

Russian Military Basing in the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean: The Central Component to  
the Regional Foreign Policy

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## ABSTRACT

Taylor Cayce: Military Bases: Russia's Main Objectives in Georgia, Crimea, and Syria  
(Under the direction of Graeme Robertson)

In the last eight years, Russia has sent troops into Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria to further its foreign policy. This thesis describes this policy and how regional military bases fit into them. Defending these bases and maintaining Russian control over them is the impetus for military action in Russian foreign policy governing the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean. I contrast this understanding of why Russia has acted in these conflicts with three competing theories of Russian foreign policy and explain why they fail to explain all three of the conflicts.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there has been a dramatic change in Russian foreign policy. Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev presided over the greatest alteration of Russian foreign policy with their engagement in military conflicts outside of Russia's borders. From 2008 to the present, Russia has fought in three extraterritorial military interventions in the Black Sea littoral and the Eastern Mediterranean. The policy of engaging in direct military action outside of Russia's borders lies in stark contrasts to the contracted foreign policy of the 1990s and the consolidation of power in the 2000s under Putin. This new period began with a short war between Russia and Georgia in 2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and continues with the 2015 interventions in Syria. These conflicts demonstrate a pivot in Russian foreign policy from inward looking policies of the 1990s and early 2000s to a willingness to use force where basing interests are threatened.

The change in Russian foreign policy begs the question, what is the Russian foreign policy for the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean that emerged after August 2008 and how do these conflicts fit into that policy? I answer this question by finding commonalities among the conflicts that point to shared objectives in each conflict. The common factor among these conflicts is that military bases were at stake in each of these conflicts. Loss of these bases would be detrimental to the ability of the Russian military to act in the respective regions. I argue that the threat of losing this power prompted Russia to act to protect Gudauta in Georgia in 2008, Sevastopol in Ukraine in 2014, and Tartus in Syria in 2015. These bases fit into a foreign policy in the Black Sea and Middle East (via the Eastern Mediterranean) of spreading influence through

maintaining military dominance. These regions are of utmost importance to Russian policy makers due to strategic and geographic connections to Russia.

To answer the question posed, I use the three aforementioned bases and the conflicts that surrounded them as the cases to support my thesis. In these cases I establish the background to the conflicts and the importance of the bases prior to the conflicts. I connect the strategic importance of these bases to show the Russia policy of military dominance over regional powers. The cases illustrate the necessity of the bases for the continuance of the observed Russian foreign policy in the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean. My argument is comprehensive in its explanation of all three of the conflicts in tying them to a changed Russian foreign policy that arose in 2008 with the Georgian war.

I will contrast the cases with three alternative explanations for Russian motivations in the analyzed regions. I find fault in the alternatives because of they are unable to adequately explain Russia action in all three of the major military conflicts. These alternatives include, action on behalf of public opinion, advancing Russia's economy, and a historical explanation. These explanations provide useful explanations when analyzing some of the cases in a vacuum, but fail to account for all three of Russia's military actions in the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean. Understanding why these competing explanations are not comprehensive enough to account for all three conflicts is important to provide policy makers with correct impressions of why Russia acts.

Understanding a Russian foreign policy that uses military force often is vital to policy makers in the United States. Russia is again a great power and must be considered by policy makers when crafting a foreign policy. Russian interests must be recognized and how they fit into the overall Russian foreign policy. In this case, the interests are the military bases. Policy

makers must recognize the role and importance of these bases in the foreign policy when advancing an agenda in the Black Sea or Mediterranean. If they are informed by theories that are not comprehensive in their explanations of lack comprehensiveness the foreign policy being demonstrated in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria then they will be acting on poor assumptions.

In the next sub-section I expand upon the literature and historical background behind Russian foreign policy in the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean. The analysis of the literature on this leads into an expansion on the alternative explanations and how they attempt to illuminate Russian motivations in the three cases. In chapter 2, I analyze the three cases of Georgia in 2008, Crimea in 2014, and Syria in 2015. Chapter 3 is the consideration of the three alternative explanations and how they are unable to account for all three conflicts. Finally in chapter 4, the implications and conclusions of my theory and argument on the future of Russian foreign policy and the fate of these conflicts are discussed.

## Background and Literature

The end of the Soviet Union and the Georgian war are the two main watershed events that challenged existing literature on Russian foreign policy. The collapse of the Soviet Union saw the rise of an independent Russian Federation under the leadership of former Soviet officials. During the 1990s, under President Boris Yeltsin, a Russian foreign policy was salvaged from the Soviet Union but largely this era was one of turning inwardly to organize and solve the domestic crises of the new state. The military contracted as well as Russian overseas obligations inherited from the Soviet Union. A basic skeleton of the former network of bases and allies that established global influence remained in place but largely stagnated.

Russian foreign policy changed dramatically with the accession of Vladimir Putin to the presidency. Foreign policy became a centerpiece of his terms as president when he rekindled old relationships with states such as Syria and reinvigorated military policy to strengthen the Russian hard power position.<sup>1</sup> Renewed focus on foreign policy partly led to tensions between Georgia and Russia leading to the 2008 Georgian war. The changes under Putin are heavily scrutinized in the literature on Russian foreign policy and strategy.

The Georgian war was the first major military conflict with another independent state since the formation of the Russian Federation. This conflict forced the reevaluation of Russian policy which was accelerated in 2014 when Russia used military force to secure Crimea and finally in 2015 with its military intervention in Syria. This new era differs from Putin's first two terms and is a far cry from the Yeltsin era. The literature has evolved alongside the changes in Russian policy.

Currently, there are two competing ideas of Russia's grand strategy for its foreign policy. Either it is taking a geopolitical approach and concentrating on its position as a major power or it is focusing on creating and integrating the idea of a Eurasian identity through the tools of its foreign policy. The Eurasianist approach to understanding Russian foreign policy is based on the idea that Russians are unlike any other people or civilization. Russia straddles a crossroads of the world connecting west and east.<sup>2</sup> Eurasianism as a theory extends back several centuries to philosophers in Imperial Russia but it has risen again in discourse concerning Russia under Putin.

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<sup>1</sup> Elvin Aghayev and Filiz Katman, "Historical Background and the Present State of the Russian-Syrian Relations," *European Researcher* 34, no. 13 (2012): 2068.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Schmidt, "Is Putin Pursuing a Policy of Eurasianism?" *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 13, no.1 (January 2005): 91-92; Fyodor Lukyanov, "Putin's Russia: The Quest for a New Place," *Social Research* 76, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 141.

Eurasianists argue that Russia under Putin has followed this idea by using foreign policy to establish Russia as an independent power that can lead itself and its neighbors to create a more unified Eurasian identity and power. Anti-western rhetoric and attempting to maintain friendly governments in post-soviet states allow Russia to lead this movement.<sup>3</sup> It has been argued; I believe correctly, that Eurasianism has been supplanted by geopolitical thinking as evidenced by the strategic nature of the conflicts of the last eight years.<sup>4</sup> While confrontation with the West is a part of Eurasianism, the strategic value of the assets gained and secured in these conflicts fit better in a geopolitical framework.

The geopolitical approach to understanding Russian foreign policy is based on the notion that Russia is acting to strengthen its international position all around the world through strategic action.<sup>5</sup> The idea that Russia is a great power that should be heavily involved in world politics is an underlying assumption of the elites in Moscow. This idea undergirded much of the understanding of Soviet policy and these people did not leave the Kremlin when the USSR collapsed. Central to this argument is that Russia is looking to be a globally influential power and is not content with only being the most powerful actor in its sphere of influence. In all regions relevant to Russian policy makers, Russia is utilizing its foreign policy tools to including but not limited to economics, political influence, and military action.<sup>6</sup>

Different regions play different roles in the geopolitical approach of explaining Russian foreign policy. For instance, Central Asia has remained prominent in Russian policy due to American intervention in the region and the threat of terrorism. To the west of Russia, Europe

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<sup>3</sup> Dmitri Trenin, *The End of Eurasia* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002)

<sup>4</sup> Morozova, "Geopolitics, Eurasianism and Russian Foreign Policy Under Putin,"

<sup>5</sup> Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*, ; Natalia Morozova, "Geopolitics, Eurasianism and Russian Foreign Policy Under Putin," *Geopolitics* 14, (2009):

<sup>6</sup> Morozova, "Geopolitics, Eurasianism and Russian Foreign Policy Under Putin,"

remains one of Russia's closest trade partners in natural gas, which is strategically important to the health of the Russian economy which backs the whole foreign policy. But the most important region remains the "near-abroad" area of former Soviet states.

The "near-abroad" of former Soviet states has been at the center of discussion on Russian foreign policy since the independence of these states in the 1990s. This is a region defined by unresolved conflicts, ethnic interests, and close economic ties to Russia.<sup>7</sup> The Russian sphere of influence encompasses this region and during the 1990s Russia retained the extensive influence and control over developments there. At the end of the 1990s, future president Medvedev quipped that this region was "Russia's sphere of privileged interests" meaning that Russia holds a special position in these states that precludes interference from other powers.<sup>8</sup> With political changes in this region during the 2000s, the Russian ability to control and influence the region waned. This region remains the most important to Russian foreign policy in 2016 even though Georgia and Ukraine moved further away from Russian interests. Based on the vast number of Russian interests ranging from natural gas pipelines to military bases this region provides the foundation for Russian claims to being a great power. As well as its interests in the region, influencing and taming the states of the near-abroad establish its position as a power broker to make its claim to being a great power.

