Ukrainian crisis several years later.

In his memoirs, former United States Secretary of Defense Robert Gates would later admit that

[D]uring the Cold War, to avoid military conflict between us, we had to take Soviet interests into account, maneuvering carefully wherever those interests were affected. When Russia was weak in the 1990s and beyond, we did not take Russian interests seriously. We did a poor job of seeing the world from their point of view, and of managing the relationship for the long term.¹⁰¹

During the Cold War, both the United States and the Soviet Union supported authoritarian regimes, regardless of the violations of human rights committed by those regimes. This support reflects the concept of the realpolitik: when material considerations take priority over ideological and ethical premises. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the U.S. continued to exploit the same modus operandi worldwide, led by its national interest, and definitely not by its ideals. As a result, “American military and diplomatic policies have convinced a large part of Russia’s political class (and intelligentsia) that Washington’s intentions are aggressive, aggrandizing, and deceitful.”¹⁰² The U.S. policy created in Russia—as a state actor and as a society—the perception of humiliation which Russia and its people suffered: the Russians could not

⁹⁸ Stephen F. Cohen, “America’s Failed (Bi-Partisan) Russia Policy,” *The World Post*, February 28, 2012.

⁹⁹ Jack F. Matlock Jr., “Who is the bully? The U.S. has treated Russia like a loser since the end of the Cold War,” *The Washington Post*, March 14, 2014.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Robert Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (Alfred A. Knopf; January 14, 2014), 158

¹⁰² Cohen, “America’s Failed (Bi-Partisan) Russia Policy.”

tolerate any humiliation once they felt strong enough to oppose it. The 2008 Russia–Georgia war was their first opposition to the status quo.

The first illustration of disrespecting Russia was the broken promise given by the U.S. to the U.S.S.R. that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) would not expand eastward. How did that broken promise look from the Russian perspective? We answer this question by posing three rhetorical questions: Why did NATO expand? If the Alliance was not against Russia, why was Moscow not invited to join NATO? If it was not against Russia, then, why did the U.S. refuse to work with Russia toward creating a mutual Antiballistic missile defense system? These three basic questions became the Apple of Discord between the Russian Federation on one side, and the United States of America and its allies on the other.^{103 104}

The promise was broken when Russia was seen as weak and incapable of resisting and reacting. Following almost a decade of continuous decline of its predominantly economic and military power, Russia stepped down from the international stage and stopped playing a major role. Consequently, Russia’s reputation and credibility diminished and even disappeared before the Western powers, and especially, the United States.

There were multiple, connected, and often complex reasons forcing Russia to withdraw from the stage: beginning with the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a period between 1991–2000 when Russia’s disintegration continued and its existence as a state was questioned. Then, at the very end of 1999, Russian President Boris N. Yeltsin announced that he would transfer his authority to Vladimir V. Putin. On May 7, 2000, elections for President were held in Russia. The newly elected President became Vladimir Putin, who remained in the office until May 7, 2008, or exactly three months before the Russia–Georgia war.

¹⁰³ Cohen, “America’s Failed (Bi-Partisan) Russia Policy.”

¹⁰⁴ President of Russia, “Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy,” February 10, 2007.

Assuming power, Putin initiated large-scale measures to stop the internal disintegration process and to further stabilize the country, especially in North Caucasus where after decisive actions, Chechnya was reintegrated. The 2000–2008 rapid growth of both the economy and military power led internally to increased trust and hope among the Russians toward Moscow. Once the nation stabilized, the Kremlin focused on regaining Russia’s global status as a major power. Such status would be first claimed in 2007, during the Munich Security Conference, where President Putin was invited to give a speech. Since that speech is relevant, it will be analyzed later on. In his speech, Putin expressed Russia’s dissatisfaction with the world order, established after the end of the Cold War. The speech had an impact “like an ice-cold shower”¹⁰⁵ on the West. Putin sent strong and clear signal to the West. Whether these signals were interpreted in the way, Russia expected, though, is debatable.

The 2008 Russo-Georgian War became an exchange of the lack of mutual understanding between Russia and the West. Georgia became the arena of the first clash between Russia and the United States, or the first proxy war after the end of the Cold War. The causes for this conflict go far beyond 2008 Russia–Georgia War: it was just the first episode of the new Russia-U.S. rivalry. The next episodes would be the Syrian and the Ukrainian crises. All those should be scrutinized as a sequence of related events in the Russian-U.S. context, rather than as isolated conflicts.

In 2008, the Kremlin refused to retreat. Russia possessed both the capability or the power to hurt—“to destroy things that somebody treasures, to inflict pain and grief,”¹⁰⁶ and the will to use force—the necessary functions for achieving a successful coercion over Georgia. As discussed, “people think in terms of gains and losses, and encode choices in terms of deviations from a reference point.”¹⁰⁷ In this case, “the risk-acceptance with respect to losses”¹⁰⁸ was the engine for Russia’s determination. Being in losing frames and not acting decisively, Russia would continue to lose. Therefore, unlike

¹⁰⁵ Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, 155.

¹⁰⁶ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, xiii.

¹⁰⁷ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 174.

¹⁰⁸ Levy, “An introduction to prospect theory,” 174.

the previous years of multiple concessions, Moscow sent a clear response: will to act and risk-acceptance, which would later help Russia to build a reputation for strong resolve. Any reputation for irresoluteness would be perceived by the United States as a weakness, further encouraging the Western policy-makers to ignore and disrespect Russia.

Although the war was very short and limited in scale, its geopolitical resonance was enormous: it was the first time when Russia directly claimed and defended its national interests after 17 years of acquiescence to western policy making. With this stunning victory, gained within only five days by conducting for first time a hybrid war against the U.S.-backed and militarized regime in Georgia, Russia demonstrated its capabilities to defend its national interests. The war became a strong signal to the world that Russia was resolved to regain its lost image. The quest for reputation began.

Before delving into the Russia–Georgia War, we will examine what caused Russia, the successor of the one of the two superpowers, to lose her status. We will attempt to provide an answer to the following questions, What impacted Russian and Western attitudes after the collapse of the USSR? What episodes in the Russia-West relations contributed to the 2008 war?

B. THE END OF THE COLD WAR

I assured the President of the United States that I will never start a hot war against the USA. . . We are just at the very beginning of our road, long road to a long-lasting, peaceful period. [T]he USSR is prepared to cease considering the U.S. as an enemy and announce this openly.

Mikhail Gorbachev

We can realize a lasting peace and transform the East-West relationship to one of enduring co-operation. That is the future that Chairman Gorbachev and I began right here in Malta.

George Bush

The Malta Summit was held March 2 – 3, 1989, on the Soviet cruise ship Maxim Gorky, where the leaders of the two superpowers met and officially and symbolically declared the end of the Cold War. The 1989 Malta Summit was considered by many as the most important meeting between the United States and the Soviet Union since the

1945 Yalta Conference, when Joseph Stalin, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Winston Churchill decided the future fate of Europe after the end of the WWII.

Gorbachev would reminisce later that both superpowers had gone through a difficult road in order to make multiple agreements on the elimination of intermediate and short-range missiles, and the reduction of the strategic nuclear missiles by 50 percent. The agreements they reached made possible it to announce before the world the end of the Cold War.¹⁰⁹

On December 26, 1991, two years after the end of the Cold War, the Soviet Union ceased to exist. Several weeks later, in January 1992, Mikhail Gorbachev argued that, “the end of the Cold War is our common victory.”¹¹⁰ In 1992, in his State of the Union address, American President George H. W. Bush said, “by the grace of God, America won the Cold War.”¹¹¹ These words determined the policymaking of all the future U.S. presidents toward Russia. Instead of improving its relations with Russia right after 1991, the U.S. claimed victory over the Soviet Union, adopting “an aggressive triumphalist approach to Moscow. That administration tried to dictate Russia’s post-Communist development and to turn it into a U.S. client state. It moved the U.S.-led military alliance, NATO, into Russia’s former security zone,”¹¹² violating the strategic promises between both countries.

Ironically, the Cold War ended two years earlier; therefore, President Bush’s premise about winning the Cold War against Russia was false. Imagine two judokas who have planned a bout for world title. Suddenly, one of them has suffered a car accident, causing multiple fractures. In this case, will the other judoka be considered the legitimate world champion after never actually fighting with his opponent?

¹⁰⁹ Mikhail Gorbachev, “Is the World Really Safer Without the Soviet Union?” *The Nation*, December 21, 2011.

¹¹⁰ Jack F. Matlock Jr., “Who is the bully? The U.S. has treated Russia like a loser since the end of the Cold War,” *The Washington Post*, March 14, 2014.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Cohen, “America’s Failed (Bi-Partisan) Russia Policy.”

Mikhail Gorbachev would later state that, “contrary to what is sometimes asserted, the Soviet Union was not destroyed by any foreign power, but as a result of internal developments.”¹¹³ In fact, the Soviet Union was destroyed from the inside, regardless of the referendum in March 1991, where the vast majority of the people expressed their will to remain integrated within the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus made the decision to put an end to the Soviet Union. The U.S. strongly supported this decision, which “led to euphoria and a ‘winner’s complex’ amongst the American political elite.”¹¹⁴

Jack Matlock, the last American Ambassador in the Soviet Union, shared the position of Gorbachev: “the common assumption that the West forced the collapse of the Soviet Union and thus won the Cold War is wrong. The fact is that the Cold War ended by negotiation to the advantage of both sides.”¹¹⁵ He also argues that, “a failure to appreciate how the Cold War ended has had a profound impact on Russian and Western attitudes—and helps explain what we are seeing now.”¹¹⁶

The impact on the Russia-U.S. relations was enormous. Russia lost its trust toward the United States: according to polls conducted in 1991, 80 of the Russians had a positive attitude toward the U.S., while in 1999, almost the same percentage had a negative stance toward the United States.¹¹⁷ Since 1991, Russia has not been satisfied with the status quo; therefore, the 2008 Russo–Georgian War would become the first step made by Russia in opposing the world order imposed by the U.S. after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Regardless of the promises given to Moscow, the NATO expansion, the NATO bombing campaign against Serbia in 1999, and the invasion of Iraq in 2003, happened because of the U.S.’s “winner’s complex.” Russia became sensitive to “the force’s

¹¹³ Gorbachev, “Is the World Really Safer Without the Soviet Union?”

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Matlock Jr., “Who is the bully?”

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

dominance”¹¹⁸ of the U.S. foreign policy, especially when NATO reached Russia’s borders. In this regard, in his speech at the 2014 Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, President Putin claimed

The Cold War ended, but it did not end with the signing of a peace treaty with clear and transparent agreements on respecting existing rules or creating new rules and standards. This created the impression that the so-called “victors” in the Cold War had decided to pressure events and reshape the world to suit their own needs and interests.¹¹⁹

The following sections are an illustration of the Western perception of being the winner over opponents who never fought and were never directly defeated. The focus will be on those episodes of Russia–West relations that created the preconditions and the motives for the 2008 Russo-Georgian War.

C. BROKEN PROMISES OR HUMILIATING RUSSIA

The roots of the confrontation between the United States and Russia derived from one broken promise and statement. On February 8, 1990, Secretary of State James A. Baker had a meeting with Mikhail S. Gorbachev, the General Secretary of the Soviet Union, during which they discussed the fate of reunited Germany.

Secretary of State Baker said that if Germany were to remain part of NATO, “there would be no extension of NATO’s jurisdiction for forces of NATO one inch to the east.”¹²⁰

Gorbachev made clear that “Any extension of the zone of NATO is unacceptable.”

“I agree,”¹²¹ Baker answered.

The same promise was announced on May 17, 1990, when the seventh Secretary General of NATO, Manfred Hermann Wörner, gave a historical speech in the NATO

¹¹⁸ President of Russia, “Speech and the Following Discussion.”

¹¹⁹ President of Russia, Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, October 24, 2014.

¹²⁰ Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Harvard University Press 1997), 182.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 183.

Headquarter in Brussels. In that speech, the Secretary General stated, “the very fact that we are ready not to deploy NATO troops beyond the territory of the Federal Republic, gives the Soviet Union firm security guarantees . . . We do not look upon the Soviet Union as the enemy. We want that nation to become our partner in ensuring security.”¹²²

Nevertheless, all those assurances had the purpose of simply deceiving the Soviet Union and making it withdraw its troops from its former satellites in Central and Eastern Europe. As previously mentioned, the U.S. would proclaim a victory¹²³ over its enemy, which was otherwise called a “partner.” This would later be the main reason for Russia to lose trust in the West.

