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**Russian Meddling In Its Near  
Abroad.** The Use of Frozen Conflicts  
as a Foreign Policy Tool

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*To James, for without you none of this would be possible*

## **ABSTRACT**

The fall of the Soviet Union witnessed the birth of a new kind of conflict in some of its former republics. Classified as frozen conflicts, these situations destabilize the region and prevent nation-state consolidation. The aim of this study is to determine why Russia encourages and supports secessionist rebels in some states but not in others. Although the original conflicts emerged at start of the 1990s, the ongoing crisis in Ukraine and recent flare-ups in Nagorno-Karabakh demonstrate the relevance of this endeavor. This paper utilizes a two level case study to determine which factors play a role in Russia's behavior. The first level analyzes three frozen conflicts to discover similarities present across the cases, while the second level compares these results to similar post-Soviet states that lack conflict situations. This study's findings confirm that the presence of a restive ethnic minority, the progress of a government's westernization efforts, and the lack of geopolitical alternatives are the main indicators driving Russia's destabilizing actions. The confluence of these three factors creates a necessary condition for Russian intervention and secessionist support.

**Keywords:** frozen conflicts, Russia, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Transnistria, post-Soviet conflicts, ethnicity, westernization

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Explanation
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EU	European Union
FSU	Former Soviet Union
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
US	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Following the collapse of the USSR in 1991, a new type of conflict began to appear within its successor states. Labeled ‘frozen conflicts,’ these situations remain unique to a few former Soviet republics. The conflict regions consist of Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Transnistria, although there is now a debate about including the ongoing Ukrainian crisis. Due to Russia’s involvement and influence in each situation, Western scholars such as Pere Vilanova, Vladimir Socor, and Theodor Tudoroiu have claimed this is an active tool in Russia’s foreign policy arsenal. This raises an important question: Why does Russia encourage and maintain frozen conflicts in some former Soviet states and not others?

In order to answer the question, the term frozen conflict must first be defined. Dov Lynch has claimed the word ‘frozen’ is misleading, as the situations are dynamic and have developed differently from their original goals (Lynch 2005: 192). However, frozen conflicts “are simply conflicts that were not formally concluded by a peace agreement” (Tudoroiu 2012: 136). Long-standing frozen conflicts include Cyprus and Kashmir. Unlike these examples however, the sub-category involving post-Soviet states are a “unitary phenomenon characterized by the following elements” (Tudoroiu 2012: 137): they are politically motivated, the breakaway regions develop similar state-building apparatuses, there is a prevention of modern nation-state consolidation, and they include a similar three-sided dynamic (among rebels, government forces, and Russia) (Tudoroiu 2012: 137).

Much has been written about the consequences of the Soviet Union’s collapse. Unfortunately this breadth does not extend to post-Soviet frozen conflicts, where there is an overall lack of scholarly literature analyzing Russia’s role expanding and maintaining these crises. Dov Lynch has compared the breakaway separatist states, but primarily ignored the wider regional implications of their existence and the evolving conflict dynamics. A follow-up paper by Lynch partially addresses these issues by providing a brief overview of the stalled peace processes, but does not highlight the common pattern displayed by Russia across these conflicts. More recently, Andreas Bock and his colleagues examined the ongoing Ukraine case as an example of the balance of threat theory to explain East-West relations. However, both Lynch’s and Bock’s works failed to discuss the broader regional context or incidents in the other Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) members. The successful development of some former Soviet republics lies in stark contrast to those with long-simmering conflicts. Yet there is a scarcity of information comparing the developmental paths of former Soviet republics with and without conflicts. Roy Allison compares regional differences between Eastern European and Central Asian trajectories since the collapse (Allison 2004: 465), but focuses mainly on regional security developments through a neorealist lens instead of the conflicts. While there has been little hesitation to depict Russia’s demeanor as paranoid and reactive like the Soviet Union, there is a

gap in analysis of whether Russian actions represent a continuation of Soviet domestic policies or if they are part of a new phenomenon.

The question of Russian intervention, which implies an international system governed by anarchy, serves to showcase the broader debate between realist scholars on whether threats or power relations better explain actors' behaviors. As Roy Allison notes, balance of power differences within and between former Soviet regions can help explain the presence or absence of frozen conflicts but do not go far enough (Allison 2004: 464). Stephen Walt's balance of threat theory may better explain Russia's varied responses throughout the CIS region, as the balance of power does not change but the perceived threat does. Andreas Bock illustrates this point in his analysis of the Ukrainian crisis.

This paper also taps into the wider discussion about whether military security, defined primarily as preservation of external borders, or political security, characterized by regime survival, serves as a more potent driver of foreign policy (Buzan 1991). An oft-repeated Soviet policy about intervention in Warsaw Pact countries appears to have been readapted by the Kremlin, albeit now directed within the Former Soviet Union (FSU). The possible continuation of the Brezhnev Doctrine and its concept of limited sovereignty need to be examined more closely. By questioning Russia's motivations, this paper seeks to examine the role of identity politics in foreign policy formation and intervention as a determining factor in states' actions (Carment and James 2000: 175).

These long running conflicts "continue to represent a serious threat to regional stability" (Tudoroiu 2012: 135). By determining the underlying causes of Russian instigation, progress can be made on reaching long-term solutions. It is important to analyze the failure of various conflict management frameworks, particularly given the similarity of these cases and their ongoing nature. Thus not only can effective efforts be made to resolve these conflicts, it will help diplomats to prevent crises, like in Ukraine, from devolving into frozen conflicts. This paper will also challenge overly simplistic Western narratives about Russian attempts to recreate a new Soviet-type empire in their near abroad (Bock et al. 2015: 102), focusing instead on various factors and the possibility of Russian actions dictated by the threat of further encroachment into areas traditionally influenced by Russia.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

A study of relevant literature has provided five indicators to help explain why Russia may become involved in or facilitate these conflicts: political regime, relations with and proximity to Western institutions, percentage of ethnic Russians, legitimate geopolitical alternatives, and economic ties.



Magdalena Grono raises the issue of geographical proximity in her overview of CIS and European Union (EU) relations. As she notes, “of the six countries singled out by the EU as its eastern neighborhood partners, five are locked in disputes over regions that have claimed independence” (Grono 2016: 1).