With these ideas of Russian foreign policy at the grand scale and at the regional scale, I now consider alternative explanations from the literature on Russian policy in the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean. The literature surrounding Russian strategic thinking in these regions is dominated by three groupings of explanations: Domestic politics, economic, and historical. The

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<sup>7</sup> James Sherr, *Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion: Russia's Influence Abroad* (London: Chatham House, 2013), 59; Thomas de Waal, "The South Caucasus in 2020," quoted in *Russia in 2020: Scenarios for the Future*, (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011), 110-113.

<sup>8</sup> Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 221; Sherr, *Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion*, 59.

domestic politics explanations revolve around the success that the Putin regime has had in its domestic support during the Ukraine Crisis and the Syrian intervention. The regime uses its position in the international system to strengthen support for the regime by displaying the Russian Federation as being righteous in action. Countering the Russian state is the West and specifically the United States trying to block Russian success in the world. This narrative is tied the Russian return to prominence in the world as a power to be taken seriously by other states. Putin and the current regime use these narratives to win greater public support in order to cement the future of the current leadership.

After the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, a fear of a similar revolution occurring in Russia spread throughout the regime.<sup>9</sup> The regime attacked systems and processes that can be used as revolutionary outlets in its consolidation of power over the state. Besides institutional consolidation, the regime also attempted to win and hold onto public support to further solidify its position.<sup>10</sup> Some authors interpret Russian military activity and foreign policy moves as the outward expression of moves to win continued popular support. After protests of the 2011 elections, Putin and the regime feared that its influence over popular opinion was declining. In response to this decline, when Putin began his new term as president in 2012, anti-western and righteous rhetoric became central to reinvigorating public support for the regime.<sup>11</sup>

Russian moves to seize Crimea and defend the pro-Russian rebels in the east were met with resounding public support inside of Russia. During this period, the state-controlled media churned out supportive content that further established the narrative that Putin was defending the

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<sup>9</sup> Konstantin von Eggert, "All Politics are Local: Crimea Explained," *World Affairs*, (September/October 2014): 51.

<sup>10</sup> Andreas Umland, "Russia's New 'Special' Path After the Orange Revolution: Radical Anti-Westernism and Para-Totalitarianism in 2005-2008," *Russian Politics and Law* 50, November 6 (November/December 2012): 25-26.

<sup>11</sup> Von Eggert, "All Politics are Local," 54.

pro-Russian peoples in Ukraine who would be persecuted without his aid.<sup>12</sup> Crimea being an integral region in Russian history played into this narrative as well.

Putin has also enjoyed extensive public support for his intervention in Syria even though it contains fewer connotations with Russian history and the narrative differs from the Ukraine Crisis. Putin's approval rating topped 90 percent during the beginning of the Syrian intervention.<sup>13</sup> He placed himself as the defender of Russia keeping terrorist forces at bay while it protects another state under rhetorical siege from the West. Putin is again portraying Russia as the righteous actor in Syria and the people appear to respond well to this notion. Since the annexation of Crimea, Putin's approval rating has not fallen below 80% and rose dramatically during the intervention in Syria.<sup>14</sup>

This explanation is insufficient in explaining the actions taken in all three cases because the timing of the conflicts was far from optimized to woo public opinion. Each conflict occurred in-between election cycles instead of during the year to six months immediately prior to an election which reasonably could be expected to have a larger impact on voter support. As well as coming at off-times in terms of elections, the Syrian intervention could have occurred earlier than 2015 when Putin's approval rating was already riding high topping 80%.<sup>15</sup> The intervention has been popular with the public which begs the question, why did it come so late into the Syrian civil war? The war started in 2011, the same year that open protests occurred against the regime

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Coalson, "Putin Pledges to Protect All Ethnic Russians Anywhere. So, Where are They?," Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, April 10, 2014, (accessed April 8, 2016) <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-ethnic-russification-baltics-kazakhstan-soviet/25328281.html>

<sup>13</sup> Tom Porter, "Russia: Vladimir Putin Approval Rating Hits 90% Following Syria Bombing Campaign," International Business Times, (accessed April 8, 2016) <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/russia-vladimir-putin-approval-rating-hits-90-following-syria-bombing-campaign-1525181>

<sup>14</sup> "Vladimir Putin's Approval Rating at Record Levels," The Guardian (accessed April 9, 2016) <http://www.theguardian.com/world/datablog/2015/jul/23/vladimir-putins-approval-rating-at-record-levels>

<sup>15</sup> "Vladimir Putin's Approval Rating at Record Levels," The Guardian.

in Russia. One would expect military action to directly follow public displays of discontent with the regime instead of after the annexation of Crimea when the regime has mass public support. This explanation fails to offer a coherent explanation across the cases as to why Russia acted.

The second set of explanations arises from economics and argues that Russia acts to secure its economic interests where they are threatened even if that requires military action. A large portion of the Russian economy is based on the energy sector and the export of natural gas and oil. The Russian economy grew quickly during the 2000s with the increase of energy costs, which fueled the growth of the power of the state. Authors that support this explanation argue that Russia acted to preserve its energy transportation interests in Ukraine in 2014. A new government in Kiev could threaten the pipelines that carry Russian exported energy to Europe, where most of it is consumed.<sup>16</sup> Russia exerted force to weaken this new government and used a show of force to ensure that the new government did not interfere in the energy transportation. The future of the Russian export economy was too important to be left in the hands of an anti-Russian revolutionary government, therefore Russia acted in its economic interest.

Similarly to Ukraine, Russian natural gas pipelines also pass through Georgia. These pipelines help to supply the southern caucuses with natural gas and are another important market for Russian energy exports.<sup>17</sup> After the Rose Revolution, which brought Mikheil Saakashvili to power in Georgia, Russian leaders became uneasy about Georgia leaving Russian orbit and control with its attempts to join Western institutions, which can be viewed as a loss of control over transportation of Russian gas. Under this explanation, the war in 2008 would be a move to assert control over Georgia in an attempt to protect the energy transportation.

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<sup>16</sup> U.S Energy Information Administration, “International Analysis: Russia” July 2008, 2015, <https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis.cfm?iso=RUS> (Accessed March 1, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Economic explanations of the Syrian intervention cite Syria as an important and consistent importer of Russian arms. Russia sells billions of dollars of arms to Syria and has been a partner in this trade for more than four decades. At the start of the civil war in 2011, Syria imported 48 percent of its arms directly from Russia, which totaled over \$1.5 billion USD.<sup>18</sup> Russia is the single largest supplier of arms and technology to Syria, which makes it an important and lucrative partner for Assad and his regimes. On the Russia side of the deal, arms sales are a significant part of the trade portion of the Russian GDP and, in those sales, Syria is one of the largest importers.<sup>19</sup> Currently in 2016, the Russian economy is in serious decline and losing a partner that buys such large quantities of arms would be a serious further blow to it. This trade has increased value to the Russian export economy because the arms industry is largely state controlled and sales to Syria are largely unaffected by economic sanctions. These sales would be a more consistent and robust stream of revenue. As well as arms sales, many Russian companies have taken to investing in energy exploration and processing in Syria.<sup>20</sup> While this industry is significantly smaller than the arms sales, it does impact the future of the Russian export economy, which is so heavily dependent on energy.

The economic explanation falls short of describing Russian motivation in these conflicts because of the choices made in the Georgian War and Ukraine crisis. In the 2008 war with Georgia, Russian forces specifically targeted their Georgian counterparts instead of economic and political infrastructure. Russian troops move against Georgian military installations and

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<sup>18</sup> Pieter Wezeman, *SIPRI YEARBOOK 2013: Armaments, Disarmaments and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 269.

<sup>19</sup> Dmitry Gorenburg, "Why Russia supports repressive regimes in Syria and the Middle East," PONARS Eurasia, June 2012, (accessed March 1, 2016) <https://www.gwu.edu/~ieresgwu/assets/docs/ponars/pepm198.pdf>; Thomas Grove, "Insight: Syria pays for Russian Weapons to Boost Ties with Moscow," Reuters, August 28, 2013. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-russia-arms-insight-idUSBRE97S0WW20130829> (Accessed March 1, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Gorenburg, "Why Russia supports repressive regimes in Syria and the Middle East".

forces instead of to the pipelines.<sup>21</sup> After the short conflict, the ceasefire accepted by Russia did not forward the agenda of protecting these pipelines either instead it did the opposite and left the pipelines in the same position as they were at the start of the conflict.

In Ukraine, a similar narrative is at work concerning Russian energy exports and the pipelines that carry them. If the security of the Russian pipelines was to be ensured in 2014, larger scale military action would be required. Russian forces quickly secured Crimea and combatted Ukrainian forces in Eastern Ukraine, but a large scale effort to physically secure the pipelines did not occur. Instead the greatest action was centered on Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. The objective of the conflict appears to be in Crimea which was taken and annexed by Russia during this time. Sevastopol was this objective. While a part of the regional economy, Sevastopol possesses greater military value. The economic explanation is a less compelling theory when one considers the actions taken by Russian forces on the ground in each conflict.