In 1997, Zbigniew Brzezinski argued in *The Grand Chessboard*: “[A] failure to widen NATO . . . could even reignite currently dormant or dying Russian geopolitical aspirations in Central Europe.”¹²⁴ Furthermore, it “could reawaken even more ambitious Russian desires.”¹²⁵ All this reveals the real perception of the West toward Russia—as an adversary. Later, these words directed the U.S. foreign policy concerning NATO’s eastward expansion with the clear purpose of preventing Russia’s future ambitions for building a counterbalance to U.S. supremacy. Eventually, despite the promise, NATO expanded eastward, and in 1999, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland joined the alliance.

Initially, Moscow truly believed that the U.S. would not use the window of opportunity to expand NATO eastward because of Russia’s political, economic, and social weakness. The Soviet deputy foreign minister in 1990, and later Russia’s Ambassador to United Kingdom, Anatoly Adamishin, stated in 1997, “when we were told during the German reunification process that NATO would not expand, we believed it.”¹²⁶ Also in 1997, Jack F. Matlock Jr. said, “when Gorbachev and others say that it is

¹²² Address by Secretary General, Manfred Wörner to the Bremer Tabaks Collegium. NATO, March 12, 2001.

¹²³ “By the grace of God, America won the Cold War.”

¹²⁴ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American primacy and its geostrategic imperatives* (Basic Books, 1997), 200.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 200.

¹²⁶ Michael R. Gordon, “The Anatomy of a Misunderstanding,” *New York Times*, May 25, 1997.

their understanding NATO expansion would not happen, there is a basis for it.”¹²⁷ Later, Matlock would argue,

We had no reason to expand the NATO military organization to the East until we had an agreement that would put Russia in a European defense structure.”¹²⁸ While enlarging, NATO was trying to convince Russia that the Alliance was not a threat for Moscow. At the same time, NATO refused to invite Russia into the security architecture of Europe, especially after several direct hints by President Putin. In this regard, Matlock said: “I think it is unfortunate because I think there should have been a greater Western effort, American and West European, to make sure we had brought Russia into a security structure and that we have done more to encourage an understanding between the West Europeans and Russians.”¹²⁹

The last Soviet leader, Gorbachev, expressed his disappointment in March 1999.

The issue is not whether Czechs, Hungarians, and Poles join NATO. The problem is more serious: the rejection of the strategy for a new, common European system agreed to by myself and all the Western leaders, when we ended the Cold War . . . I feel betrayed by the West. The opportunity we seized on behalf of peace has been lost. The whole idea of a new world order has been completely abandoned.¹³⁰

Despite the broken promise with the first eastward enlargement of NATO, President Putin still hoped to build relations with both Western Europe and the United States, based on mutual respect. Following the 9/11 attack, the Russian President was the first Head of State to call and speak to President Bush.¹³¹ “On September 11, Putin did not hesitate to call his new friend, George W. Bush, to communicate his full support for the United States and the American people,”¹³² recalls the former United States

¹²⁷ Gordon, “The Anatomy of a Misunderstanding.”

¹²⁸ The Expandables: How NATO ‘conquered’ Europe, *RT*. April 4, 2014.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Leon V. Sigal, *Hang Separately: Cooperative Security Between the United States and Russia, 1985–1994* (The Century Foundation Press, 2000), 81.

¹³¹ (After 11:15 a.m.) “September 11, 2001: Russian President Putin Speaks with President Bush.” *History Commons*.

¹³² Michael McFaul, U.S.-Russia relations after September 11, 2001. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, October 24, 2001.

Ambassador to Russia and a former Senior Associate in *Carnegie Endowment*, Michael McFaul.

“[W]e were the first country to support the American people back then, the first to react as friends and partners to the terrible tragedy of September 11,”¹³³ President Putin would later state. Russia’s support for the United States in its war against terrorism was announced on September 24, 2001 in a five-point plan, pledging that Moscow “would (1) share intelligence with their American counterparts; (2) open Russian airspace for flights providing humanitarian assistance; (3) cooperate with Russia’s Central Asian allies to provide similar kinds of airspace access to American flights; (4) participate in international search and rescue efforts; and (5) increase direct assistance—humanitarian as well as military assistance—to the Northern Alliance and the Rabbani government in Afghanistan.”¹³⁴ Later, Robert Gates would recall in his memoirs that he, as “an old cold warrior” was surprised by the decision of Russia allowing nonlethal military equipment to Afghanistan to transit her territory.¹³⁵ In addition, Putin sent a clear message to the U.S. that he did not consider Washington an enemy when he “voluntarily removed Russian bases from Cuba and Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam.”¹³⁶

During the Soviet war in Afghanistan (December 1979–February 1989), the Mujahedeen, or more precisely the Peshawar Seven insurgents, were trained and equipped by the U.S. and its allies.¹³⁷ On October 7, 2001, the United States launched Operation Enduring Freedom. Sergey Ivanov, being Russia’s Minister of Defense at that time, argues that literally several days later, on the Tajikistan–Afghanistan border, representatives of the Taliban authorized by Mullah Mohammed Omar made contact with the Russian border troops, inviting Moscow to join and fight the “American danger.” The answer from the Russian Troops had been to “back off,”¹³⁸ as Moscow was not looking

¹³³ President of Russia, Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, October 24, 2014.

¹³⁴ MacFaul, U.S.-Russia relations after September 11, 2001.

¹³⁵ Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, 216.

¹³⁶ Matlock Jr., “Who is the bully?”

¹³⁷ “Charlie Wilson: Congressman whose support for the mujahedeen helped force the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan,” *The Independent*, 13 February 2010.

¹³⁸ Paul Mitchell, „Putin, Russia and the West. Taking control,”*BBC*

for revenge. It was a window of opportunity¹³⁹ for the U.S. to build relations on mutual respect and cooperation with Russia, but instead, the United States kept treating Russia like a defeated enemy.

If we analyze each one of these points, we will find out that Russia's support for the U.S. in its war against terrorism in Afghanistan was significantly greater than that of the NATO members. After 9/11, Russia hoped to develop a strong partnership; moreover, Putin was convinced that Russia should align with the West. During his first visit to NATO Headquarter he asked George Robertson (tenth Secretary General of NATO) when NATO would invite Russia to become a member. Robertson answered Putin saying that Russia should apply for membership. Putin replied that Russia would not wait in a queue with other countries.

It became clear to Putin that the West would not consider Russia an ally or a country with equal status.¹⁴⁰ In 2012, being interviewed by German media, Putin would say, "It seems to me our partners do not want allies, they want vassals. They want to rule, but Russia does not work that way."¹⁴¹

Instead of building an alliance, or a strong partnership after 9/11, Washington's "triumphalist reaction to the end of the Soviet state produced a winner-take-all diplomatic approach that has been almost as aggressive."¹⁴² Therefore, it was not a surprise that the U.S. expressed its "gratitude" toward Russia's significant support and assistance to the U.S. fighting the Taliban by further accepting new member into NATO, and by canceling in 2002 the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM)—a cornerstone of Russia's nuclear security.¹⁴³ Russia considers the missile defense as a direct threat to its security, arguing that such a missile defense would decrease the success of a nuclear retaliatory strike if Russia is attacked. Russia perceives the missiles defense as an element of the entire offensive system intended to be used against it. Certainly, the White House preferred to

¹³⁹ McFaul, U.S.-Russia relations after September 11, 2001.

¹⁴⁰ Mitchell, „Putin, Russia and the West.”

¹⁴¹ Putin Says NATO Missile System Pointed At Russia. *Radio Free Europe*, February 3, 2012.

¹⁴² Cohen, "America's Failed (Bi-Partisan) Russia Policy.”

¹⁴³ Ibid.

view Russia's interests abroad as less legitimate than America's. As Zbigniew Brzezinski argued, "Russia is much too weak to be a partner."¹⁴⁴

NATO's expansion was accepted as a normal process, while Russia's attempt to provide itself with security around its borders was viewed as imperialist ambitions. In fact, since 1991, all the major concessions were made only unilaterally by Moscow. At the same time, Washington had been violating Russia's political sovereignty through so-called "democracy-promotion," which was simply an instrument for influencing the former Soviet populations in favor of the United States.¹⁴⁵

The attitude of the West towards Russia was encouraged by three major episodes of humiliation for Russia, which caused its loss of reputation: the First Chechen war (1994-1996), the falsified presidential elections in 1996, and the NATO operation against Yugoslavia in 1999.

The First Chechen war was seen as the beginning of the process of disintegration of Russia; moreover, it was mostly not a military loss, but a political loss, which came after huge pressure from the West. It was the first significant loss of reputation for Russia, both internationally and domestically. Russia blamed the U.S. for supporting the terrorists in Chechnya, and the accusations would be repeated personally by President Putin.

They [the United States] once sponsored Islamic extremist movements to fight the Soviet Union. Those groups got their battle experience in Afghanistan, and later gave birth to the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. The West if not supported, at least closed its eyes, and, I would say, gave information, and political and financial support to the international terrorists' invasion of Russia (we have not forgotten this), and to the Central Asian countries.¹⁴⁶

With the falsified reelection of Yeltsin, the economic and political situation of Russia further deteriorated: "the U.S.-backed oligarchs stripped Russia's industrial assets,

¹⁴⁴ Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, 118.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹⁴⁶ President of Russia, Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club.

with the effect that the corruption scheme cut national output nearly in half causing depression and starvation.”¹⁴⁷

NATO’s intervention against Serbia was the third and most significant strike against Russia’s reputation. In his memoirs, former U.S. Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, would admit that there had been an historical tie between both countries, largely ignored by the United States.¹⁴⁸ Serbia is an Orthodox country. Since 1453, when Constantinople was conquered, Russia assumed the role of the protector of Orthodox Christians; therefore, it felt humiliated by the invasion of an Orthodox country having a centuries-long relationship with Russia.

Certainly, the most tragic and degrading event for Russia was the disintegration of the Soviet Union, which was seen as a political, economic, and social catastrophe. In his 2005 address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, President Putin would say,

[W]e 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.¹⁴⁹

All the events mentioned above, along with the two waves of NATO’s expansion Eastward, were crucial in forming the foreign policy of President Putin and Russia. “He [Putin] is, above all, a Russian patriot who feels humiliated by the experience of the 1990s, which were in the most formative period of his career,” Henry Kissinger argued.¹⁵⁰

Russia was not given the opportunity to become part of the European family and put into practice the concept Gorbachev had for a new and peaceful Europe. Since

¹⁴⁷ Greg Palast, “The Globalizer Who Came In From the Cold Joe Stiglitz: Today’s Winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics,” October 10, 2001.

¹⁴⁸ Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, 157.

¹⁴⁹ President of Russia, “Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation,” April 25, 2005.

¹⁵⁰ Fareed Zakaria, “One-on-One with Henry Kissinger; Democratic Elections in China; Will Israel Attack Iran?” *CNN Transcripts*, March 11, 2012.

Russia's interests in its traditional sphere of influence (the so called near abroad) had been disrespected and ignored by the West, Russia perceived itself jeopardized by NATO.

1. Further Deterioration of Russia-United States Relations

Russia's resolve to intervene in Georgia was triggered by external factors and events. On March 29, 2004, as part of the fifth enlargement of NATO, seven more Eastern European countries—former Soviet allies—joined NATO: Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The first three (the Baltic States) were former Soviet republics. Russia considered it a backstab. Russia had to make another concession and to admit the fact that NATO had become its neighbor. However, with the accession of the Baltic States into NATO, Russia perceived itself ignored again; its national security interests and area of traditional dominance for centuries were disrespected.

The future catalyst for the Russia's determination regarding Georgia appeared in 2006, when the U.S. first announced that Georgia and Ukraine were seen as possible members of NATO. On November 28, 2006, in his Address to the participants of the Young Leaders Forum held in the Latvian capital Riga, the President of the United States George W. Bush, after expressing his support for Croatia, Macedonia, and Albania to join the Atlantic Alliance, added, "Georgia is seeking NATO membership as well. And as it continues on the path to reform, we will continue to support Georgia's desire to become a NATO ally."¹⁵¹ The statement made by President Bush sent a signal to Russia, and increased Russia's national security concerns. This statement further deteriorated Russia–United States relations.

Calling the quick acceptance of former Soviet satellites countries into NATO a "mistake,"¹⁵² Robert Gates admitted that the agreement of deploying 5,000 U.S. troops in

¹⁵¹ Address by the President of the United States George W. Bush to the participants of the Young Leaders Forum and of the Riga Conference. Riga NATO Summit 2006, November 28, 2014.

¹⁵² Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, 157.