During his analysis of the Transnistrian conflict, Stefan Wolff raises the most widespread explanation for Russian interference: attempts at integration with Western institutions. Central Asia’s lack of desire for North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) integration is a marked contrast to other CIS members; as Wolff points out, in one proposed peace agreement “Moldova would gain a Russian commitment to its sovereignty and territorial integrity in exchange for agreeing not to join NATO” (Wolff 2011: 869), indicating the influence of potential NATO membership on Russia’s actions.

Theodore Tudoroiu utilizes regime type, relations with the West, and size of the Russian-speaking minority as explanatory factors during his analysis of the Transnistrian and South Ossetian conflicts. According to him, a driving factor of the Transnistrian conflict was the passage of “new language legislation favoring the use of Romanian/Moldovan ... [which] mobilized the urban Russian and Ukrainian population” (Tudoroiu 2012: 140). This perceived threat to the Russian minority facilitated intervention and social engineering which has transformed Transnistria; “in 1989, Moldovans represented 39.9 percent of Transnistria’s 546,000 inhabitants and Russians, 25.5 percent [but] by 2004, the balance had changed to 31.9 percent and 30.3 percent” (Tudoroiu 2012: 140). His other claims are based on the assumption that democracies are more likely to favor integration and friendly relations with the West. While the ruling Moldovan democratic coalition aspires to join the EU, Transnistrian leader Igor Smirnov has “built a consolidated authoritarian regime whose Stalinist methods are not unlike those of Central Asian dictators” (Tudoroiu 2012: 144).

Vladimir Socor also proposes a combination of factors determining Russian interference, primarily regime type and states’ relations with the West. The “export of the Russian model of governance to breakaway enclaves... whereby authoritarian leaderships, security services, shadow business and organized crime control policy” (Socor 2004: 2) helps maintain influence in these regions. However, he argues the primary driver is “thwarting integration into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions” (Socor 2004: 2).

Roy Allison’s study of regional security developments in Central Asia since 1991 helps explain the absence of frozen conflicts. He focuses on regional differences to the geopolitical situation between conflict zones and Central Asia, noting the influence of the “competitive dynamics between major powers” (Allison 2004: 464). Unlike Georgia or Moldova, the Chinese and American presences limit Russia’s actions as they provide credible alternatives. Meanwhile, although “the normative pull of the

European Union and NATO” (Allison 2004: 466) on states like Georgia can impact domestic policy, the organizations do not yet represent credible threats to halt Russian actions in the region.

S. Neil MacFarlane's analysis of the Georgian conflict also supports the argument that geopolitical situation impacted where these conflicts developed. Georgia's desire to join NATO was considered unacceptable “because of its potential implications for NATO intrusion elsewhere in the region” (MacFarlane 2008: 27). Another factor is that all four conflicts originated in the 1990s, during which time “Russia had the ability to complicate the situation in neighboring states significantly [but] did not have a reliable capacity to impose outcomes” (MacFarlane 2008: 28). Central Asian states had a less developed national identity during this period, thus avoiding similar kinds of concerns about breakaway regions. However, this is now in question with the continual development of the Ukrainian crisis and reassertion of Russian power.

### **3. HYPOTHESES**

Based on a review of appropriate literature and the corresponding factors thought to be driving Russian policy, this paper proposes four unique hypotheses to explain why Russia encourages and maintains frozen conflicts in some former Soviet states but not others. The first hypothesis synthesizes the most commonly found explanations for Russian actions.

*H1: Westernizing states are more likely to experience Russian intervention.*

Support for this hypothesis would indicate that Russian intervention is used to weaken Westernizing states in an attempt to maintain its regional influence and protect its political and economic interests. However, rejection suggests that a state's relationship with the West is not an important factor, but instead internal or situational issues play a leading role.

The second hypothesis receives strong empirical support from Russian politicians' statements on intervention, including Putin's speech in 2014.

*H2: States with a large<sup>1</sup> ethnic Russian minority are more likely to suffer from Russian intervention.*

A positive finding would bolster the argument that Russia is protecting ethnic minorities against hostile governments in FSU republics. On the other hand, a negative result would lend credence to the

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<sup>1</sup> For analysis purposes, a large minority is considered 10% or greater

belief that Putin's declarations of sheltering vulnerable populations serve as a pretense for intervention to support other goals.

Hypothesis three focuses on economic systems and threat perception as the driving factors of Russian operations.

*H3: States liberalizing their economies are more likely to experience Russian intervention.*

Conclusive support for H3 would substantiate the belief that Russia destabilizes efforts to liberalize regimes and create free market economies as it views these as a direct threat to its domestic regime. This links closely with discussions about perceived threats and political security, as Russia's political system is based on kleptocracy (Dawisha 2014). Severing the links of this system throughout the CIS would thus undermine Russia's ruling class.

The final hypothesis considers both internal unrest and power relations.

*H4: Former Soviet states with minority groups opposing government westernization efforts are more prone to Russian intervention.*

H4 is similar to H1 in that it assumes Russia views Westernization efforts as a threat. However, it implies Russia is too weak for direct intervention, so it exacerbates domestic unrest in response to perceived threats by the West against its interests. It is also related to H2, although in this case the minority groups do not need to consist of ethnic Russians. A positive result would indicate that these groups are used as a tool to prevent further attempts to integrate with Western institutions. Therefore, one would not expect to see Russian intervention into authoritarian states with a vocal anti-government minority or in liberalizing states with content minorities.

#### **4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND CASE SELECTION**

This paper aims to identify Russia's motives for preserving conflicts and preventing the consolidation of certain former Soviet republics. It will start by examining continuities between post-Soviet states, highlighting factors that have remained constant across the non-Russian CIS republics.

## **4.1 First Level Case Selection**

In order to thoroughly evaluate the hypotheses defined above, a two level comparative case study will be employed. Due to the small number of post-Soviet frozen conflicts, the first level will involve a comparison between three cases: Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Transnistria. Although Abkhazia is excluded, an examination of South Ossetia will provide insights into Russian actions and motives in Georgia. South Ossetia proved to be the more interesting case, as it was the spark for the 2008 Russo-Georgian war. The geographical range of these cases also illuminates Russian strategy towards two different regions.