The final group of explanations is the historical explanations. Proponents of a historical explanation for Russia's actions look to the relationships built between the belligerent states dating back to Imperial Russia. Ukrainian history is entwined with Russian history and the two states and peoples have been closely linked through the history of Imperial Russia, the Soviet Union, and currently as independent states. Russia has historically dominated this relationship, which kept Ukraine in a subservient role in the Russian sphere of influence. Russian leaders cannot ignore the actions taken by an independent Ukraine, especially if it is a move to leave the Russian sphere of influence.<sup>22</sup> Putin has no desire to see a fully sovereign and independent

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<sup>21</sup> Cohen and Hamilton "The Russian Military and the Georgia War: Lessons and Implications" Strategic Studies Institute.

<sup>22</sup> Polina Sinovets, "Why did the Bear Become so Belligerent?: The Meaning of Ukraine for Russia," PONARS Eurasia, March 3, 2015, (Accessed March 15, 2016) <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/article/why-did-bear-become-so-belligerent-meaning-ukraine-russia>

Ukraine thrive outside of his sphere of influence and has taken action to ensure that Ukraine cannot enter another state's orbit. In 2014, when Ukraine appeared to be radically moving away from Russia after Yanukovich was ousted, this historical dynamic and controlling influence was threatened. Russia asserted military dominance by seizing the Crimean peninsula and fomenting separatism in Eastern Ukraine.

A similar narrative can be told for the 2008 Georgian war because the relationship between Georgia and Russia extends to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and even then it was a strained relationship marked by Russian dominance. Russia dominated Georgia during this time and through the twentieth-century when it was a Soviet Republic.<sup>23</sup> In the 1990s, Russia was reluctant to accept the sovereignty and independence of Georgia when it backed the separatists in South Ossetia and Abkhazia during their respective wars for autonomy. In 2008, if the discussion of Georgian admission to NATO or Georgian President Saakashvili's rhetoric bore fruit, this would have severed Georgia from the Russian sphere of influence. Russia moved upon this possible weakness and spoiled Saakashvili's hopes of leaving Russian orbit and joining the West.

The historical explanation for action cannot account for the intervention in Syria. This explanation is founded upon the notion that there is historical pressure placed on the relationships between Russia and Georgian and Russia and Ukraine. These pressures do not exist in anywhere near the same capacity in the relationship between Russia and Syria. The connection between Moscow and Damascus is only forty years old and while the relationship has favored Russian interests, it has not been an imperial history as with Georgia and Ukraine. The historical connection between Russia and Syria is too weak to account for the intervention in the civil war.

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<sup>23</sup> Shermanna, Peter and Matthew Sussex. "The Roots of Russian Conduct." *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 20, no.2 (June 2009): 256.

All of the alternative explanations fail to provide comprehensive explanations that can address the breadth of Russian military conflicts from 2008 to 2016. While these explanations can provide a narrative as to why Russia acted in one or two of the cases, none effectively inform on why Russia acted in all of them. They provide snapshots of Russian involvement that are focused only on one or two conflicts. This focus fails to provide larger scale explanation of why Russia acts in these conflicts and without this broader explanatory power they lack predictive power. Policy makers need explanations that can cover the range of military actions undertaken by Russia to provide the most unified understanding of Russian motivations. This thesis provides a more complete explanation of why Russia engaged in Georgia, Crimea, and Syria.

## Theory

Russian foreign policy in the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean is based on the basic ideas of the geopolitical approach to foreign policy. The regional level of this policy is centered on military dominance of Russia over all contenders in the Black Sea. Military dominance in the Black Sea region entails that there is no force based in or native to states of the Black Sea littoral that can challenge the force that Russia can bring to bear on the region. The Black Sea Fleet is the most powerful naval force in the region and the Russian army and air force far outstrips its regional neighbors. This dominance in hard power allows Russia to conduct its regional relations from a place of military strength and with the implied threat of overwhelming force being brought to bear like in the Georgian war in 2008.

In the eastern Mediterranean, Russia does not have the same military dominance as in the Black Sea but it has made moves during the Syrian Civil War to extend that military influence. Russia is able to extend this influence into the region because of its privileged position with the

regime in Syria and its intervention on its behalf. Through the expansion of this influence in Syria, Russia is making further inroads into the Middle East, a region of utmost importance to any major power because of natural resources extracted there.

Central to this policy of dominance and expansion of influence are the military bases used by Russia in Abkhazia, Crimea, and Syria. Military dominance cannot be achieved without a substantial military presence that can be used against rival states. This military presence lies in Gudauta, Sevastopol, and Tartus. These bases offer strategic value that advance this policy of dominance. Gudauta entrenches the independence of Abkhazia from Georgia and strengthens Abkhazia's ability to repel Georgian attempts and unification. Sevastopol is the home of the Black Sea Fleet as well as base to 20,000 Russian troops. This is the heart of the Russian policy in the region without which no serious military policy can occur. Finally, Tartus is the base that opens up Syria and the rest of the Middle East to Russian influence. While small, Tartus is the only base Russia has in the Mediterranean and in the Middle East. These bases have been protected over the last eight years through military conflicts due to their significance to this policy.

## CHAPTER 2: CASES

In this chapter I analyze the three cases central to my argument and how they demonstrate the Russian emphasis on military bases as the anchors of its foreign policy in the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean. I outline the history of these bases and conflicts surrounding them from the fall of the Soviet Union until their respective conflicts ended. The relationships between Georgia, Ukraine, and Russia predate the current states that rule these territories, but for the purposes of this thesis I look at their history during the last three decades because the conditions relevant to the conflicts arose during this period. I establish the strategic importance of each of the bases in each case and how they tie into the Russian strategy in the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean.

### Georgia

The Georgia case is concerned with the former Soviet air base at Gudauta in Abkhazia, and the new bases established after the Georgian defeat in the 2008 war. The breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia have been major frustrations for the Georgian government since its independence. Russia's support of the republics secured the Russian military's control of the Gudauta base and created a *casus belli* in 2008 when Georgia moved against South Ossetia. The resulting war secured *de facto* independence for the republics and several new bases for the Russian military.<sup>24</sup> In Abkhazia, Russia was granted access to expand the base near Gudauta on

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<sup>24</sup> Nikolai Sokov, "The Withdrawal of Russian Military Bases From Georgia: Not Solving Anything," PONARS, June 2005, (accessed March 21, 2016) [https://www.gwu.edu/~ieresgwu/assets/docs/ponars/pm\\_0363.pdf](https://www.gwu.edu/~ieresgwu/assets/docs/ponars/pm_0363.pdf)

the Black Sea coast and to reclaim the harbor at Ochamchira.<sup>25</sup> In South Ossetia, Russia gained access to a new army base north of the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali as well as border outposts near the capital.

The new bases allowed for even greater Russian leverage against Georgia and secured the independent position of the republics. Russian expansion of Gudauta and the new access to Ochamchira cemented Russian military dominance over the eastern coast of the Black Sea. By reinforcing Abkhazia and expanding Gudauta, Russia further solidified its denial of Georgian access to the Black Sea coast. Georgia claims control over the Abkhazian region, which would substantially increase Georgian access to the Black Sea if it did control Abkhazia. The Georgian navy, while inferior compared to the Russian presence in the Black Sea, would be bolstered by control of Abkhazia and thus threaten Russian dominance by the expansion of regional naval competition.

The harbor at Ochamchira currently is without significant forces based there because construction and reclamation of the harbor has been a slow process. Once this process is finished, Russia will be able to move a small squadron from the Black Sea Fleet there.<sup>26</sup> Basing this squadron there would be a further reinforcement of Abkhazia and a denial of Georgian access to the Black Sea similar to the expansion and deployment of troops to Gudauta. The bases in Abkhazia and South Ossetia house over 7,000 active Russian soldiers. Their presence makes any attack against the republics precarious because these units would be under Georgian fire and offer Russia justification to repeat the invasion of 2008. Their presence limits the options

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<sup>25</sup> Nikolai Poroskov, "The Ochamchira-Gudauta Military District," *The Current Digest of the Russian Press* 61, no.4 (January 2009): 10.

<sup>26</sup> Poroskov, "The Ochamchira-Gudauta Military District," 10.

Georgia can take to pursue its policy of unification because after 2008, it cannot hope to contend with Russia militarily.

When Georgia gained independence at the end of 1991, two regions, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, declared their independence from Georgia and were backed by the Russian Federation. The situations in South Ossetia and Abkhazia descended into violence with the Georgian state. The first of the conflicts was South Ossetia fighting for independence in 1991-1992 followed by Abkhazia in 1993-1994. Russia gained tremendously by weakening its new southern neighbor by supporting the separatists. These rebels received arms and training from the Russian military, which empowered them to repel Georgian attempts to militarily unify the regions.<sup>27</sup> Georgia was unable to gain sovereign control over its territory leaving it weaker to Russian influence. Russian success in supporting the breakaway republics proved crucial in the 2000s because Putin used them as instruments to influence and affect Georgia. Influence in Georgia is vital to Russia's claims to being a major power because a small neighbor such as Georgia should not be able to confound a major power. Concurrently with these conflicts, Russia and Georgia settled the future of former Soviet forces and bases in Georgia.

Russia retained control of bases in Georgia after its formation based on old Soviet military bases at Vaziani, Batumi, and Akhalkalaki. These bases were ceded by the Yeltsin regime in a plan created in 1999 at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe summit in Istanbul.<sup>28</sup> The agreement called for removal of Russian forces from bases in Georgian territory that Georgia controlled by 2001. This agreement was one of the final forms of military contraction under Yeltsin that Putin looked to reverse during his presidency, but the

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<sup>27</sup> Roy Allison, "Russia Resurgent? Moscow's Campaign to 'Coerce Georgia to Peace'," *International Affairs* 86, no.6 (2008): 1146.