Bulgaria and Romania additionally eroded the U.S.–Russian relations;¹⁵³ moreover, along with the 1972 ABM withdrawal, the attempts to bring Georgia and Ukraine into NATO, as well as the supported independence of Kosovo, “all had brought the bilateral relationship to the low point of Putin’s February 2007 tirade in Munich.”¹⁵⁴

2. Putin’s 2007 Speech at the Munich Security Conference

Since 1962, the Munich Security Conference (MSC) in Munich, Germany has been an annual event on international security policy. During the 2007 MSC, there were 270 political figures from 40 states. On behalf of the United States, there were the Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, the Deputy Secretary of the Treasury, Robert M. Kimmitt, Senator John McCain, and Senator Joseph Lieberman. In addition, former Secretary of Defense, William Cohen, also represented the U.S. at the conference.

Putin was the first Russian leader to participate at the conference. He delivered his speech on 10 February for only 15 minutes, but its international resonance was enormous. For first time Russia openly expressed its dissatisfaction with the status quo. A significant part of the speech was about U.S. supremacy, wherein Putin called the unipolar world “not only unacceptable but also impossible,” and accused it of causing more armed conflicts and casualties worldwide; moreover, he said, it “encourages a number of countries to acquire weapons of mass destruction.” Criticizing the Western “uncontained hyper use of force” as an instrument in international relations, Putin stated that, “first and foremost, the United States has overstepped its national borders in every way. This is visible in the economic, political, cultural, and educational policies it imposes on other nations.”¹⁵⁵

Putin stated that the anti-missile defense system in Europe could not make it more stable and secure, because it would provoke another arms race. He argued that the system was likely to be built against Russia, because neither North Korea nor Iran would be

¹⁵³ Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, 157.

¹⁵⁴ Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, 159.

¹⁵⁵ President of Russia, “Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy,” February 10, 2007.

likely to have long-range missiles capable of hitting Western Europe. Putin accused the West of building “new dividing lines and walls between us,” after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Putin said Russia was not against the will of any state to ensure its own security, but he posed the following question: Why had it been necessary for NATO to build military infrastructure right on the Russian border? Putin also criticized the exploitation of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe by a “group of countries” to “promote the foreign policy interests.”¹⁵⁶

President Putin expressed his discontentment with the West for frequently interfering with Russia’s internal affairs and teaching her democracy. “But for some reason, those who teach us do not want to learn themselves,” he said. In fact, Russian society, along with the growing wealth and welfare status, perceives such a “teaching” very offensive. In this regard, at the end of his speech, he stated that throughout the course of history, Russia “used the privilege to carry out an independent foreign policy. We are not going to change this tradition today.”¹⁵⁷

Because of the infamous 1991–1999 period in Russia, Moscow became very sensitive and suspicious toward Western activity in Russia. Putin did not miss the opportunity to make clear that, financed by foreign governments; NGOs were seen as, “an instrument that foreign states use to carry out their Russian policies.” He also stated that when elections were to be financed by foreign governments through NGOs, such financing would be considered an intervention in the Russia’s internal affairs: “Because, there is no democracy here, there is simply one state exerting influence on another.”¹⁵⁸ Certainly, the soft power policy that the U.S. implements in Russia is one of the major concerns of Russia today.

Since the fate of Serbia has been of greater concern for Russia, Putin also touched upon that topic, especially on the background of the NATO/EU plans to recognize the independence of Kosovo, arguing that not foreign countries, but Serbs and Kosovars

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

should decide their own destiny: “there is no need to play God and resolve all of these peoples’ problems.”¹⁵⁹ In 2008, the precedent that the West created would be used by Russia in recognizing the breakaway territories from Georgia.

In his memoirs, Robert Gates recalls that Putin “was clearly trying to drive a wedge between the Europeans and the United States with his anti-American remarks, but all the questions he was asked were hostile in tone and content. He had misread his audience.”¹⁶⁰ Putin did read his audience; however, the audience misread Putin. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov said he did not find Putin’s speech aggressive or confrontational, but “open, without hypocrisy and without the Cold War philosophy.... [O]ur relationships with the European Union and the United States and Germany are so mature that we can freely say what we truly think.”¹⁶¹

The speech was interpreted as the beginning of a new Cold War. Senator Joseph I. Lieberman labeled the speech as “confrontational,” and that “some of the rhetoric takes us back to the cold war.”¹⁶² Senator John McCain said, “Moscow must understand that it cannot enjoy a genuine partnership with the West so long as its actions, at home and abroad, conflict fundamentally with the core values of the Euro-Atlantic democracies.”¹⁶³ White House spokesman Gordon D. Johndroe stated, “We are surprised and disappointed with President Putin’s comments. His accusations are wrong.”¹⁶⁴ Others went further by posing the question, “So what are we to make of Putin’s intimidating broadsides in Munich?”¹⁶⁵ NATO Secretary General Jaap De Hoop Scheffer described Putin’s speech as disappointing and not helpful.¹⁶⁶

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, 155

¹⁶¹ Carl Schreck, “Putin Castigates U.S. Foreign Policy,” *The Moscow Time*. February 12, 2007.

¹⁶² Thom Shanker and Mark Landler, “Putin Says U.S. Is Undermining Global Stability,” *New York Times*, February 11, 2007.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Peter Brookes, “Putin’s Pique,” *The Heritage Foundation*, February 13, 2007.

¹⁶⁶ Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, “Speech by NATO Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer at the Munich Conference of Security Policy,” *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, February 9, 2007.

The reaction to Putin's speech is an illustration of the Western attitude toward Russia: "What is permissible for Jove is not permissible for an ox."¹⁶⁷ In other words, Russia does not have the right to feel threatened when NATO military bases, personnel, and missiles have been installed on its borders, despite all the promises. However, when Russia initiates a large modernization of her armed forces, it becomes a great concern for the West. When Russia moves weaponry and troops within its borders, Russia is blamed for being aggressive and for threatening Europe and NATO, even though NATO has expanded eastward, reaching Russia's border, and depriving it of the buffer it needs to feel secured. Missiles or fighter jets deployed by the U.S. in foreign countries such as Poland, Czech Republic, Rumania, or the Baltic states, are acceptable, but missiles or fighter jets in the Russian exclave Kaliningrad, or close to the border, although still in Russia, are not acceptable, and are seen as an aggressive step. "We cannot agree with such an approach. The ox may not be allowed something, but the bear will not even bother to ask permission,"¹⁶⁸ Putin would state in another speech delivered in 2014, which Washington somehow neglected, although the message to the U.S. and the West was even stronger.¹⁶⁹ "We are ready to respect the interests of our partners, but we expect the same respect for our interests,"¹⁷⁰ Putin would add.

As Andrei Tsygankov argued, "since the end of the Cold War, many within the U.S. establishment have grown accustomed to meeting little resistance to their grand designs, and keeping Russia weak remains essential for extracting from Moscow important concessions on energy resources and political mastery in Eurasia."¹⁷¹ When Russia expressed its disagreement with the status quo, and refused to be neglected, disrespected, and humiliated, it was criticized for being arrogant and aggressive. The western perception of ultimate and unchallenged superiority, however, obstructed the

¹⁶⁷ *Quod licet Iovi, non licet bovi* is a Latin phrase that indicated the existence of double standards.

¹⁶⁸ President of Russia, Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club.

¹⁶⁹ Patrick L. Smith, "New York Times doesn't want you to understand this Vladimir Putin speech," *Salon*, November 6, 2014.

¹⁷⁰ President of Russia, Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club.

¹⁷¹ Andrei P. Tsygankov, "Blaming Moscow: The Power of the Anti-Russia Lobby," *Global Dialogue*, Volume 11, Winter/Spring 2009.

Western politicians to realize that despite their will, multiple non-Western countries with enormous potential had emerged, and Russia was among them. A year-and-a-half later, Russia put into practice Putin's speech by defending its interests through military actions.

Despite the negative resonance the speech received, Robert Gates later admitted,

When I reported to the president my take on the Munich conference, I shared with him my belief that from 1993 onward, the West, and particularly the United States, had badly underestimated the magnitude of Russian humiliation in losing the Cold War and then in the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which amounted to the end of the centuries-old Russian Empire. The arrogance, after the collapse, of American government officials, academicians, businessmen, and politicians in telling the Russians how to conduct their domestic and international affairs (not to mention the internal psychological impact of their precipitous fall from superpower status) had led to deep and long-term resentment and bitterness.¹⁷²

Certainly, the U.S. arrogance toward Russia has a logical explanation. In his essay, "Why International Primacy Matters," published two years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Samuel P. Huntington argued that the U.S. should sustain its global primacy, and preserve its influence over the rest of the world "in shaping global affairs," because it "is central to the welfare and security of Americans and to the future of freedom, democracy, open economies, and international order in the world."¹⁷³ This principle of the U.S. foreign policy was perceived by Russia as aggressive and dangerous to its existence. In 2007, Russia already felt strong enough to publicly express its opinion and to defend it; therefore, Putin's speech was a quite natural reaction. State actors, just like people, when they become stronger/richer, do not tolerate any disrespect/ humiliation and their sensibility increases proportionally with their growing power or social/ international status; therefore, both Russia as a state and Russian society have anticipated an opportunity to demonstrate their determination to interrupt the 'tradition' of disrespect established in 1991.

¹⁷² Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, 157.

¹⁷³ Samuel P. Huntington. "Why International Primacy Matters," *International Security*, Vol. 17 No. 4 (Spring, 1993).

In 1997, Brzezinski stated that, “no Russian Ataturk is now in sight,”¹⁷⁴ having in mind a real leader, capable of modernizing and integrating his state into the European family. Soon after that, this leader emerged. Ten years later, he publically insisted Russia deserved respect, unlike Ataturk; however, he remained misunderstood. It seemed the West was not ready to have a strong and sovereign Russia capable of defending its national interests.

In an interview for *Der Spiegel*, one of Putin’s closest associates, Vladimir Yakunin, when asked what the West should do for its relations with Russia, answered,

It should not humiliate us. You can throw a bucket of cold water on Russians, and we can take it. But, one should not humiliate us! The political scientist Hans Morgenthau said that countries should not forget the national interests of other countries when defining their own. The current American government becomes irritated over every attempt on the part of a country to go its own way—especially when it is as big and wealthy as Russia. That’s political arrogance.¹⁷⁵

The speech was another forward step by Putin forward in an attempt to restore Russia’s worldwide prestige since he came to power. It was a strong message that Russia will conduct its own independent foreign policy in accordance with its national interest.

3. Bilateral Relationship Hitting the Bottom

[W]e will not tolerate any more humiliation, and we are not joking.

–Dmitri Medvedev

On April 1, 2008, while in the Ukrainian capital Kiev, President George W. Bush once again expressed his support for both Georgia and Ukraine, in spite of strong opposition by Russia, by saying “helping Ukraine move toward NATO membership is in the interest of every member in the alliance and will help advance security and freedom in this region and around the world . . . There are no tradeoffs, period.”¹⁷⁶ Nevertheless,

¹⁷⁴ Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, 120.

¹⁷⁵ “SPIEGEL Interview with Putin Confidant Vladimir Yakunin: ‘The West Shouldn’t Humiliate Us,’” *Spiegel Online International*, October 10, 2007.

¹⁷⁶ Bush Urges NATO Membership for Ukraine, Georgia, NPR, April 1, 2008.

Gates would later admit that the attempt to bring Ukraine and Georgia into NATO “was an especially monumental provocation,”¹⁷⁷ while Russian Foreign minister Sergei Lavrov argued that inviting Georgia and Ukraine to join NATO, “would destroy bilateral relations between our two countries.”¹⁷⁸

On April 4, 2008, in Bucharest, President Putin made a press statement following a meeting of the Russia–NATO Council. It became clear that Russia would do everything necessary to stop the NATO expansion through Georgia or Ukraine. Putin said, “we view the appearance of a powerful military bloc on our borders . . . as a direct threat to the security of our country. The claim that this process is not directed against Russia will not suffice. National security is not based on promises.”¹⁷⁹ This time, the Russian President was even more direct than usual. He sent a strong message not only to Georgia and Ukraine, but to the United States. The message was either misread, or it was understood correctly, but seen as lacking credibility. It was about the reputational deficiency that Russia experienced on the global arena. Russia, however, was already prepared to materialize its multiple signaling delivered through speeches and statements not taken seriously by the U.S.

Russia would go to war with the clear intent of acquiring a reputation for resolve, which would provide it with the credibility it needed the next time its opponents sent a signal. As discussed, Russia was ready to go to war because it was more risk-acceptant to revive the old status quo it had during the time of the Soviet Union, and was under a challenge to revise the new one. Russia defined its aspiration levels as reference points that further motivated it to go to war. The meaning of the phrase “all politics is local,” was confirmed in the Caucasus, particularly in Georgia.