First, a short historical background of each conflict will be presented, followed by an analysis of Russia's involvement. Each hypothesis will then be tested against the evidence of each case. This approach will examine how Russian intervention has differed, identify common factors across frozen conflicts, and test the merits of each hypothesis based on these findings.

There are important historical, ethno-linguistic, and economic differences between the cases. Despite these differences, they all have ongoing frozen secessionist conflicts in their territory, indicating the existence of at least one important common factor.

To properly analyze the cases it is important to determine how Russia has intervened to stimulate or propagate conflict in a given territory. This will be measured across several indicators, the most straightforward being direct Russian military intervention on behalf of at least one side. Indirect military assistance, including supplying weapons and intelligence, will also be considered. Although harder to reliably assess, economic factors such as providing funding, loans, and financial grants need to be considered to fully understand the extent of support provided. The final factor of evaluation will be whether Russia has offered official diplomatic support to the breakaway region or group.

## **4.2 Second Level Case Selection**

The second level will then look at cases with similar conditions to states with frozen conflicts but lack Russian backed secessionist movements. It will take those hypotheses with merit from the first study and test them using new cases, isolating each factor to determine the variation's impact. By comparing similarities found amongst the frozen conflicts to Belarus, Kazakhstan, Latvia, and Uzbekistan, this paper aims to determine why Russia supports secessionist movements in some regions but not others. These cases have been selected due to the large variation across the selected indicators, as seen in Table 1. These states have differing levels of ethnic Russians within their borders, diverse relations

with the West, diverging economic outlooks, and a variety regime types, but none have experienced conflict situations like Azerbaijan, Georgia or Moldova. Having tested the hypotheses, this study will then determine which factor(s) influence Russian actions.

**Table 1: FSU Republics Scored Across the Indicators**

	Belarus	Kazakhstan	Latvia	Uzbekistan
Government System (Freedom House 2016)	Not Free / Autocratic (7)	Not Free / Autocratic (6)	Free / Democratic (2)	Not Free / Autocratic (7)
% of ethnic Russians in 1989 <sup>2</sup> (Demoscope Weekly 2016)	13.2%	37.8%	34.0%	8.4%
Signed EU/NATO Association Agreements	No	No	Yes	No
% of exports sent to Russia <sup>3</sup> (Observatory of Economic Complexity 2016)	39%	8%	11%	8.4%
Geopolitical Alternatives	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

**4.3 Data Sets**

In order to effectively test H3, economic liberalization efforts need to be quantified. This will measure a state’s attempt to modernize its economy having come from a communist system. Economic liberalization will be assessed using the Heritage Foundation’s Index of Economic Freedom. One drawback of these ratings involves the relatively high weight placed upon ‘Limited Government.’ This metric is comprised of government spending and overall tax burden, which does not always accurately reflect liberalization efforts. For example, Germany scored as ‘Mostly Unfree’ on this indicator even though it is universally considered an advanced market economy (Heritage Foundation & Wall Street Journal 2016). Noting these limitations, however, the overall index provides an accurate outlook on liberalization efforts.

Government corruption levels represent another important factor that will used to test the hypotheses. While the Index of Economic Freedom does include corruption in its score, this is not its main focus.

<sup>2</sup> The last official Soviet census was published in 1989  
<sup>3</sup> Figures from 2014

In order to more accurately assess corruption, this paper utilizes Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index. The scale measures the perceived level of corruption within government agencies, assigning a composite score from 0 to 100. Notoriously difficult to quantify, the Corruption Perception Index relies on corporate leaders and regional experts for raw data. Perception does not always reflect reality and this remains a serious drawback of the index. Unfortunately, relying on empirical data also presents difficulties; judicial system effectiveness, media freedom, and a government's willingness to publish the data can wildly skew the results. Therefore, this paper uses the index as the best available measure while still recognizing these figures are perceptions and not precise counts of individual bribes or court cases.

Regime type and political freedom will be evaluated using Freedom House's Freedom in the World report. This study measures political and civil liberties within countries. Although it does not explicitly mention regime type, it nevertheless measures how open societies are regardless of how the government is structured. This is especially important when examining FSU states that are officially democracies but autocracies in practice. There are concerns about subjectivity because of Freedom House's scoring process, involving panel consensus to finalize scores rather than more robust data. However, these scores provide the most effective measure of freedom experienced on the individual level.

## **5. CONTINUITIES THROUGHOUT THE FORMER SOVIET SPACE AND RUSSIA'S CENTRAL ROLE IN THE REGION**

The Former Soviet space is still undergoing a process of regional transition and transformation, one that started with the internal fracturing during the late Gorbachev years and culminated with the USSR's collapse. Due to its military capabilities, economic weight, and sheer size, Russia remains the regional power broker. Without its tacit support or outright approval, there can be no stability or security. Thus it is able to influence outcomes and play the role of kingmaker. Russia's traditional role in the region has been the "power with the greatest influence on how the conflict would ultimately be resolved ... but this power was not monolithic" (Eiff 2008: 36). The 1990s was a period of internal strife and reorganization throughout the FSU; Russia was at its weakest point, unable to successfully impose its will without regards to the international community, but powerful enough to support breakaway regions and sustain frozen conflicts.

While the USSR may have disappeared, economic and military remnants of the union endured. Following the Soviet collapse, six former republics<sup>4</sup> signed the CIS Collective Security Treaty in

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<sup>4</sup> Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan

1992, joined by Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Georgia a year later. This later developed into the Russian dominated Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO); however, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan<sup>5</sup> withdrew in 1999 prior to the alliance's formation. On the economic front, Russia has actively promoted the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). As an integrated single market modeled in part after the EU, the EEU is an attempt to recreate a system reminiscent of the USSR (albeit a capitalist one). Its current membership includes Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia.

Political continuity across the region is a striking factor of post-Soviet development. The leaders of Belarus<sup>6</sup>, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan<sup>7</sup>, and Uzbekistan are former Communist chairmen who have remained in office since their states' independence, though all suffer from repeated claims of electoral fraud. Furthermore, the former presidents of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan were prominent Communist party members and remained in power for over a decade<sup>8</sup> until being overthrown during the color revolutions of the 2000s.