<sup>28</sup> "Istanbul Document 1999," OSCE, January 2000, (Accessed March 16, 2016), <http://www.osce.org/mc/39569?download=true>

agreement was carried out in a full but delayed manner by 2006.<sup>29</sup> This agreement alongside political developments in Georgia made it difficult for Putin to maintain full influence over his southern neighbor.

In 2003, Georgia underwent the Rose Revolution, which brought Mikhail Saakashvili to power, who favored Western powers.<sup>30</sup> In 2008, President George W. Bush openly supported a plan for Georgian membership in NATO and Saakashvili jumped at this support. This idea was problematic and undesired by Russian policy makers because Georgian entrance to NATO would fully remove Georgia from Russian influence and provide Georgia an opening to military influence the region with the backing of the alliance. At the time, the motion to extend the expansion process to Georgia failed to pass but the idea lingered as well as American support for it. The loss of influence and possible loss of control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia would be an unacceptable loss for Russian policy makers.

For Russia, these republics are linked in their fate, because if Georgia takes control over one of the republics, the other's position is weakened with a stronger and emboldened Georgia. The remaining republic would become the sole fixation of Georgian irredentism. Abkhazia offers Russia the more important strategic position with its control of the Black Sea Coast and the Russian base at Gudauta. If Georgia joined NATO, the bases in the republics would be threatened by the possibility of Georgian irredentism with NATO support. As well as the bases, the ability to influence the future development of Georgia would be lost to Russia. A similar situation occurred in Eastern Europe when former eastern-bloc states joined western organizations removing them from Russian orbit.

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<sup>29</sup> Nikolai Sokov, "The Withdrawal of Russian Military Bases From Georgia: Not Solving Anything," PONARS Policy Memo 363, June 2005, (accessed June 2, 2016), [http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/pm\\_0363.pdf](http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/pm_0363.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Mearsheimer, "Why The Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault."

The 2008 Russo-Georgian war was a quick and decisive affair that ended in favor of the separatist republics and Russia. During the diplomatic crisis that led to the war, Russia goaded Georgian aggression by supporting the breakaway republics politically and economically. Russia began to cement the de facto independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia forcing Georgia to act to extend its control over South Ossetia.<sup>31</sup> In August 2008, Georgian forces began shelling Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, in order to prepare for an assault. In response, Russia prepared and executed an overwhelming invasion of Georgia. This invasion pushed to the city of Gori in central Georgia as well as pushed out from Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

After five days of fighting, Georgian forces were repelled from South Ossetia and Russia troops occupied several cities while ceaselessly harassing the Georgian military. French president Nicolas Sarkozy brokered the cease-fire and peace plan between the belligerent parties that required all forces return to borders established prior to the outbreak of war.<sup>32</sup> This settlement was signed by all parties within a month and required that all Georgian and Russian forces return to their pre-war positions. Russian forces did not withdraw in the manner described by the ceasefire as they continued to harass Georgian troops in the north before a second ceasefire had to be signed.<sup>33</sup> This result benefitted the breakaway republics, which Russia then recognized as sovereign states. Russia claimed to have bilateral relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which allowed for leasing of military bases to Russia.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Allison, "Russia Resurgent?," 1146-1147.

<sup>32</sup> Tomáš Hoch, Emil Souleimanov, and Tomáš Baranec, "Russia's Role in the Official Peace Process in South Ossetia," *Bulletin of Geography* 23, (2014): 59

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Allison, "Russia Resurgent?," 1147.

Under the arbitrated agreement, Russia was allowed to station over three thousand troops in both of the republics.<sup>35</sup> Active Russian military in these republics provides Russia with an immense amount of power over Georgia because these troops are only tied to the will of Moscow. While three thousand troops may not appear to be an imposing force against that of the whole Georgian state, the combined six thousand troops would compare to the roughly 37,000 military personnel in the Georgian armed forces, though this number is representative of all Georgian forces, in the 2008 war far fewer were mobilized.<sup>36</sup> The Georgian failure to quickly seize South Ossetia demonstrated the inability of Georgian forces to end the separatism in these republics in one stroke. If the territories became reinforced, as they have, the Georgians would be unable to unilaterally seize them with the military before a Russian military response.<sup>37</sup> While the Russian military can devastate the Georgian military at will stronger bases in the republics halt the possibility of a Georgian surprise attack to force the issue of unifying the republics with itself. In case of such an attack, the Russian forces will inevitably come under Georgian fire due to their positions near the capital. In this scenario, Russians being in harms way is a more than sufficient cause for Russian retaliation and defense. The mere presence of Russian soldiers deters further Georgian attempts to military move against the republics.

If South Ossetia fell to Georgia, Russia would have lost an ally against Georgia and the possibility of basing military units there. With the fall of South Ossetia the position of Abkhazia becomes questionable and far more tenuous. Russian objectives in and against Georgia presuppose Russian dominated forces in both breakaway republics. If these allies and base were

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<sup>35</sup> Reuters, “Russia signs deal to build military base in Abkhazia,” *Reuters* <http://in.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-46239320100217> (Accessed March 1, 2016).

<sup>36</sup> Cohen and Hamilton “The Russian Military and the Georgia War: Lessons and Implications” Strategic Studies Institute.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

lost, Russian policy toward Georgia would be far more constrained, due to a lack of leverage from the de facto independence of the republics and the Russian units defending them.

Protecting these military bases and gaining new ones has forwarded Russian policy in the region and maintained military dominance. The base at Gudauta was included in the 1999 Istanbul document, in which Russia agreed to evacuate the base by 2001 but did not do so citing impediments to the evacuation.<sup>38</sup> These impediments were likely weak or fictitious in order to remain in control of the base. The agreement lacked enforcement for evacuating this base because it was in Abkhaz controlled territory instead of Georgian territory like the other bases. If Abkhazia fell to Georgia and Russia remained in control of the Gudauta air base, it is likely that Russia would be pressured by the other states that agreed to the Istanbul document to finally relinquish that base since it would be in Georgian territory fully. Because of the strategic benefits of this base, Russia will attempt to keep this situation from coming to pass.

Gudauta and the base near Tskhinvali offer Russia guaranteed superiority against the Georgian military in the event of another conflict. One can use the results of the 2008 war to understand the strength of the Russian garrisons in Abkhazia and South Ossetia against the Georgian military. There are between 6,000 and 7,000 ground troops based in the bases in the breakaway republics. During the 2008 war, Georgia mobilized between 12,000 and 14,000 troops to move against the republics.<sup>39</sup> Considering Russian troops alone, they are nearly 50 percent of the size of the Georgian troops available to engage in another war. What allows the

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<sup>38</sup> “Russia Clings Tooth and Nail to Gudauta Base” James Town Foundation, May 18, 2001, (Accessed April 10, 2016)  
[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=23120&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=215&no\\_cache=1#.Vw-6\\_hMrKRt](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=23120&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=215&no_cache=1#.Vw-6_hMrKRt)

<sup>39</sup> Cohen and Hamilton “The Russian Military and the Georgia War: Lessons and Implications” Strategic Studies Institute.

Russian forces to even the balance of power being outnumbered 2:1 is the easy air superiority enjoyed by Russian forces.

During the 2008 war, the Georgian air command had eight SU-25 “Frogfoot” close air-support fighters and 25 helicopters to counter the Russian defense.<sup>40</sup> This air force was grounded by the Georgian military command after the first day of hostilities due to the air superiority of the Russian forces. After the war, Russia reinforced its garrisons in Abkhazian and South Ossetia. These garrisons are now backed by active Russian military bases in case of threat. At the Gudauta base alone, Russia has deployed twenty aircraft permanently of which twelve are attack fighters specifically, SU-27s “Flanker” and SU-35s “Flanker-E”.<sup>41</sup> These fighters outperform the Georgian air force because of their design and usage as air superiority fighters.

As well as moving aircraft to support the ground troops in the republics, Russia has spent over \$400 million USD reinforcing the static defense and defense infrastructure of their bases and the republics. For instance, S-300 anti-air missile defense systems have been moved to Gudauta and bases in South Ossetia.<sup>42</sup> These defense systems are capable of nullifying the threat of Georgian airstrikes and air support in the event of another conflict. In the event of a second conflict, the bases Russia acquired in 2008 are most likely capable of protecting themselves and the republics from any Georgian aggression. Moscow would likely respond with another invasion but there is little hope for a Georgian advance to quickly seize Abkhazia and South Ossetia before a Russian response.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Cohen, Ariel. “Georgia Russia Plans Three Military Bases in Abkhazia.” Eurasianet. February 5, 2009. (Accessed March 18, 2016). <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav020609g.shtml>

<sup>42</sup> Vladimir Socor, “Russia Deploys S-300 Air Defense System in Abkhazia,” The Jamestown Foundation, August 11, 2010, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=36734&no\\_cache=1#.VvQuNhIrKR4](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=36734&no_cache=1#.VvQuNhIrKR4) (Accessed March 1, 2016).

The base at Gudauta and the other bases throughout the republics add power to the de facto independence enjoyed by Abkhazia and South Ossetia as physical manifestations of Russians support. Because of Russia's control of these bases the situation in these republics is unlikely to change and will leave Georgia in a weakened state. The independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia directly boosts Russian power and influence over Georgia. A weakened Georgia is a boon for Russia, because a weak Georgia ensures Russian military dominance over its neighbor and continued uncontested control over the eastern Black Sea littoral. This dominance over Georgia helps to pacify Russia's "backyard" and strengthen its claim to being an influential global power.