To become a member of NATO, Georgia needed to solve its territorial issues with the breakaway regions, originating prior to the creation of the Soviet Union. Russia

¹⁷⁷ Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, 157.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁷⁹ Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations in Geneva, “Press Statement and Answers of President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin to Journalists’ Questions following a Meeting of the Russia–NATO Council (Bucharest, April 4, 2008).”

played the role of UN peacekeeper between the belligerents. For Tbilisi, it seemed that the territorial integrity of Georgia would only be solved through a military operation. After a long history of clashes between Georgia and the breakaway territories, it was highly unlikely to expect any reconciliation and peaceful solution of the situation. Georgia decided to act, but instead of forceful integrity, the military operation drew Russia into the conflict once Russian military personnel were killed by the Georgian forces.¹⁸⁰ Russia was prepared for the war and was waiting, because the behavior of Saakashvili was very predictable: the rapidly growing Georgian military budget¹⁸¹ and the announced aspirations for membership in NATO, encouraged by the United States, were signals that could not be misinterpreted or neglected by Moscow. The fact that Moscow was militarily prepared¹⁸² in advance for such a war with Georgia confirmed that the intentions of Saakashvili toward South Ossetia and Abkhazia were known, or at least expected, in The Kremlin.

The war would cause territorial losses for Georgia that Tbilisi would not recognize—among them an obstacle for its future NATO membership. For Russia, the war would become the tipping point in its foreign policy. This time, the message was clear: the bear was back.

D. GEORGIA

Beyond the geopolitical context, Georgia is minuscule in territory and population, and not a threat to Russia, nor could Russia gain any reputation by fighting such a minor power; therefore, we have to scrutinize the relations between Russia, the West, and Georgia. The 2008 Russia–Georgia war should be explored in a global context, because “without uncovering meanings and emotions behind international relations, we are unlikely to adequately explain and predict state actions.”¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Oleg Shchedrov, “Over 10 Russian peacekeepers killed in S.Ossetia-agencies,” *Reuters*, August 8, 2008.

¹⁸¹ Georgia - Military expenditure, *Index Mundi*.

¹⁸² “Russia was prepared for Georgian aggression – Putin,” *RT*, August 8, 2012.

¹⁸³ Andrei P. Tsygankov and Matthew Tarver-Wahlquist, “Duelling Honors: Power, Identity and the Russia-Georgia Divide,” *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 5, No. 4, October, 2009.

Explaining the significance of Georgia and the entire area will allow us to evaluate and realize the level of risk both parties—the U.S. and Russia—were willing to accept in order to defend or reject the status quo.

1. The Geopolitical Significance of Georgia

In October 2006, the U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, had a meeting with President Putin in the Kremlin. One of the major topics of the meeting was Georgia. In her memoir, Rice described her dialogues with Putin. The words of Rice were, “any move against Georgia will deeply affect U.S.-Russian relations.” Putin’s answer was, “If Saakashvili wants war, he will get it. And any support for him will destroy our relations too.”¹⁸⁴ Certainly, Georgia was an essential piece of the geopolitical grand chessboard that both the U.S. and Russia wanted to have under control.

To realize how important the war against Georgia was for Russia, one must understand the overall geopolitical picture around Georgia. Georgia is a country in the Caucasus region of Eurasia.¹⁸⁵ The strategic geographic location of the country, being the crossroads of Western Asia and Eastern Europe makes it of a higher importance for the major geopolitical actors. Georgia has a territory of 69,700 square kilometers (26,911 square miles), and its population is about 4.5 million.¹⁸⁶

The Eurasian Balkans comprise a large area that includes parts of Southeastern Europe, Central Asia, parts of South Asia, the Persian Gulf area, and the Middle East. Nine countries form the Eurasian Balkans: Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. With the exception of Afghanistan, the rest were part of the Soviet Union. The Eurasian Balkans serve as an avenue directly linking the West with the East. All this makes the Eurasian Balkans

¹⁸⁴ Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor* (Broadway Books, 2012), 533.

¹⁸⁵ Eurasia is “the globe’s largest continent and is geopolitically axial.”¹⁸⁵ Dominating Eurasia would mean dominating the world. Three quarters of the world’s population lives there; moreover, nearly 75 % of the natural resources on the planet are in Eurasia. Zbigniew Brzezinski explains the significance of Eurasia for the United States very clearly, arguing that “For America, the chief geopolitical prize is Eurasia.” Beginning with Genghis Khan, whoever controls the so-called Eurasian Balkans or New Balkans, controls Eurasia; therefore, “America’s global primacy is directly dependent on how long and how effectively its preponderance on the Eurasian continent is sustained” (*The Grand Chessboard*, 30).

¹⁸⁶ Georgia, *The World Factbook*, Central Intelligence Agency.

vulnerable to armed conflict for world dominance, especially considering their economic value: “an enormous concentration of natural gas and oil reserves is located in the region, in addition to important minerals, including gold.”¹⁸⁷

The Caucasus is a region, situated on the border of Europe and Asia, between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, which makes it a weighty part of the Eurasian Balkans. It is divided on northern and southern parts. The northern Caucasus is part of Russia, while the southern part consists of several states, three of which are former Soviet Republics—Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. In addition to Russia, only these three states can be considered as nation states historically. This explains why, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Georgian nationalism gained support and popularity among the people. It also explains the U.S. interest in these three countries, attempting to exploit the susceptibility of nationalistic and anti-Russian movements there, a practice that later would be observed in the early stages of the Ukrainian crisis.

To control the Eurasian Balkans, one should dominate the Caucasus. To dominate the Caucasus, one should gain control or influence over the independent countries in the Southern Caucasus. This principle is in force for both the U.S. and Russia. The difference is that Russia maintains control over the northern part of the Caucasus, as well as Armenia, while the U.S. maintains control over Azerbaijan and Georgia. Russia’s perception, however, is that through Georgia, the U.S. would try to destabilize the Northern Caucasus, which include Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and North Ossetia–Alania. Some of these republics are significantly vulnerable to Islamic terrorism; therefore, Russia has more resolute for preventive military actions against Georgia, signaling the U.S.

¹⁸⁷ Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, 124.

2. The Significance of Georgia to the United States: Motives in Supporting Georgia

It is imperative that no Eurasian challenger emerges capable of dominating Eurasia and thus of also challenging America.

–Zbigniew Brzezinski

In 1997, Zbigniew Brzezinski argued, “America is now the only global superpower, and Eurasia is the globe’s central arena. Hence, what happens to the distribution of power on the Eurasian continent will be of decisive importance to America’s global primacy and to America’s historical legacy.”¹⁸⁸ The decisive role of the United States in Eurasia depends on U.S. policy toward the Eurasian Balkans, which, in turn, strives to make certain that no state or states have the power to dominate the area.¹⁸⁹

Numerous events occurred on the international political arena between 1997 and 2008, thus changing the picture. Nevertheless, the U.S. had been building its foreign policy on the 1997 premise of one world superpower, when neither China nor Russia was a significant factor. It is hard to argue whether the U.S. did not understand the multiple signals sent by Russia since 2000 for its determination to defend her national interests, at least in the near abroad area. It is possible that the U.S. did understand the message, but chose not to give up the status quo that Russia was trying to challenge. However, the level of risk that the U.S. was willing to accept was not enough to deter Russia’s determination for changing the status quo.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, influence in the Caucasus became one of America’s geostrategic goals. The Caspian Sea, one of the richest gas and oil areas worldwide, had to be shared among five states, to keep it from becoming a Soviet lake.

In 1999, during a conference on “The Geopolitics of Energy into the 21st Century,” Brzezinski argued that if Russia managed to stabilize Chechnya, it would threaten the U.S. interest in the Caucasus, because “the neo-colonial thinkers in Moscow”

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 194.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 148.

would have focused toward the Southern Caucasus, which meant toward Georgia and Azerbaijan, or the U.S. pipelines projects. Brzezinski stated, “If Georgia falls under the influence of Russia, the pipelines, and by extension, the economic and political pluralism of Central Asia, would be at stake.”¹⁹⁰ He also argued that,

A subordinated Georgia would give Russia access to Armenia, already Moscow’s dependency [sic], thereby cutting off Azerbaijan (as well as Central Asia) from the West while giving Moscow political control over the Baku-Supsa [Georgia] pipeline.¹⁹¹

To effectively counter Russia’s role in the Caucasus by limiting Russia’s access, control, and monopoly over the natural resources in the area, the United States needed to influence at least two friendly regimes out of the three former Soviet states—Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. To export the resources, besides Azerbaijan, being the source of the natural resources, an avenue from Central Asia to Europe was necessary, and this avenue was either through Armenia or Georgia. Azerbaijan, the Southeast neighbor of Georgia has been historically associated with Turkey; being a Muslim country, Azerbaijan strongly fought domination by Orthodox Russia. This bolstered Azerbaijan to find in the face of the United States the support it needed to minimize its vulnerability to potential Russian aspirations of reintegration. As a result, the very nationalist Baku was quickly alienated from Moscow. Azerbaijan provided the U.S. access to the natural resources of the Caspian Sea, as well as its corridor to Central Asia. Granting an access, though, was not enough for America: transportation of the resources depended on building a pipeline and completely avoiding Russian control. The pipeline had to reach Turkey, and the only possibilities were the territories of either Armenia or Georgia. Being in an armed conflict with Azerbaijan for decades, Armenia was unlikely to abandon Russia, because Russia provided Yerevan with weapons and granted security against other Muslim states, or any threat coming from Turkey, Armenia’s historical enemy. The only option for the U.S. remained Georgia. After the Rose Revolution led by Mikheil Saakashvili, the second Georgian President, Eduard Shevardnadze, resigned. In January

¹⁹⁰ Scott Thompson, Conference at SCIS: the geopolitics of energy, *Exclusive Intelligence Review* (Volume 26, Number 51, December 24, 1999), 27.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

2004, pro-NATO and pro-West Saakashvili became the third President of Georgia, and Georgia initiated an anti-Russian policy, which was the ultimate goal of the United States.

Having Georgia and Azerbaijan on its side, while diminishing Russian influence, the United States increased its power upon the rich oil of the Caspian Sea; thus, the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline became operational in 2006, which provided a crude oil from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean Sea. Russia’s monopoly on exporting the oil, obtained by the former Soviet Republics, was eventually disrupted. Further increasing its influence in the Caucasus, and more broadly the New Balkans, the U.S. would create future opportunities for building additional pipelines, thereby ignoring Russia. Thus, the U.S. would be able to eventually take over Russia’s share of the European oil and gas market. This would inevitably affect Russia’s GDP to a larger extent: as of 2013, the trade in both oil and natural gas provided Russia 70 percent of its \$515 billion annual export revenue (\$360.5 billion) according to the U.S. Energy information Administration.¹⁹² Trade in oil and gas constituted 14 percent of Russia’s GDP, which in 2013 was estimated to be \$2.553 trillion.¹⁹³ As a result, multiple second and third order effects such as slowing down or stopping Russia’s military rearmament program, and decelerating both Russia’s economic diversification, and industrial modernization processes would occur. Moreover, deteriorated economic conditions, would impact people’s approval for the regime, potentially leading to protests, revolution, and even regime change. Russia, once economically and socially unstable inside, would be forced to change her foreign policy. Subsequently, the U.S. would effectively counter for an indefinite time-period Russia’s ambition to change the status quo, eliminating a major opponent not only in Eurasia, but globally.

In addition, by having Georgia and Azerbaijan as allies, the United States would be able to deploy significant military forces and potentially use them in any future offensive against Iran, which in 2008 was seen by the United States as a threat to U.S.

¹⁹² Steve Hargreaves, Russian energy should keep flowing, *CNN*, March 3, 2014.

¹⁹³ Russia, *The World Factbook*, Central Intelligence Agency.

national security and to the security of its allies in the area, which is not a surprise. To date, Iran is developing better relations with Christian Armenia than with Islamic Azerbaijan. Certainly, admitting Georgia to NATO would seal a constant U.S. military presence in the region. Eventually, the U.S. might deploy elements of the antiballistic shield, additionally limiting Russia's room to maneuver and exercise pressure over any of the former Soviet states.

3. Significance of Georgia for Russia: Motives Behind the Intervention in Georgia

In general, whatever was determined to be a gain for the United States would be a loss for Russia: it was a zero-sum game. For Russia, if Georgia became a member of NATO, both countries would consider each other as enemies. Through Georgia, the United States would destabilize the predominantly Muslim populated Caucasus republics in Russia (Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Dagestan). Russia still remembers the two wars in Chechnya, and its leadership would not allow such destabilization to happen again. The Caspian Sea is very important for Russia as well. Concerning Iran, Russia is interested in having a stable and friendly regime; however, in the case of war between Iran and the U.S., a regime change in Iran would be very likely to occur.