Russian actions supporting separatist forces throughout its near abroad call into question whether it is a strong supporter of nationalistic self-determination. As a multiethnic state, frequent support to minority breakaway groups could set a dangerous internal precedent threatening Russia's territorial integrity. However, as the Chechen case demonstrates, Russia is not a principled supporter of self-determination. It fought two brutal wars with Chechen separatists, eventually leveling Grozny and installing a ruthless but loyal warlord. The Tajikistan Civil War further refutes the idea that Russia always supports separatist forces, even when they remain outside its borders. These revolutionary forces had a strong ethnic and regional base<sup>9</sup>, yet Russian military forces actively backed the Tajik government (Akiner and Barnes 2001). Furthermore, during the 2010 Kyrgyz Revolution Russia refused to offer military support<sup>10</sup> to either the interim government or rebels, claiming it did not want to meddle in Kyrgyz internal affairs (Górecki 2010). In both Central Asian cases, efforts were aimed primarily at taking control of the government rather than creating a new, ethnically homogenous state. Although not directly comparable to secessionist dynamics of the frozen conflicts, the Tajik Civil War and Kyrgyz Revolution indicate Russian support for breakaway regions is based not on the principle of self-determination, but on other factors.

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<sup>5</sup> Uzbekistan later rejoined, but left again in 2012

<sup>6</sup> Unlike the other leaders, Lukashenko was only a deputy to the Supreme Soviet Council and not the regional party leader

<sup>7</sup> Saparmurat Niyazov was replaced following his death by his appointed successor, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow in 2007

<sup>8</sup> Aliyev in Azerbaijan and Shevardnadze in Georgia were not the first leaders following independence, but both quickly consolidated power and gained control by 1993

<sup>9</sup> Revolutionary forces comprised of two contradictory, yet united, factions: radical Islamists and democratic reformists, each with a regional and ethnic base

<sup>10</sup> Russia offered the potential for future intelligence support through CSTO, but it failed to materialize

## 6. RUSSIAN INTERVENTION PATTERNS: A COMPARISON OF NAGORNO-KARABAKH, SOUTH OSSETIA, and TRANSNISTRIA

The 1980s witnessed a rebirth of nationalism across Soviet territory. In addition to standard nation-state consolidation efforts, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova suffered from secessionist conflicts during the early 1990s. In all three of these cases, Russia provided support to the breakaway region. After a brief historical overview of each case, this paper will then examine Russia's level and method of support to discover patterns across the cases, gaining insights into Russian motives.

**Figure 1: Post-Soviet Frozen Conflicts**



(Source: Jackson 2014)

### 6.1 Nagorno-Karabakh

As the first post-Soviet frozen conflict, Nagorno-Karabakh set a precedent for the later independence movements. The roughly 1,700 square mile region is located entirely within Azerbaijan's internationally recognized borders, although Azeris and Armenians have fought for control and



incorporation for over a century. Unlike the other conflicts, there is a major additional player outside of the three-state dynamic: Armenia. By providing “logistical and strategic support for the Karabakh Armenians in the form of food, fuel, medical supplies, and volunteer fighters” (Betts 1999: 164), Armenia was able to funnel the rebels additional resources from their diaspora and Russia. Another unique factor lies in Russia’s assistance to both sides throughout the conflict, rather than just the secessionist forces. Karabakh and Azeri forces both received intelligence support and weapons supplies from Russia (Ismailzade 2005: 104-105).

#### *6.1.a) Historical Background*

The current conflict has its roots in 1988, when Karabakh demonstrators demanded the region join Armenia to create a unified, singular republic. These protests were followed by an Armenian government declaration on June 15, 1988, to accept Nagorno-Karabakh as a new province; however, this was immediately followed up by an Azeri vote reasserting ownership over the region (HRW 1994: 1). The movement turned violent by 1991 and full-scale war broke out in 1992. Both sides committed human rights abuses, making the conflict notable for its large population movements, as refugee outflows shifted the overall ethnic balance of not only Nagorno-Karabakh, but also Azerbaijan and Armenia proper (HRW 1994). A ceasefire was signed in May 1994, but not before Karabakh Armenians were in control of 14% of Azerbaijan, including sharing a border with Armenia proper.

#### *6.1.b) Russian Support For Nagorno-Karabakh*

Russian support for Karabakh Armenians came in multiple forms. As stated above, Russia provided the rebels weapons and military intelligence (Goltz 1993). Beyond providing supplies, there are allegations that the 336<sup>th</sup> Russian Army regiment actively participated in the capture of Khojali (HRW 1994: 6; Goltz 1993: 101). Additionally, the Azeri army caught six elite Spetsnaz soldiers<sup>11</sup> from the Russian 7<sup>th</sup> Army assisting Karabakh forces (Goltz 1993: 98). Russian loans to Armenia for weapons purchases over the years have been widely regarded as implicit support for Nagorno-Karabakh’s military, with the most recent loan spurring the Azeri Foreign Ministry to publish a protest note (Sputnik International 2016).

Although assisting the Karabakh Armenians, Russia also sent training personnel to the Azeri military as the war persisted and even protected Azeri general Surat Husseinov<sup>12</sup> and his private army (Goltz

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<sup>11</sup> Goltz goes on to note that these soldiers were only listed as AWOL by the Russian military after they had been sentenced by an Azeri court a year later

<sup>12</sup> Husseinov was later involved in the Azeri coup d’état, installing a regime less hostile to Russian interests

1993). Besides training, support consisted mainly of vital weapons supplies. This only perpetuated the conflict, preventing either side from achieving a total victory.

### *6.1.c) Hypothesis Testing*

Russia's support to both sides in this conflict makes an analysis more difficult. However, in what could only be described as a clear reprisal, after "Azerbaijan refused to sign a CIS security pact ... the Karabakh Armenians launched a military offensive [the subsequent day] in which they gained control of territory in southwestern Azerbaijan, effectively linking Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia proper" (Betts 1999: 177). Following Azerbaijan's ratification of the security pact in 1993, Russia began providing military assistance, albeit not to the same extent as the Armenians. The Russian-supported Karabakh offensive following Azerbaijan's original failure to sign the CIS security pact and its later assistance to Azerbaijan offers support to both H1 and H4. These actions stemmed from a desire to keep former territories within its sphere of influence. Russian attempts at negotiation were "clearly motivated by a desire to reestablish and increase its influence in the region" (Betts 1999: 171). Furthermore, mediation attempts were "meant to counter Turkey's efforts to expand NATO influence... and establish a [long-term Russian] military presence in both countries" (Betts 1999: 172). This was accomplished in part by Armenia's continued reliance on Russia for protection throughout the war, eventually forcing it to agree to the presence of Russian troops (Betts 1999: 177). However, Azerbaijan's decision to leave the security pact five years later thwarted these efforts, helping to harden Russia's support for Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

Regime type did not have an impact on Azerbaijan's situation. Per Freedom House, Azerbaijan is 'Not Free' and receives the lowest possible aggregate political rights score, fairsing even worse than Russia (Freedom House 2016). Although nominally a democracy, there are few political freedoms in the country and thus little evidence to support the argument that Moscow backed secessionists out of fear of bordering another democracy.