## Crimea

The Crimea case revolves around the naval base and home of the Black Sea Fleet: Sevastopol. The base there was at the center of Russia-Ukraine relations during the 1990s when Yeltsin fought to maintain a lease and control over the port. The base remained a key component of Ukrainian politics after the Orange Revolution up through the Ukraine Crisis in 2014. This base is vital to the Russian navy and I argue that the fear of losing it prompted Russian action to seize the Crimean peninsula and the base. Russian foreign policy in the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean pivot around the Black Sea Fleet and Sevastopol is the only Black Sea port, which can house the fleet. This fleet strengthens Russian influence over Ukraine as a political tool and symbol of Russian military superiority. With the base under Russian control today, the Black Sea

Fleet is featured even more prominently in Russian military policy under the new maritime policy and has been used in the intervention in Syria.<sup>43</sup>

When Ukraine became independent, newly elected president Leonid Kravchuk claimed all former Soviet military forces and hardware in Ukraine for the Ukrainian state.<sup>44</sup> This claim to the entirety of forces in Ukraine would deprive the Russian military of Sevastopol, a fixture of the Russian military for over a century. In response, Russia claimed a right to the administration and ownership of the Crimean peninsula. After four years of growing tensions and disagreements between Ukraine and Russia, Yeltsin and Kravchuk agreed to split the armed forces in Ukraine. The agreement granted Ukraine a large portion of the land forces and Russia gained a large portion of the Black Sea Fleet based at Sevastopol. The agreement to divide the Soviet armed forces left in Ukraine allowed for the Russians to lease Sevastopol and the necessary facilities to maintain the fleet until 2017.<sup>45</sup> This agreement left Russia in control of the port even though the fleet deteriorated in the port. Even with a deteriorating fleet, the agreement guaranteed a long-term Russian presence on the Black Sea and in Ukraine. This base proved to be substantial leverage against the Ukrainian government in the 1990s and Putin continued to use it as a political tool during his terms as president and prime minister.

In 2008, president Viktor Yushchenko declared that Ukraine would not renew the lease with Russia in 2017 in order to orient Ukraine closer to the West.<sup>46</sup> There was discussion and hope among policy makers in the west and in the Ukrainian government that wanted Ukraine to

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<sup>43</sup> Vladimir Shcherbakov, "Arctic to Antarctic: Russia's New Maritime Doctrine," *Russia & India Report*, July 31, 2015, (Accessed March 20, 2016) [https://in.rbth.com/economics/2015/07/31/arctic\\_to\\_antarctic\\_russias\\_new\\_maritime\\_doctrine\\_44521](https://in.rbth.com/economics/2015/07/31/arctic_to_antarctic_russias_new_maritime_doctrine_44521)

<sup>44</sup> Taras Kuzio, *Ukrainian Security Policy* (Westport: Praeger, 1995), 66-67.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Deborah Sanders, "Ukraine's Maritime Power in the Black Sea – A Terminal Decline?," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 25, (2012): 18.

join NATO in the next round of enlargement. At the same Summit in Bucharest where the possibility of Georgia joining NATO was discussed, the potential for Ukraine to join NATO was covered as well. Like Georgia, Ukraine received some support but the process for joining NATO did not start. Yanukovych came to power in 2010 and he did not have the same aversion to Russia that his predecessor did. He did not seek NATO membership for Ukraine, instead choosing to maintain the position as a partner to the alliance.

Shortly after being elected, Yanukovych began a renegotiation of the lease of Sevastopol's facilities with Russia to extend it beyond the 2017 end date. In exchange for a favorable price for natural gas, Yanukovych negotiated an extension of the lease for 30 more years thus securing the home of the Black Sea Fleet until 2047.<sup>47</sup> In February 2014, Yanukovych was forced to flee the country because of the mass protest against him and the possible outbreak of violence. When he fled, a new regime began to form after that ran counter to Yanukovych's willingness to work with Russia. In response, Russia used its armed forces to secure government centers and military installations in Crimea. This action secured Sevastopol and the berth of the Black Sea Fleet, which was the prime objective of the Russian action.

Sevastopol is the most important port available to the Russian navy in the Black Sea. The ability to project power in the region is in large part due to the dominance of the Black Sea Fleet over its regional neighbors.<sup>48</sup> Without Sevastopol, much of the fleet would have to be redirected to other regions or be mothballed thus limiting Russia's ability to act in the Black Sea. Simply put, the Black Sea Fleet cannot be moved to any other port in the Black Sea making it

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<sup>47</sup> Nilsson, "Russian Policy Concerning the Black Sea Fleet," 1162-1163.

<sup>48</sup> Nilsson, "Russian Policy Concerning the Black Sea Fleet," 1164.

completely dependent on control of the facilities at Sevastopol.<sup>49</sup> Other Russian ports on the Black Sea cannot accommodate the deep drafts of the fleet and are too small to house the whole fleet together. The fleet itself serves several purposes politically and militarily.

Politically, the fleet is an insurance policy against the government of Ukraine moving too far away from Russian influence. Ukrainian leaders are constrained in their ability to directly challenge Russia on the base at Sevastopol or Russian foreign policy objectives. Specifically, the base made it difficult for Ukraine to control its own territorial waters during the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia when it attempted to stop the return of the Black Sea Fleet detachment that fought on the Abkhazian coast.<sup>50</sup> Ukraine could not exercise its sovereignty fully in this situation. In the 1990s, the fleet and Sevastopol were used as bargaining chips to settle disputes between Russia and Ukraine. Even though during this time, the fleet was deteriorating rapidly its existence provided Russia with leverage in negotiations.<sup>51</sup> It was not until the rise of Vladimir Putin that the fleet became a threatening military force again. He pushed early in his first term to modernize the fleet and bring it back to its former level of operations. After 2006, he began a massive push by the Russian state to modernize the military with large sums of money and technology being used specifically for the Black Sea Fleet.<sup>52</sup> A modernized fleet cements uncontested military dominance of the Black Sea by any other nation with a coast on the sea due to its size and technological advantage over other regional militaries.

Militarily, in the region only the Turkish navy can attempt to challenge the Black Sea Fleet and to do that, Turkey would have to move a large portion of its fleet from the Eastern

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<sup>49</sup> William Varettoni, "Crimea's Overlooked Instability," *The Washington Quarterly* 34, no.3 (Summer 2011): 90-91.

<sup>50</sup> Nilsson, "Russian Policy Concerning the Black Sea Fleet," 1159.

<sup>51</sup> Kuzio, *Ukrainian Security Policy*, 96-97.

<sup>52</sup> Marten, "Russian Military Modernization," October 11, 2015.

Mediterranean due to the smaller size of its fleet overall. The Black Sea Fleet quickly dispatched the Georgian navy during the 2008 war asserting full naval dominance when it was tasked with shelling positions along the Georgian coastline and providing support for marine attacks on the coast.<sup>53</sup> The easy dominance of the Black Sea Fleet over the Georgian navy demonstrated the importance of the fleet at Sevastopol in terms of ability to assert power in the region. If the Georgian navy were allowed to operate off the coast of Abkhazia, likely Abkhazia would have suffered more during the conflict and hampered Russian operations on the coast.

A secondary outcome of the Russian military action in Crimea was spoiling Ukraine for the West. With Russian controlled and eventually Russian annexed Crimea, Ukraine would not be admitted to western defensive structures.<sup>54</sup> With a new government forming after the ouster of Yanukovich, anything could happen in the new Ukrainian government. What was visible to any viewer was that the government that formed was anti-Russian and Western oriented.

If Ukraine sought NATO membership in the future, Russia's presence in Sevastopol would be ostensibly lost. This threat is greater than an existential threat from NATO to Russia because since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russian bases abroad have contracted partially due to western negotiation and arbitration such as in the Istanbul document. The threat of losing Sevastopol to diplomacy with the west was a very real threat to Russian power. This base is crucial to the Russian military and the loss of it, let alone it falling into another state or alliance's hands is unthinkable. The loss of the fleet's homeport would force the dispersing of the fleet to other regions and across the Black Sea into several smaller ports.

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<sup>53</sup>Varettoni, "Crimea's Overlooked Instability," 90-91.

<sup>54</sup> Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics Second Edition* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012), 237.

Sevastopol's size and continued modernization allow Russia to project power throughout the Black Sea littoral. Outside of the fleet, the personnel and military assets based in Sevastopol have important bearing on the region. Prior to the Ukrainian conflict, Russia based 20,000 military personnel in Sevastopol.<sup>55</sup> This is a significant force compared to the other militaries in the region. Alongside the personnel are land-based cruise missiles that can easily cover the area of the Black Sea to strike at any target. Russian cruise missiles have been used in the intervention in Syria from greater distances than cruise missiles would have to cover from Sevastopol to Black Sea targets. These missiles can be fitted with conventional explosive warheads or nuclear warheads.<sup>56</sup> While the reality of the need to use the fleet, personnel, or missiles against another state in the region is remote, the capability to do so is central to Russian power projection and posturing. Sevastopol is one of the most important bases in the Russian Federation with the capabilities outline above and it has gained in prominence through the new maritime policy announced in July of 2015.