Being an Orthodox country, Georgia has very strong cultural and historical ties to Russia. Moreover, Georgia is considered part of the Russian civilization, and is still perceived by the Russians as part of the "Russian world," undoubtedly, as part of the Russian area of interests and influence, directly related to its national security. Georgia voluntarily became part of the Russian empire in 1801, during which time the Russian empire provided protection to Georgia against Persia. Throughout the entire XIX century, defending its economic, cultural, and security interests in the Caucasus, Russia fought and won decisive battles against Persian, Turkish, and British forces.¹⁹⁴ Russia's policy today is a continuation of that same policy. Certainly, it is not because Russia wants to achieve an ultimate supremacy in the area.

¹⁹⁴ Andrei P. Tsygankov, "Blaming Moscow."

Russia's major concern is stability: providing a secure environment is priority for Russia, because without it, Russia will not be able to promote its cultural and economic interests throughout the rest of the sovereign states in the area: "Moscow does not seek to establish its hegemony and imperial control in the Caucasus. Instead, it wants to see the area as a stable and secure environment conducive to promoting Russian economic and cultural interests."¹⁹⁵

Russia views itself as an established honest broker and a guarantor of peace in the Caucasus, and that perception is widely supported by the public at home. Indeed, a number of the small nations in the region perceived Russia favorably. These constituencies upheld and promoted Russia's more assertive actions toward Georgia, which they viewed as the bully in the region. They were largely supportive of Russia's decision to wage the war and recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia.¹⁹⁶

In fact, Russia, considered itself Georgia's historic protector, and when Georgia rejected Russia in favor of the U.S., Russia felt humiliated,¹⁹⁷ which motivated Russia to intervene.

Stabilization cannot be achieved without solving several major problems in the area: "secessionism, the expansion of Western military infrastructure, the militarization of Caucasian countries, and great-power rivalry over energy."¹⁹⁸

The expansion of Western military infrastructure included plans for Georgia in NATO, a move which Russia considered a direct threat. This perception was supported by 77 percent of the Russians who considered Georgia's admittance to NATO unacceptable.¹⁹⁹ In addition, U.S. elements of the antiballistic shield in Georgia would mean further vulnerability of Russia's nuclear forces.

Militarization of the Caucasus meant the constant supply of weapons to both Azerbaijan and Georgia by the United States, which triggered Russia to supply Armenia,

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin: Honor in International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 243.

¹⁹⁷ Tsygankov and Matthew Tarver-Wahlquist, "Duelling Honors."

¹⁹⁸ Andrei P. Tsygankov, "Blaming Moscow."

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. To rearm the Georgian military, Saakashvili increased the military expenditures over 12 times beginning in 2004. In 2003, when the Revolution of the Roses occurred, the military budget of Georgia was \$96,300,000 or 1.1 percent of its GDP. When Saakashvili became President, the budget in 2004 was \$134,000,000 (1.4 percent of GDP); in 2005, it was \$357,000,000 (3.3 percent of GDP); in 2006, it was \$607,000,000 (5.2 percent of GDP); and in 2007, it was \$1,201,000,000 (9.2 percent of GDP). In 2008, the budget slightly declined to \$1,140,000,000 (8.5 percent of GDP).²⁰⁰ However, according to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the values are even higher, although the percentage of GDP is almost the same. In 2008, the maximum value of \$ 1,625,000,000 was reached.²⁰¹ In addition, over the past decade, Washington provided Tbilisi with \$1.2 billion in aid.²⁰² After 2008, defense spending began to drastically decrease reaching \$451,000,000 (2.9 percent of GDP) in 2012,²⁰³ which may be explained with the de facto secession of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and the unambiguous positions of Moscow.

Secessionism has been the other major problem for Russia in the Caucasus. During the conflicts, some areas in Georgia such as the Pankisi Gorge and others near the border with Chechnya were used by the international terrorists as avenues of approach from the Southern to Northern Caucasus. Terrorists today use these ways to conduct their attacks in Dagestan, Ingushetia, and North Ossetia.

When the so-called First Chechen War began, U.S. President Clinton responded by stating, “it is an internal Russian affair.”²⁰⁴

In his memoirs, Strobe Talbott wrote, “what little we did know about Chechnya and Dudayev inclined us to accept Moscow’s version that it was dealing with an ugly

²⁰⁰ Georgian Military Budget, *MilitaryBudget.org*.

²⁰¹ Georgia - Military expenditure, *Index Mundi*.

²⁰² Tsygankov and Matthew Tarver-Wahlquist, “Duelling Honors.”

²⁰³ Georgian Military Budget, *MilitaryBudget.org*.

²⁰⁴ President Clinton , Final Press Conference at the Summit of the Americas , Florida, December 11, 1994.

mixture of secessionism and criminality.”²⁰⁵ Moreover, as Michael McFaul admits, “U.S. intelligence sources suggested that international supporters of Chechens were enemies of the United States.”²⁰⁶

With the beginning of the Second Chechen War, the U.S. and Western Europe began to accuse Russia of initiating a military operation against the terrorists, although the U.S. already knew that the Chechen terrorists had ties with Osama bin Laden and other terrorists from Saudi Arabia.²⁰⁷ Moreover, Russia initiated the operation in response to several terrorist acts conducted by Chechen terrorists, who also invaded Dagestan. This was admitted by the U.S. administration.²⁰⁸ Nevertheless, the problem was not labeled an “internal affair” anymore, and U.S. officials changed their language toward Moscow.²⁰⁹ Outside the White House, politicians criticized the “weak” policy of Clinton toward Moscow.

A significant anti-Russian view was expressed by Zbigniew Brzezinski,²¹⁰ who along with Alexander Haig and Max Kampelman, formed the American Committee for Chechnya.²¹¹ In the founding declaration of the anti-Russian committee, it was declared that, “There is no excuse for inaction. The United States should immediately announce a comprehensive plan to deter Russian aggression, provide humanitarian relief to the Chechen people, and begin a process of bringing the war to a negotiated end.”²¹² Before

²⁰⁵ Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy* (Random House Trade Paperbacks/New York, 2002), 149.

²⁰⁶ Michael McFaul, *US Foreign Policy and Chechnya: A Join Project on Domestic and America’s Russia Policy* (The Century Foundation and The Stanley Foundation), p. 7, March 2003.

²⁰⁷ Michael McFaul, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Chechnya: A Join Project on Domestic and America’s Russia Policy* (The Century Foundation and The Stanley Foundation), 11, March 2003.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

²¹⁰ In 1999, when Putin initiated a military operation against the terrorists in Chechnya, in the U.S. was established “American Committee for Peace in Chechnya.” Officially, it was NGO with Chairman of the organization Zbigniew Brzezinski. As of 2014, Brzezinski is advisor of the U.S. President Obama.

²¹¹ Michael McFaul, *U.S. Foreign Policy and Chechnya*, 20.

²¹² American Committee for Chechnya, “Founding Declaration,” February 10, 2000.

the U.S. Senate, Brzezinski called the war “genocide” against the Chechens.²¹³ Brzezinski called for boost of American—Chechen relations.²¹⁴

President Clinton would say that, “Russia will pay a heavy price for those actions, with each passing day sinking more deeply into a morass that will intensify extremism and diminish its own standing in the world.”²¹⁵ Putin would answer that if the West was “really so worried” about the war, “let them use their influence . . . not only in order to bring some sort of pressure to bear on the Russian leadership.”²¹⁶

By the end of 1999, the West considered imposing economic sanctions on Russia. Also, it was suggested to freeze Russia’s membership in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.²¹⁷ For Russia, Chechnya was “the front line against international terrorism,” and it was “a Russian internal affair.”²¹⁸

In November 1999, Russia’s Minister of Defense blamed the U.S. for trying to gain control over the Northern Caucasus.²¹⁹ Russia’s Minister for Federal and Nationalities Affairs, Vyacheslav Mikhailov, also blamed the U.S. and Western Europe for the instability of the Caucasus. He said, “there is a tremendous interest in the Caucasus, which is a sphere of geopolitical and geostrategic interests of the whole world, the U.S. of course, West European countries and some others.”²²⁰

The former member of the U.S. National Security Council, Richard Pipes,²²¹ argued that “in militarily opposing the secession of Chechnya, the Kremlin was acting in

²¹³ Zbigniew Brzezinski, testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, April 12, 2000

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ David Hoffman, “Russia Rejects U.S. Criticism of Chechnya Action,” *Washington Post*, December 7, 1999.

²¹⁶ David Hoffman, “Russia Rejects U.S. Criticism of Chechnya Action.”

²¹⁷ M. A. Smith, *The Second Chechen War: Foreign Relations & Russian Counter-Reaction*, (Defense Academy of the United Kingdom), 132.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 133.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Richard Edgar Pipes (born July 11, 1923) is a Polish-American academic who specializes in Russian history. Pipes worked for the CIA. In 1981 and 1982 he served as a member of the U.S. National Security Council.

an imperialist and expansionist manner”,²²² disrespecting the fact that Chechnya was a legitimate part of Russia. (In 2004, after the terrorist attacks on a school in Beslan, the Republic of North Ossetia–Alania, the Russia Federation, when 334 victims died, half of them children,²²³ Richard Pipes argued that Chechnya should be granted independency,²²⁴ thus “righting an old wrong.”²²⁵)

On August 26, 1999, as Prime Minister, Putin directly blamed the West for the instability in the Northern Caucasus saying that “some states are declaring the North Caucasus as a zone of their vital interests; even though it is Russian territory, some are helping separatists with weapons and ammunition.”²²⁶

Russia developed a perception that the U.S. was interested in destabilizing the Caucasus through the war in Chechnya, and encouraging the Islamists there. For Russia, if Chechnya broke away, other Russian Republics might initiate a struggle for their independence, eventually, leading to further disintegration of Russia. This perception was first publicly announced by President Yeltsin in 1997, claiming the U.S. viewed the Northern Caucasus “as part of its sphere of influence.”²²⁷

In November 1999, Russia’s Foreign Minister, Igor Ivanov, made clear that Moscow “will resolutely resist attempts to force it out of the Caucasus and the Caspian region.”²²⁸ He stated,

An evident battle for spheres of influence is under way in the Caspian region and the Caucasus...individual states located thousands of kilometers from these strategically important regions have declared them to be zones of vital interest ... attempts are being made to supplant Russia and other states, particularly Iran, in those regions. But those are the

²²² Andrei P. Tsygankov, “Blaming Moscow.”

²²³ Beslan mothers’ futile quest for relief, *BBC News*, June 4, 2005.

²²⁴ Richard Pipes, “Give the Chechens a Land of Their Own,” *New York Times*, September 9, 2004

²²⁵ Phyllis Chesler vs. Richard Pipes on Chechen Terror, *FrontPageMag.com*, September 15, 2004

²²⁶ Smith, *The Second Chechen War*, 133

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 134.

countries for which the Caspian region and the Caucasus are indeed vitally important.²²⁹

If for the United States, Georgia and the Caucasus are about national interests, for Russia, the Caucasus is not simply about national interests; it is about national security, including survival.

It became clear that Georgia played an important for both the U.S. and Russia. To some degree, the future of Central Asia would be definitive for the future of Russia, and both parties were aware of that. The higher the value of the Caucasus was for the United States, the higher the motivation for Russia became to defend its national interest on its borders. The victory over Georgia scored huge geopolitical capital for Russia. As Andrei Tsygankov argued, “Russia was prepared to go it alone over Georgia because its security interests in the Caucasus are the last thing the Kremlin is ready to give up.”²³⁰

4. Recent History of Georgia and Russo-Georgian Relations

Russia is a country that defines its future based on the past. The history plays a pivotal role for the Kremlin’s decision-making. In this section, we will provide a retrospection of the recent history of Georgia and its relations with Russia.

On March 17, 1991, a referendum on the future of the Soviet Union was held. Georgia was one of the six Soviet Republics that refused to vote; however, Abkhazia and South Ossetia participated in the referendum. Ninety-nine percent of the voters were for preservation of the Soviet Union.²³¹

On March 31, 1991, Georgia held a referendum to restore its independence. Officially, over 98 percent of the voters expressed their will for independence. South Ossetia and Abkhazia mostly boycotted the vote. Georgia officially proclaimed independence on April 9, 1991.²³²

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Andrei P. Tsygankov, “Blaming Moscow.”

²³¹ Svante E. Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Case in Georgia* (Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Report No. 61, University of Uppsala, 2002), 163.

²³² Ibid.

The proclaimed independence of Georgia further increased the security concerns among Abkhazians and South Ossetians. The security issues first appeared in the end of 1980s, when the disintegration process of the Soviet Union became evident. Without going into details, we will focus on the major issues between Georgia on one hand, and South Ossetia and Abkhazia on the other, which led to the 2008 war.