By 1989 Russians made up only 5.6% of the population in Azerbaijan, a number that decreased throughout the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Demoscope Weekly 2016). More importantly, at the end of the 1980s 75% of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh was ethnically Armenian, with Azeris roughly comprising the rest (Betts 1999: 163). The lack of a threatened, sizeable Russian minority in either Azerbaijan or Nagorno-Karabakh undermines H2. In fact, although the Human Rights Watch

notes pogroms and ethnic cleansing occurred throughout the region, it makes no mention of Russians<sup>13</sup> being targeted or attacked (HRW 1994).

Ongoing arms deals to both Armenia (and Nagorno-Karabakh by proxy) and Azerbaijan benefits key players in the defense industry, potentially supporting Russia's kleptocratic domestic regime. However, H3 finds little support based on the available data. Azerbaijan ranked 91<sup>st</sup> in economic freedom with a score of 60.2 (Heritage Foundation & WSJ 2016) and 119<sup>th</sup> in corruption during 2015,<sup>14</sup> with a total score of 29 (Transparency International 2015). Little progress has been made since the collapse of the Soviet Union to root out systemic corruption or clientelism. Additionally, only 1.8% of Azeri exports are sent to Russia (OEC 2016).

## 6.2 South Ossetia

Similar to the Nagorno-Karabakh War, the South Ossetia conflict also occurred in the Caucasus. The disputed region is located in northern Georgia along the border with Russia. Unlike the previous case, the South Ossetian conflict has two chapters: the first South Ossetian War from 1991-1992 and the broader 2008 Russo-Georgian War.

### 6.2.a) *Historical Background*

The South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast was created for political reasons during the Russian Revolution. In order to gain Ossetian support to help fight and integrate Georgia into the USSR, the Bolsheviks granted South Ossetians a level of autonomy via an independent oblast in 1922 (Kosven 2002: 11). This area had never been administratively distinct and did not accurately reflect the ethnic makeup of its inhabitants, with large Ossetian settlements left out (Kosven 2002).

The current conflict dates back to 1988 with the rebirth of the South Ossetian nationalist movement and its appeal to create a South Ossetian autonomous republic. This led to a series of escalating tensions on both sides regarding language, culture, and minority rights. Following Soviet troop deployments and Georgian rebuttals against Moscow's interference, sporadic fighting erupted in January 1991 (HRW 1992: 8). After three failed assaults on Tskhinvali, the Ossetian capital, and the outbreak of another secessionist movement in Abkhazia, the Georgian government signed a ceasefire in June 1992.

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<sup>13</sup> Violence was directed mainly at the two warring ethnic groups with the Kurds caught in the middle

<sup>14</sup> Previous years show little change, with a range from 27-29

In August 2008, Georgia invaded South Ossetia following a series of border skirmishes. Georgian forces quickly overwhelmed rebel positions, but Russia soon became involved under the pretense of protecting the Russian minority. Russia's resounding victory forced Georgia to withdraw from both South Ossetia and Abkhazia, effectively ending any semblance of Georgian sovereignty over these regions.

#### *6.2.b) Russian Support For South Ossetia*

Unlike in Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia's support of the South Ossetian cause has been much more upfront. This is due to the lack of a proxy state like Armenia to funnel supplies through, the presence of the North Ossetian Republic in Russia, and because of Georgia's more combative relationship with the Soviet (and later Russian) government.

Although Georgia alleges that Russians provided some military support for the South Ossetians (HRW 1992), this is hard to substantiate through independent sources. Due to the timeframe of the conflict, much of the fighting happened while Georgia was still part of the USSR. This makes explicit Russian military support during the conflict harder to ascertain since Moscow's role was principally to maintain internal order. The situation in 2008 represented a dramatic shift, with Russia going to war against Georgia on South Ossetia's behalf.

South Ossetia is reliant on Russia for even the most basic supplies with "Moscow staff[ing] over half the government, donat[ing] 99 per cent of the budget and provid[ing] security" (International Crisis Group 2010: i). By 2010, South Ossetia was inhabited by only 30,000 people and Russia had sunk \$840 million into the territory (ICG 2010: i). Russia now "maintains an estimated 7,000 to 9,000 combat, security, and border forces and is building and refurbishing permanent military bases, in violation of the ceasefire brokered by the EU presidency" (ICG 2011: 2). In a dramatic step during March 2015, Russia signed a treaty to formally incorporate South Ossetia's<sup>15</sup> military forces and economy into its own (Associated Press 2015). This represents a major evolution and signals a de-facto annexation of South Ossetia.

In addition to military and economic aid, South Ossetia has also received diplomatic support. Following its victory in the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, Russia officially recognized South Ossetia as a sovereign state on August 28, 2008. Furthermore, since the 1992 conflict, large numbers of South Ossetians were granted Russian citizenship even though the region was internationally recognized as Georgian territory (Owen and Lomsadze 2008).

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<sup>15</sup> This is true for Abkhazia as well

### 6.2.c) Hypothesis Testing

From the beginning of the independence movement, Georgia's political elite actively tried to realign their country towards the West. Despite this westward orientation, Georgia's political freedom score has remained 'Partly Free,' even with the election of supposed liberal Saakashvili (Freedom House 2016).