The new maritime policy for the Russian naval forces has reinforced the position and importance of Sevastopol in Russian strategic thinking. The new policy emphasizes having a permanent Russian naval presence in the Mediterranean Sea, which would be started by the Black Sea Fleet.<sup>57</sup> The Black Sea fleet would generate the detachments for Mediterranean patrols, similar to what it has done during the intervention in Syria. In this doctrine as well as the use of the Black Sea fleet in the Mediterranean, swift integration of Crimea into Russian political and economic structures is planned. Crimea will become a fully integrated part of the Russian

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<sup>55</sup> Nilsson, "Russian Policy Concerning the Black Sea Fleet," 1159.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> "Russia Updates Maritime Doctrine, Criticizing NATO Expansion," *Foreign Policy News*; "Arctic to Antarctic: Russia's New Maritime Doctrine," *Russia & India Report*

Federation with updates to its infrastructure and ties to the Russian economy.<sup>58</sup> This change in maritime policy aids in demonstrating the strategic importance of the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean naval assets. They will continue to grow in importance in the region while this doctrine is in effect which, with its stated goals spanning more than a decade, will be for the foreseeable future.<sup>59</sup>

The new maritime doctrine highlights the need to expand the Russian fleets around the world but specifically it calls for enlargement of the Black Sea Fleet to carry out its new directive and the shipyards in Sevastopol are key to that goal. A part of the Sevastopol facilities is the Sevastopol shipyards that are completely under Russian control now and are no longer divided between Ukraine and Russia. This shipyard has been active since Putin announced in 2006 his modernization plan for the military.<sup>60</sup> The expansion of the fleet appears imminent under this maritime policy, which would strengthen the Russian presence in the Black Sea but also increase the reliance upon Sevastopol. The fleet as it is can only be anchored there and if the fleet is expanded Sevastopol only increases in importance. This new policy would be difficult to carry out if Ukraine controlled the port because the shipbuilding facilities were not fully under Russian control and investment in the fleet would be dangerous if the base could be lost.

The Russian annexation of Crimea at its heart is a defense of Russian strategic interests in Sevastopol making it the central objective of this operation. At that time, the Black Sea fleet had already proven itself during the 2008 Georgian war and during the occupation of the Crimean peninsula. The fleet offered a powerful Russian presence anywhere on the Black Sea with no

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<sup>58</sup> Jess McHugh, "Putin Eliminates Ministry of Crimea, Region Fully Integrated Into Russia, Russian Leaders Say," July, 15, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.com/putin-eliminates-ministry-crimea-region-fully-integrated-russia-russian-leaders-say-2009463> (accessed March 1, 2016).

<sup>59</sup> Shcherbakov, "Arctic to Antarctic: Russia's New Maritime Doctrine,".

<sup>60</sup> Luis Simon, "Assessing NATO's Eastern European 'Flank'," *Strategic Studies Institute* (2014): 75.

other entities being able to challenge it. The movement of forces to Crimea and new maritime doctrine has added greater emphasis on the naval base. This base has become integral to Russian strategic decision-making and is one of the most important bases in the whole Russian Federation. Russia cannot lose this base and hope to maintain the power projection capabilities that are currently enjoyed in the region and in the Mediterranean Sea.

## Syria

The case of the intervention in Syria revolves around the use of the Tartus facility and the construction of the new Khemeim air base near Latakia. These bases bring Russian material, imports, and influence directly into Syria, a state that is heavily involved in the regional politics of the Middle East. Russia needs to be involved in the Middle East and be able to extend influence and control to this region in order to be considered a serious player on the international stage. Tartus has been integral for naval operations in the intervention and Khemeimim airbase has been the heart of the Russian air sorties. The future of the Tartus facility would be in danger if Assad fell to any of the forces arrayed against him, but the Russian intervention has appeared to stave off that danger, for the present. The air base has been a platform from which to demonstrate state of the art military assets and the power that the Russian military can wield. It appears that the Russian military presence in Syria will become permanent after Putin's March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016 announcement that Russian forces would begin a withdrawal from Syria but would remain in Tartus and Khemeimim.

Russia's involvement with Syria predates the current crisis by over four decades when the relationship was between the Soviet Union and Syria under Hafez al-Assad. Hafez al-Assad, father to current leader Bashar al-Assad, signed an agreement of friendship and a basing

agreement with the Soviet Union upon his accession to the presidency in 1971. Assad needed a patron in a region torn between the two superpowers.<sup>61</sup> The Ba'athist ideology fit well with the Soviet ideology during a time when ideology was still an important factor in international relations. Assad flew to Moscow to sign the agreement of friendship upon succession and solidify his ties with the Soviet Union in exchange for a naval facility. The base that came from the agreement was the naval facility at Tartus.

Tartus itself is a small naval facility that can refuel, supply, and refit up to three ships at a time. It can service most Russian ships with the exception of extended work on the sole aircraft carrier.<sup>62</sup> It was designed to be one outpost among a dozen more in the world, but today it is the last of its kind. Russian patrols can continue for longer periods of time in the eastern Mediterranean thanks to the Tartus facility. The facility is currently too shallow to house a large detachment of a fleet and it lacks the appropriate infrastructure to serve as a command and control center for Russian naval operations.<sup>63</sup> Its importance is less than that of Sevastopol in tactical thinking, but it is paramount in its region when one considers it is Russia's only non-NATO base in the Mediterranean where refueling and refitting can be done.

Tartus became a fixture of the Soviet global outlook because it was one of a dozen of small naval facilities to supply and refuel the Soviet Navy in its global operations.<sup>64</sup> In exchange for Soviet naval basing at Tartus, Syria received large amounts of discounted arms sales and essentially had its security subsidized by the Soviet Union. Alongside the arms deals, the Soviets

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<sup>61</sup> Aghayev and Katman, "Historical Background and the Present State of Russian-Syrian Relations," 2067.

<sup>62</sup> Christopher Harmer, "Russian Naval Base Tartus," *Backgrounder for Institute of War* (2012): 3-4.

<sup>63</sup> Harmer, "Russian Naval Base Tartus," 3.

<sup>64</sup> Aghayev and Katman, "Historical Background and the Present State of Russian-Syrian Relations," 2067.

added a clause to the agreement of friendship, which served as guarantee of Syrian security.<sup>65</sup>

Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, this relationship worked well for Assad because a patron subsidized Syrian security and the port leased to that patron provided imported goods and arms for his regime. This relationship weakened with the collapse of the Soviet Union but was still minimally maintained.

When the Russian Federation formed, Syria's position as a Soviet partner changed dramatically. The ideology, which undergirded the relationship between Moscow and Damascus, lost its value with the rise of the Russian Federation under Yeltsin.<sup>66</sup> Syria provided nothing to the new state that suffered from economic woes and an uncertain future and place in the world. Syria was not considered integral to Russian foreign policy in the 1990s and its subsidies disappeared. Russia remained in control of Tartus during this period, but it was used to little effect due to the lack of funding and mission for the Russian navy.<sup>67</sup> Trade still arrived through the port, but the port offered little tactical value to a state that was not valuing international missions and power projection as much as its predecessor. Relations between Damascus and Moscow took a dramatic turn in 2000.

The relationship between Russia and Syria was reinvigorated after the rise of Vladimir Putin to the presidency in 2000. Contemporaneously with Putin's rise to power, Hafez al-Assad died and his son Bashar became president. Putin restarted direct aid to Syria, showing a renewed interest in Syria and foreign policy in the region. Being an oil producing state and geographically positioned to influence the region, Syria took on a greater importance to the Putin regime which

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<sup>65</sup> Harmer, "Russian Naval Base Tartus," 3.

<sup>66</sup> Aghayev and Katman, "Historical Background and the Present State of Russian-Syrian Relations," 2067-2068.

<sup>67</sup> Harmer, "Russian Naval Base Tartus," 3.

looked outward in its policy more than his predecessor's.<sup>68</sup> With terrorism being a major point of Russian policy under Putin, Assad became an ally against extremism. This relationship continued to strengthen until the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011.

With the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011, Russia has significantly increased naval traffic through Tartus. Specifically, a fleet broke off from the Black Sea Fleet in 2011 through 2012 led by the Russian flagship and sole aircraft carrier, *Kuznetsov*, and provided a show of force by resupplying at Tartus.<sup>69</sup> Putin announced that with modernization efforts for the Russian navy that Tartus would be updated as well starting in 2011 with the announcement of an intention to dredge the facility to allow larger ships to dock and to expand it to accommodate more ships.<sup>70</sup> When this update is completed, Tartus will be a full-fledged naval base in the Middle East offering Russia greater ability to use its military as a tool of its policy of extending its influence deeper into the Middle East and Mediterranean.

At this time, Tartus remains a facility only but the Russian military has used it extensively during the course of the Syrian civil war. In 2013, patrols were strengthened in the Eastern Mediterranean despite Russian denials of intervention or future intervention in Syria. These patrols used Tartus as a resupply and refuel center. These increased patrols cost Russia a substantial amount of resources because the ships were broken off from the Black Sea Fleet, the Russian presence in the Black Sea was weakened, and the cost of extended patrols is quite high. These patrols continued for nearly two years before public talks about Russian intervention began in August 2015.

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<sup>68</sup> Aghayev and Katman, "Historical Background and the Present State of Russian-Syrian Relations," 2068.

<sup>69</sup> "Sea Alert: Russian Warships Head for Syria," RT, November 28, 2011, (Accessed March 1, 2016) <https://www.rt.com/news/russian-aircraft-carrier-syria-363/>

<sup>70</sup> Harmer, "Russian Naval Base at Tartus," 5.