5. Abkhazia

From 1921 to 1931, Abkhazia was a republic within the Soviet Union; however, instead of being subordinated to Moscow, it was subordinated to Tbilisi. Since that time, Abkhazians have organized multiple protests and demonstrations against Georgian rule, the most significant of which were in 1967, 1977–1978, and 1989. Just as a similar process of struggling against the Socialist regimes in most of the former Soviet satellites gave birth to national movements based on the intelligentsia of the respective countries, a national movement in Abkhazia emerged as well.²³³ Eventually, on July 23, 1992, Abkhazia declared its independence from Georgia.

6. South Ossetia

The South Ossetian Autonomous Region was within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (GSSR). During the era of the Soviet Union, in contrast to the Abkhazians, South Ossetians and Georgians lived without any interethnic issues. In fact, the separatist movements and the struggle for independence occurred because of the “Georgia for the Georgians” policy conducted by the first President of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who was elected in 1992.²³⁴

Instead of working to unite the diverse population in Georgia—of whom around 30 percent were non-Georgians²³⁵—Gamsakhurdia alienated the ethnic groups within Georgia. In 1989, Gamsakhurdia called the Ossetians “trash that has to be swept out

²³³ Paul A. Goble, “How the South Ossetians Became ‘Separatists,’” *New York Times*, September 22, 2008.

²³⁴ Svante E. Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict: Ethnoterritoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus – Case in Georgia* (Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Report No. 61, University of Uppsala, 2002), 165.

²³⁵ Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, 129.

through the Roki Tunnel.”²³⁶²³⁷ He later would suggest banning Georgian citizenship to those who could not prove their ancestors had lived in Georgia before 1801.²³⁸ “[I]n Georgia,” New York Times columnist Paul A. Goble noted, “there are Ossetians, but no Ossetia.”²³⁹

On September 20, 1990, the Ossetians proclaimed the South Ossetian Democratic Republic within the Soviet Union.²⁴⁰ On December 11, 1990, Tbilisi declared the South Ossetian republic illegal, and revoked its autonomous status within Georgia.²⁴¹ Gamsakhurdia justified his decision by saying, “they [the Ossetians] have no right to a state here in Georgia. They are a national minority. Their homeland is North Ossetia.... Here they are newcomers.”²⁴²

7. Georgian Civil War

Orchestrated by Gamsakhurdia, the nationalistic and hostile policy toward the ethnic minorities in Georgia led to a civil war. Besides the military coup to overthrow Gamsakhurdia—followed by his unsuccessful attempt to retake power—the major episodes involved the two wars against South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Tbilisi aimed to prevent secession of the regions; however, the de facto wars led to secession of both regions.

The Georgia-South Ossetia War was fought 1991–1992. On June 22, 1992, a cease-fire was reached known as the Sochi agreement, signed by Eduard Shevardnadze (de facto President of Georgia), and Russian President, Boris Yeltsin, in the presence of

²³⁶ The Roki Tunnel is a mountain tunnel and only road joining North Ossetia–Alania in the Russian Federation into South Ossetia, Georgia.

²³⁷ Sergey Markedonov, “Don’t write Russia off yet!,” *Prague Watchdog*, August 29, 2008

²³⁸ James Stuart Olson et al., *An Ethnohistorical Dictionary of the Russian and Soviet Empires* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1994), 525.

²³⁹ Paul A. Goble, “How the South Ossetians Became ‘Separatists,’” *New York Times*, September 22, 2008.

²⁴⁰ John Kohan, “Hastening The End of the Empire,” *Time Magazine*, January 28, 1991.

²⁴¹ “Georgia: Avoiding War in South Ossetia,” *International Crisis Group*, November 26, 2004, ICG Europe Report 159, 3.

²⁴² Quoted in Stuart J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* (Cornell University Press, 2001), 111.

the leaders of North and South Ossetia. Russia's led peacekeeping forces were to keep the agreement.²⁴³

The Georgia-Abkhazia War was fought from 1992–1993. Through Russia mediation, a ceasefire between the fighting parties was agreed upon in Sochi on July 27, 1993; however, it was broken in September by the separatists. Eventually, a cease-fire was reached when Georgia completely lost control over Abkhazia.²⁴⁴ Finally, on May 14, 1994, the Agreement of a Cease-fire and Separation of Forces was signed by Georgia and Abkhazia. The agreement was recognized in the United Nations Security Council Resolution 934. UN peacekeeping forces were appointed to monitor the compliance of the agreement.²⁴⁵

8. The 2001 Kodori Crisis

Once Putin came de facto to power, he initiated a second military campaign in Chechnya. For Putin, it was clear that Russia could not start building global status unless stability at home was achieved. On October 1, 1999, Russian troops entered Chechnya.²⁴⁶

In October 2001, there was an armed conflict in the Kodori Valley, Abkhazia, between Chechen fighters and Abkhazian forces.²⁴⁷ On October 8, 2001, a helicopter of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) was shot down while conducting an inspection flight. Nine men died, including five UN observers.²⁴⁸ Russia blamed the Chechen fighters hiding on Georgian territory who were fighting against Abkhazian forces and attacking Russian forces in Russia. Russia officially accused Georgia of assisting international terrorists, and warned that Russia could resort to self-

²⁴³ Cornell, *Autonomy and Conflict*,” 163.

²⁴³ Ibid., 167.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 169.

²⁴⁵ Resolution 934 (1994) Adopted by the Security Council at its 3398th meeting, on 30 June 1994, UNHCR, 30 June 1994.

²⁴⁶ Alexander Pushin, “Russian Army Operations and Weaponry During Second Military Campaign in Chechnya,” *Moscow Defense Brief* (Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies), March, 2002.

²⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch World Report 2002: Europe & Central Asia: Georgia, 2002.

²⁴⁸ UN helicopter shot down in Georgia, *BBC News*, 8 October 2001

defense in line with Article 51 of the UN Charter and conduct pre-emptive strikes against terrorists' bases on Georgian territory.²⁴⁹

9. From the Revolution of the Roses to the 2008 War

Although fragile, the peace lasted until January 2004, “when an aggressive and impetuous Georgian nationalist, Mikheil Saakashvili, was elected president.”²⁵⁰ President Eduard Shevardnadze, convinced by Russia, resigned to avoid bloodshed in Tbilisi. After ruling Georgia for over 30 years, Shevardnadze remained the last and the longest-serving Soviet-era post-independence president.²⁵¹

Moscow hoped that the new leadership in Tbilisi would work to restore “the traditions of friendship” between both countries, while Saakashvili stressed that he would work to improve the relations between Russia and Georgia. Saakashvili not only admitted the fact that there were Chechen fighters on Georgian territory, but expressed resoluteness to fight them.²⁵²

In May 2004, an economic forum was held between Russia and Georgia, where Moscow made multiple economic concessions such as restructuring Georgia's debt, supplying electricity, easing the issuance of visas, and easing the labor market.²⁵³

Also in May 2004, Russia managed to peacefully solve the so-called Adjara crisis. Adjara is an autonomous republic in Georgia. The crisis was about to turn into a military confrontation. Russia prevented the conflict and any possibility of secession of Adjara from Georgia, thus saving face for the new Georgian President. It was a great example of how both countries would work to solve the problems within Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, the “friendly” relationship between Russia and Georgia ended when Saakashvili announced that Georgia wanted to join the EU and NATO.²⁵⁴

²⁴⁹ Nikolai Gorshkov, “Duma prepares for Georgia strike,” *BBC News*, September 19, 2002.

²⁵⁰ Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, 167.

²⁵¹ “How the Rose revolution happened,” *BBC News*, May 10, 2005.

²⁵² Tsygankov and Matthew Tarver-Wahlquist, “Duelling Honors.”

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Saakashvili tried unsuccessfully to regain control over South Ossetia during the summer of 2004, saying, “the Georgians were forced into a humiliating withdrawal, but their violation of the status quo infuriated the Russians.”²⁵⁵ This only served to add fuel to the relations with Russia.

In May 2005, Russia agreed to withdraw its troops from the Soviet era military bases in Batumi and Akhalkalaki, Georgia. Although the bilateral agreement requested that Russian troops withdraw by 2008,²⁵⁶ the troops were removed by December 2007.²⁵⁷

In January 2006, a pipeline explosion occurred in North Ossetia. Georgia remained without gas, which brought electrical and heat shortages, causing a diplomatic tension between Moscow and Tbilisi.²⁵⁸

In February 2006, the Georgian parliament issued a resolution stating that Russian peacekeepers had to leave the break-away regions.²⁵⁹ As a reaction, Russia stopped issuing visas,²⁶⁰ and the Georgian wines were banned in March 2006 from the Russian market.²⁶¹

In September 2006, a spy scandal additionally increased the temperature between both states, when Georgia arrested four Russian intelligence officers for spying. A very harsh reaction from Russia followed when Russia’s Defense Minister, Sergei Ivanov, said, “all [recent] actions by Georgian authorities can be characterized as utterly

²⁵⁵ Quoted in Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, 168.

²⁵⁶ “Russia, Georgia strike deal on bases,” *Civil Georgia*, May 30, 2005.

²⁵⁷ “Russia Hands Over Batumi Military Base to Georgia,” *Civil Georgia*, November 13, 2007.

²⁵⁸ “Explosions in Southern Russia Sever Gas Lines to Georgia,” *New York Times*, January 23, 2006.

²⁵⁹ “Gruzinskiy parlament prishel k vyvodu rossiyskikh mirotvortsev,” *Kommersant*, July 19, 2006.

²⁶⁰ Bertil Nygren, *The Rebuilding of Greater Russia: Putin’s Foreign Policy Towards the CIS* (Routledge, 2007), 124.

²⁶¹ Russian ‘Wine Blockade’ Against Georgia and Moldova, *New York Times*, April 6, 2006.

outrageous, as an open desire to provoke the Russian Federation.”²⁶² Russia suspended the pullout of its troops, and many Georgians working in Russia were deported.²⁶³

In 2007, Saakashvili promised his supporters in Abkhazia that “they would be home within a year.”²⁶⁴

In January 2008, Saakashvili was reelected. Although he again claimed that he would work toward improving relations with Russia, Moscow questioned the legitimacy of the elections.²⁶⁵

On the global stage, two major events contributed to the increase of the temperature between Russia and Georgia. On February 17, 2008, the U.S.-backed Kosovo declared independence from the Russian ally Serbia.²⁶⁶ The 20th NATO Summit was held in Bucharest, Romania on April 2–4, 2008.²⁶⁷ Both Ukraine and Georgia were encouraged to become NATO members, although they were not offered a Membership Action Plan, which was postponed to a December 2008 meeting.²⁶⁸

In March-April 2008, Georgia began a military build-up near the borders of the two breakaway regions. Russia reacted immediately by extending additional political and military support to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Putin stated that, “Any attempts to apply political, economic or especially military pressure on Abkhazia and South Ossetia are futile and counterproductive.”²⁶⁹ Russia also considered the option to recognize independence to both separatist regions.²⁷⁰

²⁶² “Russia Recalls Georgian Ambassador Over Spy Scandal,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 3 October 2014

²⁶³ Tsygankov and Matthew Tarver-Wahlquist, “Duelling Honors.”

²⁶⁴ Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, 168.

²⁶⁵ Tsygankov and Matthew Tarver-Wahlquist, “Duelling Honors.”

²⁶⁶ “Kosovo MPs proclaim independence,” *BBC News*, February 17, 2008.

²⁶⁷ *Bucharest to host 2008 NATO Summit*, NATO, April 27, 2007.

²⁶⁸ Bucharest Summit Declaration, NATO, April 3, 2008.

²⁶⁹ “Putin says Russia will support Abkhazia and S. Ossetia,” *Sputnik International*, April 3, 2008.

²⁷⁰ “Abkhazia: Russia Supports Abkhazia and South Ossetia,” *Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization*, April 5, 2008.

Moscow sent a signal to the West, expressing its dissatisfaction about the international events. The other recipient was Tbilisi: “the message for Georgia was that a NATO membership might come only at the expense of its territorial integrity; thus, following the August 2008 war, Moscow did recognize the independence of the two breakaway areas.”²⁷¹

On April 20, 2008, a UAV belonging to the Georgian military was shot down over the Abkhazia. Georgia blamed a Russian Mig-29 for shooting down the drone, an allegation which eventually proved to be true.²⁷²

On April 30, 2008, Russia accused Georgia of building-up troops in the Kodori regions, deploying 1500 soldiers, and for eventually planning to retake Abkhazia.²⁷³ Russian response on the military build-up was instant. On May 8, 2008, the Russian Ministry of Defense stated that Russia had increased the number of her peacekeeping forces in Abkhazia to 2,542 out of the 3,000 allowed by the international agreement.”²⁷⁴

By the morning of August 7, 2008, Georgia concentrated 12,000 troops on its border to South Ossetia, and 75 tanks and armored personnel carriers were deployed near Gori.²⁷⁵

E. THE WAR

[A] stronger Russia, reacting to NATO’s encouragement to both Ukraine and Georgia for eventual alliance membership as well as plans for installing U.S. missile defense installations in Poland and the Czech Republic, caused Russia to tighten its grip on its near abroad, their

²⁷¹ Andrei P. Tsygankov, “Blaming Moscow.”