Like Azerbaijan, Georgia signed the CIS security pact only after failing to recapture its secessionist territories. It left the pact in 1999 and remains outside of CSTO. The Georgian government submitted a NATO Individual Partnership Action Plan in 2004 and was promised future membership during a NATO summit<sup>16</sup> in April 2008 despite strong Russian objections (North Atlantic Treaty Organization 2008). Additionally, Georgia's refusal to allow Russian troops on its territory stands in marked contrast with the 'peacekeeping' forces stationed in South Ossetia. This lends support to H1, as Russian actions appear directed at preventing any further integration with the West. Russia's bolstering of secessionist regions aims to "diminish decisively the attractiveness of offering Georgia a Membership Action Plan (MAP)... or indeed taking any other major steps towards Georgian accession to NATO" (Allison 2008: 1165). Separatist forces presented an opportunity for Moscow "to hamper Georgia's increasing pro-Western orientation in security policy" (Eiff 2008: 43).

Russian officials have repeatedly claimed that their intervention in these conflicts is to protect ethnic Russians. During a news conference announcing Russian involvement in the 2008 war, Foreign Minister Lavrov declared "Russia will not allow the death of its compatriots to go unpunished" (Allison 2008: 1153). Russia's NATO envoy, Dmitriy Rogozin, was "even blunter: 'the issue of using military force to protect our citizens is a matter of principle'" (Allison 2008: 1154). Medvedev claimed "that 'protecting the lives and dignity of our citizens, wherever they may be, is an unquestionable priority for our country'" (Allison 2008: 1167). While not ethnically Russian, by granting citizenship to South Ossetians, Russian claims of protecting its citizens does provide a shaky pretext for intervention. However, this process started only after the first war's conclusion. Moreover, H2 looks specifically at the Russian minority as government officials have repeatedly used this as a pretext for intervention. Russians in Georgia amounted to 6.3% in 1989, hardly a large percentage of the population and not even the largest minority group (Demoscope Weekly 2016). Ethnic Russians had decreased to 1.5% by 2002 and just 0.7% in 2014 (GEOSTAT 2016). More importantly, South Ossetia's population comprised almost entirely of Ossetians and Georgians (HRW 1992). Despite Russian insistence, population data undermines their argument for intervention and thus H2.

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<sup>16</sup> Ukraine was also promised future membership

Georgia ranked 48<sup>th</sup> in corruption during 2015, with a total score of 52 (Transparency International 2015) while it was rated 23<sup>rd</sup> in economic freedom with a score of 72.6 (Heritage Foundation & WSJ 2016). This is a dramatic improvement from Georgia's first ranking of 123<sup>rd</sup> in 1996 (Heritage Foundation & WSJ 1996). Georgia's marked economic improvements do offer support to H3. In addition, the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline poses a real threat to Russian economic interests. Georgian instability due to its breakaway regions and Russia's military presence "influences psychologically the climate for developing the whole energy transit corridor ... viewed by European states as a way of diminishing their high levels of dependence on Russian oil and gas" (Allison 2008: 1166).

H4 also receives support, as the South Ossetian population remains opposed to closer ties with the EU and U.S. From the beginning of the conflict in 1991, South Ossetians have actively agitated for Russian annexation. These calls became louder after Georgia to pursue EU ascension over EEU membership (European Commission 2014).

### **6.3 Transnistria**

The case of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic follows a similar pattern to the two conflicts mentioned above, albeit with some unique historical factors. While the other frozen conflicts were localized to the Caucasus, Transnistria<sup>17</sup> is in Eastern Europe, close to the historical heartland of the EU and NATO. Another important distinction is Moldova's recent history as part of Romania,<sup>18</sup> becoming part of the USSR during WWII. During the interwar period, Transnistria and Moldova belonged to different countries. Transnistria was first incorporated into the Ukrainian Republic during 1924 and did not join Moldova until 1940 (HRW 1993: vi).

#### *6.3.a) Historical Background*

With the rebirth of nationalism during the late 1980s, the Moldovan legislature began passing laws to promote Moldovan culture (HRW 1993). New culture laws and discussions about reunification with Romania sparked fears in the politically conservative minority communities. This only bolstered secessionist desires.

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<sup>17</sup> Sometimes referred to as Transdnistria, Trans-Dniester, Dniester, or Transdnier

<sup>18</sup> Moldova was part of the Russian Empire, but was integrated into Romania in 1918

In June 1990, the Moldovan SSR declared itself as a sovereign state.<sup>19</sup> Transnistria responded by announcing its independence the following September. The unofficial Transnistrian government then established parallel political structures, often converting existing Moldovan institutions (HRW 1993: 13). Although small skirmishes had occurred since 1990, full-scale hostilities erupted in March 1992. The Moldovan Army tried to seize control of key bridges but failed in three different attempts. The ceasefire was signed in July 1992 after Moldovan forces were decisively pushed back across the Dniester River.

### *6.3.b) Russian Support For Transnistria*

Russia does not provide any official diplomatic support to Transnistria and the region remains unrecognized by all UN member states. However, Russia has repeatedly called for Moldova to respect the will of the Transnistrian people (HRW 1993).

The Transnistrian rebels were supported by the Russian 14<sup>th</sup> Army regiment and reinforced by Ukrainian and Russian volunteers (Goltz 1993: 93; HRW 1993). The presence of 10,000 sympathetic troops offered two important benefits to Transnistrian forces: a large supply of Soviet arms and a source of willing recruits. Russian General Grachev referred to the 14<sup>th</sup> Army as the “guarantors of [Transnistria’s] safety” (HRW 1993: 22), while Transnistrian President Smirnov noted the “republic has survived only thanks to Russia and the 14<sup>th</sup> Army” (HRW 1993: 23).

Not only did the rebel forces receive support from the Russian 14<sup>th</sup> Army during the conflict, the allegedly neutral “Russian peacekeepers clearly supported the Tiraspol regime in strengthening its military capabilities and creating a ‘Transnistrian Army’ which [now] outnumbers the Moldovan Army” (Munteanu and Munteanu 2007: 51).

In addition to military support, Russian financial assistance keeps the Transnistrian economy solvent. Tax revenues are not enough to cover basic expenses, so Russia provides \$100 million annually (Ernst 2016) and free natural gas supplies worth an additional \$270 million (Calus 2015).