With the start of public talks of Russian military aid to Syria concluding in August 2015, a new base near the port city of Latakia was made for Russian use. This new base, the Khmeimim air base, was leased by Assad's government to Russia to be used as a permanent base.<sup>71</sup> At the same time, a significant portion of the Black Sea Fleet was sent to the Syrian coast to officially drill near the city of Latakia. These ships most likely provided support and defense for the construction of the new airbase. Even if these ships were drilling under the official explanation from Moscow, they still provided ample defense to the new airbase.<sup>72</sup> All of these moves were made to strengthen Russian control of their naval facility and establish control over a new base that houses parts of the Russian air force and main battle tanks for the Russian army.

Part of the agreement to assist Assad in fighting his civil war, was the lease of the airfield near Latakia. During August and September, 2015 Russian soldiers and material arrived in Syria to expand this airbase and begin intervention actions in October. This base serves as the main base to launch the air campaign against the anti-government and terrorist forces.<sup>73</sup> The Russian government announced that a portion of the Russian air force would be diverted to this base for the intervention and the indefinite future.<sup>74</sup> The extent of the air campaign being tied to the air base shows affinity for the base because there were few others outside the Russian Federation from which to launch air strikes.

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<sup>71</sup> "Russian Air Base in Syria: RT Checks out Everyday Life at Latakia Airfield," RT, October 3, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/317528-latakia-russian-khmeimim-airbase/> (accessed October 3, 2015).

<sup>72</sup> "Russia's Syria Military Build-up is Self Protection – Kerry," BBC, September 23, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34329961> (accessed February 5, 2016).

<sup>73</sup> "Russian Air Base in Syria," RT.

<sup>74</sup> Roland Oliphant and Louisa Loveluck, "Russian Forces to Stay in Syria 'Indefinitely' under Deal with Assad," The Telegraph, January 16, 2016, (accessed February 5, 2016) <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/12102611/Russian-forces-to-stay-in-Syria-indefinitely-under-deal-with-Assad.html>

These two bases are strategically important in that they provide a larger number of options to the Russian military to carry out the current intervention and serve as a springboard for future operations. As witnessed during the Syrian civil war before the Russian intervention, Tartus allowed for larger and longer patrols to be sent from the Black Sea Fleet to the Eastern Mediterranean Sea.<sup>75</sup> The base helped maintain and supply the patrols. These patrols provide greater defense to Russian personnel and bases in Syria with radar and anti-air systems as well act as a show of force in a region where Russia is attempting to extend its influence again. The patrols created a shield against possible retaliation from air attack and land launched missiles. NATO as well as other states in the region closely monitored these patrols because of the military power they brought to bear in a region, where Russia contracted from during the 1990s. Some authors fear that Russia is capable of denying access by NATO states and other regional powers from accessing the coast of Syria, which directly influences the conflict in Cyprus.<sup>76</sup> The patrols would be a formidable force in the region if there were threat of air attack. The balance of power in the Eastern Mediterranean is shifting around Russian military entering the region.

Khmeimim airbase is the heart of the Russian intervention in Syria and without it the intervention would be far smaller and less impactful. Russia has shown the ability to use guided cruise missiles from distant naval vessels but these strikes are few and far between compared to air sorties which were numerous and constant during the height of the intervention.<sup>77</sup> With the Russian navy possessing only one aircraft carrier, a ground base is needed for a large-scale

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<sup>75</sup> Thomas Grove, "Russia Sending Warships to its Base in Syria," Reuters, November 28, 2011, (accessed April 10, 2016), <http://af.reuters.com/article/egyptNews/idAFL5E7MS1XT20111128?sp=true>; Nikolai Novichkov, "Russia's New Maritime Doctrine," Jane's Defense, August 11, 2015, (accessed April 10, 2016), <http://www.janes.com/article/53643/russia-s-new-maritime-doctrine>

<sup>76</sup> Jonathon Altman, "Russian A2/AD in the Eastern Mediterranean: A Growing Risk," *Naval War College Review* 69, no.1 (Winter 2016): 75.

<sup>77</sup> "Russian Cruise Missiles Hit ISIS Mediterranean and Caspian; 600 Killed in One Strike," RT <https://www.rt.com/news/322881-russia-cruise-missiles-isis/> (Accessed November 30, 2016).

intervention. The airbase can support almost all Russian aircraft including the large transports making it an important airbase abroad for the Russian Federation. These transports allow for the mass movement of personnel and supplies into the intervention but also opens a new Russian controlled route for arms and other supplies for the Assad regime. Through Tartus and Khemeimim, imports and arms can flow into Syria and throughout the region extending Russian power throughout this region. Alongside the transports are mixed role aircraft used for interception and ground operations.<sup>78</sup> This versatility allows Khemeim to be used for any number of types of operations in the future beyond the intervention. These aircraft are part of the current intervention in Syria but like the naval patrols; show a projection of Russian power and influence. The hardware and munitions being used are a far cry from the withering Russian military of the 1990s. The airstrikes show a coordinated and effective air capability which few states in the region can challenge.

In Khemeimim, there is a contingent of active army forces in the base complemented by main battle tanks and defenses against ground assault and shelling.<sup>79</sup> While Russia is not committed to a full-scale land intervention, these forces have been used to secure the airbase and Tartus in the event of a push from anti-government or terrorist forces. The final aspect of the intervention is the helicopters and gunships that are based in Khemeimim and serve as a mainstay of Russian operations.<sup>80</sup> The way, in which the Russian military carried out this intervention, is a showcase of Russian military capabilities to the world at large and the regional powers that Russia is seeking to influence. This act to defend the regime that leases a

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<sup>78</sup> “Russian Airbase in Syria,” RT.

<sup>79</sup> “Why Russia is Increasing its Military Presence in Syria,” The Economist, September 22, 2015, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2015/09/economist-explains-15> (accessed February 5, 2016).

<sup>80</sup> “This Helicopter is Putin’s Weapon of Choice in Syria,” Foreign Policy <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/10/14/this-helicopter-is-putins-weapon-of-choice-in-syria/> (Accessed January 20, 2016)

strategically important base has allowed Russia to further its regional goal to establish military dominance and extend its influence into the Middle East. While the Russian forces in Syria are not dominant over other armed forces in the region, it does strengthen the Russia claim to being globally powerful and influential.

It appears that these two bases will remain permanent fixtures on the Syrian landscape. Assad is reliant upon the Russian support to fight his civil war and remain in power. The defense of Tartus with the naval patrols and the subsequent leasing and construction of the Khemeimim airbase were integral to the intervention and Russian planning in the intervention. Russia has gained physical military assets through this intervention that revolutionize the Russian presence and influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. Putin announced the beginning of withdrawal from Syria in mid-March 2016.<sup>81</sup> The announcement claimed that the intervention had achieved its goals in leading to a peace process. Key in the announcement is that the Russian facility at Tartus and the Khemeimim airbase will remain under Russian control and active without an end date.<sup>82</sup> If this withdrawal occurs and Russia remains in possession of these bases, Russia has defended its strategic facility in Tartus as well as gaining the Khemeimim air base where the Russian forces showcased Russian hard power in the Middle East.

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<sup>81</sup> Aron Lund, "Interpreting the Russian Withdrawal from Syria," March 15, 2016. (accessed march 15, 2016) <http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=63042>

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

### CHAPTER 3: ALTERNATIVES

In this chapter I analyze alternative explanations based on the arguments arising from the literature on Russian policy in the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean regions. The arguments are based on Russian domestic politics, economics, and historical relationships. All of these alternatives fail to explain the Russian military actions over the last eight years due to their inability to properly address one or more of the cases. Their lack of comprehensive explanatory power makes them less useful as explanations for Russian strategy and offer narrow perceptions of Russian action.

Russian domestic politics and the pressure they exert on Putin and his regime has been argued as a key factor in Russian decisions to act. The narrative is that after the Orange Revolution in Ukraine the regime in Moscow feared a similar popular movement in Russia. This fear grew after the protests over the elections in 2011 which lasted for several years. In response to the Orange Revolution and later the 2011 protests, Putin and the regime have strengthened their rhetoric against the west and against the pro-western governments in former Soviet States. They established a framework through which Russians can think about Russian action and find it to be righteous if it moves against the West or regimes that favor the West over Russia. The argument is that Putin has acted in each of the cases to bolster his public support because he is acting righteously for Russia to protect from and confound the West.

This narrative is suspect when one considers that these military conflicts have occurred during times when Russia is in-between election cycles. In 2008, the election occurred five months prior to the outbreak of war in Georgia. At this time, war with Georgia, even if it places

Russia in a self-declared righteous position, does not help to secure elections for the regime. The conflicts in Ukraine and Syria follow the same pattern of not being carried out during election cycles. Crimea was annexed a year and a half before the next round of legislative elections in 2016 and the intervention in Syria has been declared successful six months prior to an election. If the regime in Russia was attempting to convert these military actions into strong public support and continued landslide election victories, then it would be more sensible if they occurred closer to elections. The Syrian intervention is the closest to an election cycle with the upcoming legislative elections in September 2016, but the intervention is not a model of military action to garner public support.