²⁷² “Georgian president accuses Russia of aggression,” *RIA Novosti*, April 21, 2008.

²⁷³ Luke Harding, “Russia accuses Georgia of plans to invade breakaway region,” *The Guardian*, April 30, 2008.

²⁷⁴ “Russia Gives Some Details on Troop Increase in Abkhazia.” *Civil Georgia*, May 8, 2008.

²⁷⁵ Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin: Honor in International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 241.

traditional security buffer, and eventually invade Georgia and annex territory.²⁷⁶

On August 7, 2008, 12,000 Georgian troops were on the border of South Ossetia. Seventy-five tanks and armored personnel carriers were positioned near Gori.²⁷⁷ “Georgia launched a massive artillery barrage and incursion to retake the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali.”²⁷⁸ At least ten Russian peacekeepers were killed and thirty wounded.²⁷⁹ Almost 400 South Ossetians were killed.²⁸⁰

On the morning of August 8, 2008, Georgia claimed control over Tskhinvali. Meanwhile, Russian forces entered Georgia, reaching Tskhinvali at noon on the same day. On the morning of August 9, Russian troops gained control over the South Ossetian capital.²⁸¹

On August 10, Georgia asked for a ceasefire. Medvedev stated that Moscow would accept a ceasefire only if Georgia withdraw its troops “prior to conflict and pledge not to use force.”²⁸² On August 11, the U.K, followed by the U.S. condemned the Russian invasion.²⁸³ On August 12, Saakashvili agreed to Russia’s ceasefire conditions, and signed a ceasefire in Moscow.

On August 13, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), including Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, condemned Georgia: “Under the pretext of re-establishing

²⁷⁶ Jeremy Kotkin, “Crimea: Russia is harvesting the seeds sown in the 1990s,” Medium, March 3, 2014.

²⁷⁷ “Road to War in Georgia: The Chronicle of a Caucasian Tragedy,” Spiegel Online, August 25, 2008.

²⁷⁸ Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, 168.

²⁷⁹ Oleg Shchedrov, “Over 10 Russian peacekeepers killed in S. Ossetia-agencies,” *Reuters*, August 8, 2008.

²⁸⁰ By Tim Whewell, “Georgia accused of targeting civilians,” *BBC News*, October 28, 2008.

²⁸¹ Nicolai N. Petro, “Crisis in the Caucasus: A Unified Timeline, August 7–16, 2008” (University of Rhode Island), 2008.

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

territorial integrity, Georgia, in essence, conducted genocide against the Ossetian people.”²⁸⁴

On August 14, Russia’s President Medvedev stated that Moscow would support “any decision made by the people of Abkhazia and South Ossetia on their status.”²⁸⁵ On the same day, U.S. Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, said the U.S. would not become involved in the conflict.²⁸⁶

On August 15, the U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, made a “visit of support” to Georgia. She also presented the Sarkozy-Medvedev peace plan to Saakashvili, which was signed by the Georgian President.²⁸⁷

On August 16, President Medvedev officially signed the six-point Sarkozy-Medvedev peace plan. Later the same day, the U.S. President called Saakashvili to “express support for him and for the people of Georgia.”²⁸⁸

1. Moscow’s Injured Reputation: Why did Russia go to War with Georgia?

“The continued expansion of NATO is especially important in explaining Russia’s willingness to use force in the Caucasus.”²⁸⁹

After his election, President Saakashvili forgot about his promises to work on improving Georgia–Russia relationship, and rejected any proposal for a peaceful settlement of the situation around the breakaway regions. Russia viewed itself as an “honest broker and a guarantor for peace in the Caucasus,”²⁹⁰²⁹¹ as well as a historic protector of Georgia²⁹² for two centuries (since 1801); therefore, Moscow felt humiliated

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Tsygankov and Matthew Tarver-Wahlquist, “Duelling Honors.”

²⁹⁰ Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin*, 243.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 253.

²⁹² Tsygankov and Matthew Tarver-Wahlquist, “Duelling Honors.”

because instead of recognition, Tbilisi confronted Moscow, dismissing their historical, cultural and religious relations, and relying on the support of the United States. This additionally enforced Russia's suspicion regarding the U.S. interest in the Caucasus.²⁹³

During the 2004 economic forum between Russia and Georgia, Saakashvili promised to respect Russia's security interests in the Caucasus by not allowing foreign troops on the territory of Georgia after the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Soviet era military bases;²⁹⁴ however, Saakashvili admitted the presence of Chechen fighters on the territory of Georgia even as Russia expected the two nations to solve their problems together. Instead of that, however, Georgia invited U.S. advisors to train and equip Georgia's troops. Saakashvili did not keep his promise of not hosting foreign troops. The U.S. presence in Georgia was seen by Russia as disrespect of its interest, and as an attempt to limit Russia's influence in the area.

Another example of where Moscow's position was disrespected was the U.S. global strategy of changing Washington regimes in the immediate area of Russia's interest (not only in Georgia, but in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan between 2003 and 2005). The so called color revolutions were perceived by Moscow as an attempt to erode "Russia's stability and its prestige as a power on its own right."²⁹⁵

F. THE OUTCOME AND CONCLUSION

The war had a huge global resonance, and forced the West to reconsider its policymaking toward Russia. The U.S. support for Georgia to join NATO, along with U.S. economic assistance and both U.S. military equipment and training, as well as the participation of Georgian troops in the U.S. led operations in Iraq and Afghanistan led Saakashvili to develop a sense of confidence he would receive further U.S. support in the case of military operation against South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Nevertheless, the expectations of Tbilisi were not justified: this otherwise not quite rational adventure of

²⁹³ Tsygankov and Matthew Tarver-Wahlquist, "Duelling Honors."

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

Saakashvili, followed by Russia's military intervention, turned into political and military disaster for the regime in Tbilisi, and a triumph for Moscow.

1. Military Disaster

The numbers of military losses on each side differ according to the source. Georgia said it suffered 154 military deaths, stating that 400 Russian military had been killed, while Russia said it lost 64, and Georgia lost almost 3,000.²⁹⁶

In fact, the battles between Georgian and Russian troops lasted less than two days, and the Georgian defense collapsed very quickly. The two Georgian assault brigades sent to fight were destroyed. The Georgian troops, especially the reservists, retreated in panic, and many defected. A considerable amount of military equipment was left behind. From August 11–15, the military facilities in Gori built with U.S. financial support were destroyed by Russian bombers and missiles. The Russian troops kept a trophy of up to 150 units of heavy armament including tanks, armored infantry vehicles, armored personnel carriers, vehicles, guns, and surface-to-air systems. "Radar installations, ammunition depots, and armored vehicles, everything was and is being either destroyed or appropriated for the benefit of the Russian state."²⁹⁷

Since his election in 2004, Saakashvili focused on creating capable military forces, equipped with modern Western weaponry. Georgia spent up to 9.2 percent of its GDP for its armed forces.²⁹⁸ The Georgian Army was trained by U.S and U.K advisors, which means that the tactics, technics, and procedures of the Georgian troops should be the same as those of the U.S. Army (127 U.S. instructors were in Georgia when the war began).²⁹⁹ Moreover, tens of Georgian officers undergo numerous courses in the U.S. on annual basis. The structure of the Army was close to the one in the U.S. During the conflict, the Georgian Army was provided with radio-technical reconnaissance and

²⁹⁶ "Rossiiskaya razvedka obvinyaet Gruzuyu v sokrtytostii msshtaba poter," *Lenta.ru*, September 15, 2008.

²⁹⁷ Mikhail Barabanov, "Three military analyses of the 4 day war between Russia and Georgia," *The Vineyard of the Saker*, September 16, 2008.

²⁹⁸ Georgian Military Budget, *MilitaryBudget.org*.

²⁹⁹ John Vandiver, "U.S. troops still in Georgia," *Stars and Stripes*, August 12, 2008.

electronic warfare equipment, night vision, and modern communications, which means they were better equipped than the Russian Army. However, the level of training and readiness of the Georgian Army was not as qualified as it appeared. Besides the Army's heavy losses, the Georgian Air Force, Navy, and Air Defense systems practically ceased to exist. Eventually, "those who believe in the a-priori superiority of the West in military affairs have learned yet another unpleasant lesson from the Georgian affair."³⁰⁰

The [Russian] soldiers destroyed key bridges, railroad lines, and roads. The military victor went to great lengths to humiliate the loser, which had allowed itself to be provoked into an attack.³⁰¹

From 2003–2008, the U.S. invested over \$180 million in the Georgian military. Multiple Georgian officers received training and military education in the United States, and 1,000 military advisers from Israeli security companies participated in training the Georgian forces. Weapons, intelligence, and electronic warfare equipment was purchased from Israel.³⁰² Certainly, the U.S. was aware of Georgian plans to try to solve the issue militarily.³⁰³ Putin would say after the war that "...it is not just a matter of the U.S. administration being unable to restrain the Georgian leadership from this criminal action; the U.S. side had in effect armed and trained the Georgian army."³⁰⁴ Georgia became the "outpost of the West against Russia;"³⁰⁵ therefore, the war with Georgia was a proxy war with the West, particularly with the United States. Finally, Russia exploited the opportunity for "payback for the humiliation that Russia suffered in the 1990s, and its answer to NATO's bombing of Belgrade in 1999, and to America's invasion of Iraq."³⁰⁶ For Moscow, the five-day war was not only a victory over a small neighbor, but a victory over the United States. As American historian, Herbert Bix, and Japanese Political

³⁰⁰ Mikhail Barabanov, "Three military analyses of the 4 day war between Russia and Georgia," *The Vineyard of the Saker*, September 16, 2008.

³⁰¹ "Road to War in Georgia: The Chronicle of a Caucasian Tragedy," *Spiegel Online*, August 25, 2008.

³⁰² Rama Sampath Kumar, "From Kosovo to Georgia: The US, NATO and Russia," *Economic and Political Weekly* (2-12 September 2008), 27.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁴ Transcript: CNN interview with Vladimir Putin, *CNN*, August 29, 2008.

³⁰⁵ Kumar, "From Kosovo to Georgia," 27.

³⁰⁶ "The Americans arrive," *The Economist*, August 14, 2008.

scientist, Kato Tetsuro, argued, the war became “a proxy conflict pitting Russian nationalism against American imperialism.”³⁰⁷ Russia lost in Kosovo, but won in Georgia: “...the reality is there was a serious miscalculation about the Russian ability to translate rhetoric into action.”³⁰⁸

The American political scientist and founder of STRATFOR, George Friedman, would later state that Russia’s operation in Georgia “was carefully planned and competently executed, and over the next forty-eight hours, the Russians succeeded in defeating the main Georgian force and compelling a retreat.”³⁰⁹ It was recognition for the credibility of the Russian military.

2. Political Disaster

On August 26, 2008, Russia’s President Dmitry Medvedev signed decrees, thus recognizing the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as sovereign states.³¹⁰ After decades of conflicts with its two regions, the territorial loss for Georgia became fact. The independence that the West granted Kosovo became a catalyst for recognizing South Ossetia and Abkhazia by Russia: “In international relations, you cannot have one rule for some and another rule for others,” Russia’s President Medvedev said.³¹¹

For Prime Minister Putin, just like in 2014, when Crimea became, at least de facto, a part of Russia through recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the war became a means for fixing historical injustice. “When the Soviet Union was formed, these territories, by Stalin’s decision, were definitively given to Georgia. As you know, Stalin was ethnically Georgian. Therefore, those who insist that

³⁰⁷ Herbert P. Bix, “The Russo-Georgia War and the Challenge to American Global Dominance,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, October 10, 2008.

³⁰⁸ Kumar, “From Kosovo to Georgia,” 27.

³⁰⁹ George Friedman, “Georgia and the Balance of Power,” *The New York*, September 25, 2008.

³¹⁰ Clifford J. Levy, “Russia Backs Independence of Georgian Enclaves,” *New York Times*, August 26, 2008.

³¹¹ Dmitry Medvedev, “Why I had to recognize Georgia’s breakaway regions,” *Financial Times*, August 26, 2008.

those territories must continue to belong to Georgia are Stalinists: they defend the decision of Josef Vissarionovich Stalin.”³¹²

3. Miscalculations or Underestimating Russia’s Reputation for Resolve

A nation forgives injury to its interests, but not injury to its honor.