### *6.3.c) Hypothesis Testing*

Like Georgia and Azerbaijan, Moldova was not an original signatory of the CIS agreement but instead joined after failing to defeat Transnistrian rebels. This bolsters both H1 and H4, as Russian support for

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<sup>19</sup> Not independence – that was August 27, 1991

secessionist forces and the resulting ceasefire pressured the Moldovan government to join the Russian dominated regional organization.

Moldova has not undergone any major political reform since the secessionist conflict and is only rated as 'Partly Free' (Freedom House 2016). Despite this serious failing, it was offered both EU and EEU membership and opted to join the EU (EU Commission 2014). Russia banned Moldovan wine exports following improved relations with the EU in 2005,<sup>20</sup> indicating Moldova was punished for its move away from the EEU (Pravda 2005), further reinforcing H1.

Similar to South Ossetia's 'dilemma,' Transnistria also prefers EEU participation in direct contrast to Moldova. By maintaining the Transnistrian cause, Russia makes Moldova less attractive to the EU. The Transnistrian situation illustrates "Moscow's efforts to block the possibility of closer contacts between Moldova and the EU ... and to apply pressure on Moldova to join" (Wierzbowska-Miazga 2013) the EEU instead. Russia's attempt to block EU integration via the secessionist minorities provides additional support for H4.

Russian officials claimed they had an obligation to protect the Russian minority in Transnistria (HRW 1993: 24). As ethnic Romanians,<sup>21</sup> there have been calls in Moldova to join Romania, "which led to fears among the Russian-speakers east of the river Dniestr/Nistru (Transnistria)" (Prina 2012: 4). In 1989, Russians comprised 13% of the Moldovan population, while Ukrainians made up an additional 13.8% (Demoscope Weekly 2016). While those numbers have declined to 6% and 8.4% respectively (National Bureau of Statistics 2004), the language policies in Moldova were still perceived as a threat by the Russian and Ukrainian minorities. In fact, many "Russian-speakers perceived their language as being downgraded and devalued" (Prina 2012: 4). Thus it is not surprising that Russian remains the primary language in Transnistria (Prina 2012: 4). Transnistria's ethnic makeup also differs from the rest of the country, with Moldovans accounting for 40%, Russians for 25%, and Ukrainians for 28% (HRW 1993: vi). Thus the perceived threat felt by the Russian minority supports H2.

The economic situation in Moldova has not improved since independence. The country ranked 103<sup>rd</sup> in corruption during 2015, with a total score of 33 (Transparency International 2015). Overall economic freedom is even more dismal at 117<sup>th</sup>, with a score of 57.4 (Heritage Foundation & WSJ 2016). Although Moldova has made overtures to the EU, liberalization efforts have been half-hearted, undermining H3.

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<sup>20</sup> During March 2005, the EU official opened an office in Chişinău

<sup>21</sup> According to the Human Rights Watch



## **6.4 Common Factors Across the Frozen Conflicts**

In all three cases, Russia provided military support to secessionist forces on the battlefield. Outside the military realm, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Transnistria have all received preferential loans meant to fund basic government functions and build up military forces.

Although H2 receives support from the Transnistrian case, both Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia reject the argument that intervention is aimed at protecting large Russian minorities. H3 finds some support in the Georgian case, but economic factors did not play a meaningful role in the other cases.

Regime type and political freedom do not play a significant role in Russia's decision to propagate frozen conflicts. Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova have differing levels of political freedom and have seen internal variations since independence. A far more important factor is the regime's foreign policy orientation. These states were in the process of moving away from the Russian sphere of influence towards Europe and the U.S. Another common factor is the lack of geopolitical alternatives for Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova. No other major power had the regional presence or desire to challenge Russia's primacy with the threat of force.

## **7. FORMER SOVIET REPUBLICS WITHOUT FROZEN CONFLICT SITUATIONS**

While Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova all suffer from unresolved territorial conflicts, other former Soviet states remain peaceful with territorial integrity. Based on the analysis above, the regime type indicator did not have a major impact on Russia's actions. Although H2 and H3 received mainly negative results, in order to confidently reject them, both hypotheses will be explored further. H1 and H4 received support in all three cases and will be tested below.

### **7.1 Belarus**

Belarus presents an interesting comparison to the frozen conflict states. Like these states, Belarus lacks a true geopolitical alternative to Russia. However, rather than move away from Russia's sphere of influence, it has flirted with reunification via the Union State of Russia and Belarus.

There is a sizeable but declining Russian minority in the country. In 1989, they comprised 13.2% of the population (Demoscope Weekly 2016) but had dropped to just 8.3% by 2009 (National Statistical

Committee of the Republic of Belarus 2016). However, Russian remains an official government language and its status is protected in the Constitution of Belarus.

Similar to Azerbaijan and Moldova, widespread corruption persists. In 2015, Belarus ranked 107<sup>th</sup> of 168 countries with a score of 32 (Transparency International 2015). Economically, Belarus fairs even worse and is classified as ‘Repressed,’ ranking at 157<sup>th</sup> (Heritage Foundation & WSJ 2016).

Despite similarities with Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova across most of the indicators, Belarus lacks a frozen conflict. Two discrepancies stand out: foreign policy orientation and language status. As stated above, Belarus has remained pro-Russian in its foreign policy orientation in contrast with the frozen conflict states. Regarding language, Russian does not hold official status in Azerbaijan, Georgia, or Moldova. While extreme differences exist between the aggressiveness of their language policies, it remains true that Russian is no longer an official language in any of them.

## **7.2 Kazakhstan**

As a Central Asian country Kazakhstan’s cultural heritage differs from the frozen conflict states. However, a shared Soviet legacy and lack of Russian intervention makes the comparison appropriate.

Ethnic Kazaks constituted only a plurality of the population within Kazakhstan for most of the Soviet era (Ó Beacháin and Kevlihan 2011: 2). Per the 1989 census Russians alone comprised a full 37.8% of the population (Demoscope Weekly 2016). This was not a problem during the Soviet era as ideology served as the uniting factor. However, independence marked the dawn of modern Kazak nationalism. Unfortunately, in an effort to consolidate the state there was an “over emphasis by Nazarbayev on ethnic Kazakh identity” (Ó Beacháin and Kevlihan 2011: 3). Like in Moldova, the Kazak government has instituted language laws, changing street names and requiring official paperwork to be submitted in Kazak (Ó Beacháin and Kevlihan 2011). As a result, hundreds of thousands of Slavs and Germans left during the 1990s. The remaining minority population seemed unperturbed by nationalist developments (Ó Beacháin and Kevlihan 2011: 4). However unlike Moldova, this language policy did not draw the ire of Russia or lead it to promote breakaway groups.