–Max Weber

Georgia relied on the U.S. to provide both military and political support that would serve as a deterrent factor before the newly elected Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, who was not expected to be as much a hardliner as his predecessor Putin. It may be assumed that the U.S. did not expect Russia to react in such a manner; otherwise, Washington would not have allowed Saakashvili to initiate this military adventure. Putin went further in his assumptions, stating that the U.S. leadership had an interest in a prolonged war between Russia and Georgia to divert the U.S. public’s attention from domestic and international problems, thus uniting them to support one of the two political parties during the upcoming presidential elections. Putin said there had been indications that U.S. citizens had participated in the war, fighting against Russia;³¹³ therefore, for Moscow, the war became “a definite geopolitical/military response to a perceived existential threat to the Russian nation-state.”³¹⁴

Knowing that the U.S. was behind Georgia since 2003, Russia had even greater motivation to act decisively, signaling not only to tiny Georgia and the Ukraine, but to the United States. “The proxy American-Russian war in Georgia, in August 2008, which risked a nuclear confrontation like the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, was an unmistakable warning. Russia has a right, as the United States asserted for itself in that crisis, to be free of menacing foreign military bases near its territory.”³¹⁵

³¹² Transcript: CNN interview with Vladimir Putin, *CNN*, 29 August 2008

³¹³ *Ibid.*

³¹⁴ Kotkin, “Crimea: Russia is harvesting the seeds sown in the 1990s.”

³¹⁵ Cohen, “America’s Failed (Bi-Partisan) Russia Policy.”

Undoubtedly, the U.S. had the military capability to engage Russia militarily; however, the will to act depends on the level of risk that a state is ready to take, which is defined by the status quo prior the conflict. However, if the U.S. did go to war with Russia, Washington did not have a lot to gain, but did have a lot to lose. We may confirm that with an excerpt from the memoir of the U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, who recalls,

The next morning [August 12, 2008] I gave up on any notion of a vacation and returned to Washington. The President [George Bush] was back from Beijing, and Steve [Hadley–Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs] was able to gather the NSC [National Security Council] for a meeting. The session was a bit unruly with a fair amount of chest beating about the Russians. At one point Steve Hadley intervened, something he rarely did. There was all kind of loose talk about what threats the United States might make. “I want to ask a question,” he said in his low-key way. “Are we prepared to go to war with Russia over Georgia?” That quieted the room, and we settled into more productive conversations of what we could do.³¹⁶

When we discussed loss aversion, we argued that, “losses loom larger than gains,”³¹⁷ meaning that the U.S. preferred not to intervene, because it could result in serious reputational losses. During a military confrontation between the only two superpowers, definitely America was in a gains frame, which meant less will to take a risk. Russia was in a losses frame; therefore, Moscow was willing to take a risk. “Russians felt humiliated by the situation and were increasingly prepared to do anything to change it.”³¹⁸ Therefore, Russia struggled to change the status quo, which determined its “willingness [resolve] to use force to protect state’s foreign-policy interests,”³¹⁹ thereby, gaining a reputation for deterring future challengers.

Evoking the statement that, “domestic opinion operates according to Prospect Theory in finding even small losses so painful that it prefers high risks to accepting them,

³¹⁶ Rice, *No Higher Honor*, 688–689.

³¹⁷ Levy, “An introduction to prospect theory,” 175

³¹⁸ Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin: Honor in International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 246

³¹⁹ Huth, “Reputations and deterrence: A theoretical and empirical assessment,” 75.

and will punish any leader who permits them to occur,”³²⁰ helps us to explain why Russia did not hesitate to react and to send troops into Georgia. In fact, the “domestic aspects of honor as well as material capabilities will also figure prominently in shaping Russia’s international behavior.”³²¹

Domestically, Russians disliked the U.S.’s open support for Georgia. This was perceived as intervention in Russia’s interests, even in Russia’s internal affairs, since Georgia was for almost two centuries part of Russia/USSR. During the years 1991–2000, Russian society’s accumulated anger toward the U.S. because of its intervention in Russia’s internal affairs increased the national support for Putin, who was seen as opposing the Western arrogance toward Russia.

Certainly, there is a correlation between humiliation and reputation: the greater the power (economic, military) of a state, the higher the reputation, and the lower susceptibility to humiliation. The weaker (economic, military) a state, the lower the reputation, and the more susceptible to humiliation; therefore, after almost a decade of misery, since 2000, domestically, the wealth of the Russians increased drastically. Parallel to the Russia’s growing reputation internationally, the Russian society’s sense of humiliation also augmented. “In response to Russia’s perceived humiliation in the arena of international relations and its growing domestic strength, a consensus emerged in favor of an assertive foreign policy style for achieving the objectives of development, stability, and security,”³²² which was viewed by the Kremlin as “Russia’s great power pragmatism.”³²³ Due to these dramatic changes within Russian society, “Moscow is unlikely to back off when it has full support at home and when the perceived honor of a great power is at stake.”³²⁴ As was expected, Russia’s actions against Georgia met approval by the majority of the Russians. Russian society, just like the state of Russia, was tired of humiliation, tired of being treated without respect. For most of the Russians,

³²⁰ Jervis, “Political implications of loss aversion,” 189.

³²¹ Tsygankov and Matthew Tarver-Wahlquist, “Duelling Honors.”

³²² Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin*, 247.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Tsygankov and Matthew Tarver-Wahlquist, “Duelling Honors.”

Russia's success in the war increased their pride, patriotism, and nationalism: it meant, "Russia was back." Seventy percent stated that, "South Ossetia should either become part of Russia or win independence."³²⁵

Any hesitation and attempt for peaceful decision through statements, negotiations, would be seen not only internationally, but domestically, as a weakness. It would then immediately reflect on the popular support for the Kremlin, and eventually lead to internal destabilization. At that time, Russia's foreign policy "was largely supported by both elites and the general public at home;"³²⁶ moreover, "in response to Tbilisi's provocative and militarist behavior, many in Russia felt that tough reciprocal actions were fully justified."³²⁷ The adventure of Saakashvili was expected by Russia. Saakashvili was irrational or unreasonable enough to initiate a violent attack against South Ossetians, which was exactly what Russia wanted: an opportunity to demonstrate its determination to defend its national interests and to build a reputation for resolve.

Recalling the U.S. war in Korea, Thomas Schelling maintains, "We lost thirty thousand dead in Korea to save face for the United States . . . , not to save South Korea for the South Koreans, and it was undoubtedly worth it. Soviet expectations about the behavior of the United States are one of the most valuable assets we possess in world affairs."³²⁸

North Koreans were armed and trained by the Soviets,³²⁹ just like the U.S. armed and trained the Georgians.³³⁰ During the Korean War, however, neither the Soviets nor the Americans were in losing/winning frames. The Cold war had just begun; therefore, it was imperative for both superpowers to build a reputation for resolve before their adversaries, and a reputation for commitment before allies. In the case of the Russia-

³²⁵ Anne Barnard, "Russians Confident That Nation Is Back," *New York Times*, 15 August 2008

³²⁶ Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin*, 246.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 246

³²⁸ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 124-125.

³²⁹ Allan R. Millett, *The Korean War: The Essential Bibliography* (Dulles, Va. : Potomac Books, 2007), pp. 14-15

³³⁰ Tsygankov and Matthew Tarver-Wahlquist, "Duelling Honors."

Georgia War, however, the U.S. expectations about the behavior of Russia were the most valuable assets Russia was struggling to build. The primary reason for Russia to go to war with Georgia was to gain a reputation for resolve and to make clear that it would not tolerate any further attempt to be disrespected or humiliated, directly or indirectly.

Unlike in the Korean War, the U.S. decided to save lives, instead of saving face. Russia, similarly to the Soviet intervention in Hungary during the revolution in 1956, by going to war with Georgia, demonstrated resoluteness to preserve the status quo in the area (de facto independence of the two regions). Like in 1956, in 2008, the U.S. did not act not because the Russians were stronger: it did not act, because Russia was militarily capable enough and overwhelmingly motivated to collide with the West, if necessary. While the U.S. was not ready to accept the risk, Russia was. As Jeffrey Berejikian argues, “The key to maintaining credibility is the proper manipulation of rival perceptions about hidden costs through the judicious use of threats and aggression.”³³¹ This time Moscow had the key.

“The reputation that matters most to us is our reputation with the Soviet (and the Communist Chinese) leaders. It would be bad enough to have Europeans, Latin Americans, or Asians think that we are immoral or cowardly. It would be far worse to lose our reputation with the Soviets,”³³² argues Schelling. In 2008, Russia could not accept losing any reputation with the United States. Moscow drew its red line: it sent multiple signals to the West to stop encouraging Georgia to join NATO; moreover, Russia warned Georgia to avoid any military attempt to resolve the situation with the breakaway regions. Once Georgia initiated the attack, killing Russian soldiers and civilians, Russia had no option, but to react, because the red line was already crossed. Russia’s credibility was at stake. Additionally, Russia viewed itself as guarantor for peace in region - a perception shared by the nationalities in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.³³³ It meant that Russia had to prove its commitment and defend them.

³³¹ Jeffrey Berejikian, “A cognitive Theory of Deterrence,” *Journal of Peace Research*, 2002.

³³² Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 55.

³³³ Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin*, 253.

Due to the war, Russia guaranteed its military presence in the two recognized republics, which meant military presence in the Northern Caucasus. Georgia and most of the states did not recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent, and still considered them part of Georgia; however, with territorial issues, Georgia deprived itself of a NATO membership, which was one of the goals of Russia. Through the war, “Russia has shown that it will not continue to bow to Western strategic goals within their perceived sphere of influence.”³³⁴

Finally, since we began with Schelling, we finish with him:

What one does today in a crisis affects what one can be expected to do tomorrow. A government never knows just how committed it is to action until the occasion when its commitment is challenged. Nations, like people, are continually engaged in demonstrations of resolve, tests of nerve, and explorations for understandings and misunderstandings.³³⁵

³³⁴ Kotkin, “Crimea: Russia is harvesting the seeds sown in the 1990s.”

³³⁵ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 93.

IV. CONCLUSION

If reputation is a property, as in “a property, something that can be owned, controlled, accumulated, and spent,”³³⁶ as most of decision makers and strategists believe it to be, fighting for it is consistent with the Prospect Theory, as staking one’s reputation will push the state into a losses frame, and a willingness to pay a heavy price to defend it. However, the majority of scholars agree, at least in theory, that reputation is a function of others’ perceptions: an actor, then, theoretically, cannot exercise full control over others’ perceptions of him. Thus, “there seems to be a gap...between politicians’ persistent obsession with reputation and scholars’ increasing doubt about a reputation’s importance, and the gap is increasing.”³³⁷ The obsession with the misplaced notion of self-reputation pushes decision makers into the vortex of disproved, yet platitudinized, rhetoric of, “if we stand firm this time, there will be no next time.”³³⁸ This is partly the result of politicians’ lack of “nuanced understanding of credibility, reputation, resolve, and capability,” leading them to “fight for behavioral reputation for resolve and hope to improve their bargaining reputation (thus credibility) in the future.”³³⁹ Besides, while states constantly care for a reputation assigned to them based on their past behavior, they seldom assign any reputation to other states based on their past behavior.³⁴⁰

The policy implications of leaders’ obsessions with reputation and their perceived control over it can be enormous. Empirical testing demonstrates that “Schelling’s notion of reputation building [to which most decision makers ascribe] can be conceived in a proactive sense, that is, as a driving force behind initiating, rather than simply deterring, conflicts for purposes of “saving face.”³⁴¹ Moreover, the losing face can potentially

³³⁶ Jason C. Sharman, “Rationalist and constructivist perspectives on reputation,” *Political Studies* 55, no. 1 (2007): 20–37, 26.

³³⁷ Tang, “Reputation, cult of reputation, and international conflict,” 35.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 34–62, 43.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 34–62, 40.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 34–62, 42.

³⁴¹ Joe Clare and Vesna Danilovic. “Reputation for Resolve, Interests, and Conflict,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 29, no. 1 (2012): 3–27, p. 4.

stymie rapprochement and prolong crises, as decision makers assume that a conciliatory policy could question their reputation.³⁴²

Our thesis was not intended to prove or disprove whether and how significantly reputation matters in international relations in general, and whether reputation is worth fighting for. We aimed to explore the issue from a different angle: regardless of its significance, states have actually been going to war for their reputations for resolve that supposedly would deter others from initiating hostile actions. We demonstrated that decision makers generally *believe* that allies and adversaries infer the state's resolve from its behavior, and employ war itself in order to develop, preserve, or restore a reputation for resolve. Because of the policy implications of this *belief*, there is a need for further research to collect and analyze evidence regarding whether statesmen *do* draw such inferences from their allies and adversaries' past behavior.

³⁴² Lindemann, *Causes of war*, 21.

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