Due to its strategic location in Central Asia, Kazakhstan forms strategic partnerships with various global powers. It has remained in CSTO while participating in NATO’s Partnership for Peace program. Although the Nazarbayev regime has not made any efforts to westernize its domestic regime, it has bolstered its ties to the U.S. while maintaining a friendly relationship with Moscow. This indicates that foreign policy orientation alone does not drive Russian actions.

Kazakhstan ranked an abysmal 123<sup>rd</sup> in corruption during 2015, with a total score of 28 (Transparency International 2015). On economic freedom, Kazakhstan fared better, coming in slightly above the global average at 68<sup>th</sup> with a score of 63.6 (Heritage Foundation & WSJ 2016).

### **7.3 Latvia**

Unlike the other states involved in this study, Latvia is a full member of both the EU and NATO. It also refused to join or participate in CIS activities. This alone undermines H1, as Latvia represents a case of a successfully westernized former Soviet state that did not suffer from a Russian-backed secessionist movement.

Latvia presents an interesting comparison to Moldova, as both states were annexed by the Soviet Union during WWII after having gained independence from the Russian Empire in 1918. Latvians have not historically maintained an overwhelming majority in their own territory, with ethnic Russians making up roughly 34% of the population in 1989 (Demoscope Weekly 2016). This has since dropped down to 26.9% in 2011 (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia 2016). Despite instituting a language policy requiring all official documents to be in Latvian, Russia did not intervene to protect minority rights. More importantly, Russia remained uninvolved following a controversial 1994 law that stripped citizenship from many of the minorities in Latvia, including ethnic Russians (Bowring 1994: 10). This undermines H2 and stands in stark contrast to Russian claims in Georgia and Moldova. Despite this legal change in Latvia, minority groups are not advocating secession. This further bolsters H4.

In 2015 Latvia ranked 40<sup>th</sup> in corruption with a total score of 55, improving 6 points since 2012 (Transparency International 2015). Latvia's corruption rating was closely mirrored by its economic freedom ranking of 36<sup>th</sup>, receiving a total score of 70.4 (Heritage Foundation & WSJ 2016). Similar to westernization efforts, Latvia's example undermines support for the role of economic factors in Russian intervention.

### **7.4 Uzbekistan**

The case of Uzbekistan provides another striking contrast to the frozen conflict states. It withdrew from the CIS security pact in 1999 along with Azerbaijan and Georgia, but has not suffered any Russian reprisals. Although Uzbekistan rejoined the new security treaty in 2006, Uzbekistan left CSTO in 2012. It remains outside of Russian dominated security organizations, is part of NATO's

Partnership for Peace program, and maintained strong military ties with the U.S. during the 2000s.<sup>22</sup> Thus the foreign policy orientation indicator alone is not sufficient for explaining why Russia intervenes.

Similar to Kazakhstan's situation, Uzbekistan's strategic location provides the ruling elite with geopolitical options. The U.S and increasingly China are ready to replace Russia as the dominant ally in the region. A perfect example is American military aid. Between 2001-2005 Uzbekistan received over \$500 million, much to Russia's displeasure (Lumpe 2010: 5). This further reinforces the finding that foreign policy orientation alone does not determine Russian actions.

Unlike the situation in Kazakhstan, Uzbeks comprise a large majority of the republic's population. On the eve of Soviet collapse, Russians only constituted 8.4% of the overall population (Demoscope Weekly 2016).

Unfortunately corruption remains a crippling problem in Uzbekistan, which ranks 153<sup>rd</sup> in the world with a score of 19 (Transparency International 2015). It ranks even more poorly in economic freedom ranking at 166<sup>th</sup>, with a score of 46.0 (Heritage Foundation & WSJ 2016).

## **8. CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS**

The aim of this study is to determine why Russia encourages and maintains frozen conflicts in some former Soviet states and not others. This was achieved by first looking at consistencies within the FSU region followed by a comparative case study of three frozen conflicts. Results from the comparative case study were then tested against four additional FSU states, none of which have experienced frozen conflict situations.

Although H1 received significant support in the first level case study, Latvia's successful and peaceful westernization efforts weaken the argument. This indicates that westernization efforts alone are not sufficient to predict intervention. The low levels of support for H2 in the first level comparison paired with the lack of secessionist conflicts in either Latvia or Kazakhstan demonstrates that the size of the Russian minority does not play a major role in Russia's actions. Thereby H2 can be rejected, contradicting Russia's official explanation for intervention. Corruption levels and economic liberalization efforts on their own do not have noticeable impact on Russia's actions. Only Georgia and Latvia saw considerable improvement in their rankings, while the remaining cases all rank poorly.

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<sup>22</sup> American support for the color revolutions soured the U.S. – Uzbek relationship

H3 thus lacks support based on the evidence and can be rejected. H4 finds considerable support in the case analyses. This indicates that Russia uses restive minority groups in FSU republics to influence nation-state consolidation, prevent westernization efforts, and maintain or install pro-Moscow regimes. The implications of these findings point to Russia's modification of the Brezhnev doctrine to apply to FSU republics.

Several conclusions can be drawn based on the evidence presented above. The three most important factors determining Russian intervention and secessionist support are the presence of a restive ethnic minority, westernization efforts, and whether geopolitical alternatives exist. Individually these factors do not explain Russia's actions, but their convergence defines a necessary condition for Russian intervention. These factors are all present in the developing Ukrainian conflict.

One limitation of this study is its focus on states as the unit of comparison. As a result, it fails to fully account for the interplay between domestic political parties or the role of individual leaders. An additional factor of interest is the external political pressure placed upon states. Had an accurate metric existed, it could have shed light on the case of Uzbekistan, which has suffered from Russian pressure over military base leases to the U.S.

Future research efforts should focus on Russia's recent actions in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, examining the evolution of Russia's intervention methods and the potential impact of cyber weapons on future Russian endeavors. An area for further research is to assess Russia's threat perception of non-western actors increasing their influence in the region.

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