In 2011, Putin strengthened his platform of anti-Western rhetoric and in this year the Syrian civil war began as well. For Putin to show the strength and righteousness of Russia against the West he could have struck out at the opposition forces in Syria years earlier. If Putin's regional foreign policy were tied to Russian public opinion, a military intervention in Syria would have occurred earlier. In 2015, it provided a ten-point boost in his approval ratings, which is on top of the 80 percent approval rating he enjoyed over a year after the annexation of Crimea.<sup>83</sup> Intervention and a show of military force as an appeal to the public would have served Putin far better in 2011 or 2012 than in 2015, when he and his party were already well supported. One would expect action on the behalf of public opinion when public opinion is low instead of when it is high.

Economic explanations are centered on Russian trade abroad specifically in the energy and arms sectors. Their narrative is that Russia acts militarily to protect and secure their markets for exports as well as the transportation of energy. This alternative explanation is often used in the Ukraine case where Russian natural gas flows through pipelines in Ukraine into Europe.

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<sup>83</sup> "Vladimir Putin's Approval Rating at Record Levels," The Guardian.

European states consume a large percentage of Russian energy and if these pipelines were to be lost it would be devastating to an already downturned Russian economy. Similarly in Georgia, Russia has a vested interest in its energy exports because of the continuation of the Russian natural gas pipelines into and through Georgia.<sup>84</sup>

A similar trade based argument is used to explain the Russian intervention in Syria in that Assad imports large sums of Russian military hardware and arms that significantly bolster Russian trade. The arms trade to Syria has been a key component of the relationship between Moscow and Damascus since Putin restarted sales and aid to Syria.

In these cases, this explanation is superficially plausible but analyzing the actions taken by the Russian forces demonstrates that exports are not at the center of these operations in Georgia and Ukraine. The war with Georgia offered little to the Russian economy and even caused investment to flee Russia out of fear of economic uncertainty. The results of the war led to de facto independence of the two breakaway republics and in the years after the war, they have begun economic and military integration with Russia. One may see this integration as an economic boon for Russia but these republics offer little to Russia economically. They do purchase arms from Russia but on a much smaller scale than Assad in Syria. In the scenario where they become fully integrated or annexed into the Russian system, their combined GDP is around \$500 million USD which is small compared to the scale of the Russian economy. These economic gains would take decades to continue paying off the costs incurred during the war through material losses and operational costs alone.

The defense of South Ossetia and the Russian invasion of Georgia targeted Georgian military assets and bases primarily in order to destroy the Georgian capability to continue the

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<sup>84</sup> S. Mohsin Hashim, "Power-loss or Power-transition? Assessing the Limits of Using the Energy Sector in Reviving Russia's Geopolitical Structure," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 43, (2010): 268.

conflict.<sup>85</sup> In targeting these assets they ruined the ability of Georgia to continue a protracted war that led to a ceasefire after only five days of combat. Russia agreed to this ceasefire, which required all sides to return to their pre-war positions. It would not make sense for Russia to accept this ceasefire if its goal is protection of the pipelines through Georgia. The pipelines are as insecure after this ceasefire as they were before the war due to no change in territory or control. This ceasefire favored the independence of the breakaway republics but offered little to Russia in terms of energy export security. It would not follow this narrative to accept this ceasefire if its goal was the security of its pipelines through Georgia.

Like the Georgian war, the Ukraine crisis did not appear to be concerned centrally with the natural gas pipelines even though they are focal points of Russia-Ukraine relations. The pipelines cross Ukraine and for Russia to effectively ensure their security, Ukraine would need to be occupied. Even if Russia denies Ukraine the ability to tamper with the pipelines in Eastern Ukraine or in Crimea there is still all of central and western Ukraine crisscrossed by pipelines. If the pipelines are the central concern of the conflict, one would expect to see physical Russian assets protecting them. Instead, thousands of miles of pipeline remain in Ukrainian territory and the strategically vital base in Crimea is under Russian control. The priorities can be found in where emphasis was placed by the military and these priorities are not of an economic nature.

This economic explanation offers little in explaining Russian action in Georgia or Ukraine. I favor my theory to explain actions in all three conflicts to create a picture of Russian strategy. Economics may provide some insight into the soft power component of Russian power in these states but offers little predictive power about the future of Russian military action

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<sup>85</sup> Cohen and Hamilton “The Russian Military and the Georgia War: Lessons and Implications” Strategic Studies Institute.

because when using this theory, the Georgian war and Ukraine crisis do not make sense as a military endeavors.

The historical explanations emphasize the relationship between Russia and the states that were formerly part of the Russian dominated system in the Soviet Union. Under this idea, Russia moved against Ukraine in 2014 because of a lack of belief in its sovereignty because Russia always dominates that relationship. A sovereign and truly independent Ukraine that could choose its future for itself was unacceptable to the Russian elite and actions were taken to bring back Russian influence.

One can reasonably extend this idea to the Georgian war because a similar narrative reoccurs when analyzing the Georgian war because the beleaguered Russian-Georgian relations of the 19<sup>th</sup> century loom large when both were independent again in the 1990s. Historical memory of Georgia being under Russian control is strong because in imperial history and Soviet history Georgia has been controlled by Russian elite. Reestablishing this dynamic in 2008 with a pro-western revolutionary in power in Georgia appears plausible.

The problem with this historical argument to answer for Russian strategy and motivations is that it struggles to account for the Russian intervention in Syria. While Syria has been in the Soviet and later Russian sphere of influence for over forty years, it is less integral to the history of Russia than Ukraine or Georgia. Few elites pine for control of the naval facility at Tartus as they do for the plains of Ukraine and mountains of Georgia. During the Soviet era, Syria was one of a dozen clients around the world that provided the Soviet Union any entry point for regional influence and a partner to arm. Syria was almost forgotten by Russian politicians in the 1990s leading to its loss of aid and most arms sales during that time. Putin reinvigorated these relations but the historical connection between Russia and Syria is far removed from the connection

shared by Russia and Ukraine or Russia and Georgia. This argument again fails to show why Russia would act militarily in the three conflicts and for a theory to have utility and predictive power; it should be able to offer explanations for all of the conflicts.

## CHAPTER 4: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Recognition of this pattern of Russian action concerning military bases is necessary for policy makers to further relations with Russia and resolve these conflicts. If policy makers wish to arbitrate and resolve the above conflicts they must consider the future of the bases involved because they are strategically important aspects of Russian foreign policy. In this section, I outline possible paths to be taken in these conflicts and the likely Russian reaction to such changes.

In Georgia, if a final settlement were to be reached between Georgia and the breakaway republics, the role of the Russian military and its position in Gudauta, Ochamchira, and the base near Tskhinvali would have to be considered. If the republics were to integrate into the Georgian state, the Russian bases would likely have to be returned to Georgian control similar to the bases relinquished in the 2000s under the Istanbul document. This result would be unacceptable for Russia and military action may be taken again to secure future control. This possibility is one that is being planned for with the reinforcement of the bases so that no effort to unite Georgia and the republics can occur.<sup>86</sup> On the other hand, if the republics are recognized in their independence by other states, Russian integration and influence in the republics would grow and the bases would be preserved indefinitely. If the status quo prevails, Russia's bases are secured. Look for Russia to maintain this frozen conflict in Georgia or push for greater acceptance of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

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<sup>86</sup> Socor, "Russia Deploys S-300 Air Defense System in Abkhazia,".

In Crimea, there are again three paths to be taken similar to the scenario in Georgia. If Crimea and Sevastopol are reunited with the rest of Ukraine, the Russian control of Sevastopol could be threatened. For such a scenario to pass, in the agreement there would have to be a provision for the leasing or control of the naval base for an incredibly long period or indefinitely. The Russian navy would be unwilling to cede control of the base and agreements with the Ukrainian state may be viewed with distrust because of the last revolution where the pro-Russian leader was ousted. If the status quo continues indefinitely, Crimea would stay under Russian control and so would the home of the Black Sea Fleet. This is the best outcome for Russia because it would bypass any need for an agreement or a lease. Look for Russia to militarily strengthen its control over Crimea and integrate it to make the status quo more difficult to overturn.

In Syria, the events of March 2016 have shown a possible Russian withdrawal from the Syrian intervention. The Russian bases at Tartus and Khemeimim are not a part of this withdrawal, which one should expect Russia to continue to control and operate indefinitely. If a peace settlement is sought for Syria, planners must consider the indefinite presence of Russian troops in the Latakia province. If Assad remains in power after a peace settlement, then Russian interests will most likely be served and its presence will be restrained to the two bases.

If Assad is removed from power, whoever is involved in helping pick or support a successor must consider balancing Russian strategic interests. If the future of the Russian bases is threatened, look for Russia to diplomatically block any settlement or block its implementation by strengthening its military presence in Latakia. One would expect Russia to refuse to evacuate the base if a new government rescinded the leases on Tartus and Khemeimim leading to a crisis

for the new government. Being a major component of the new maritime doctrine, Tartus and Khmeimim would not be given up.

All of the above cases are situations in which Russia used its military power to secure its strategic objectives that are crucial to the continuation of Russian military dominance and the spread of its influence. This trend is likely to continue because in each major crisis Russia has responded with force and garnered a positive outcome for Russian policy. Based on these three cases, one should look for crises in Russian allied states or places with frozen conflicts. If there is a political or military crisis in one of the Collective Security Treaty Organization countries, Russian forces may react militarily to protect its basing interests. Specifically, the Russian air base outside of Yerevan in Armenia offers strategic value as a guarantee of Russian support for Armenia in case of conflict.<sup>87</sup> Based on the last eight years of Russia military action to secure its strategic positions in the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean, if a political crisis or military crisis engulfs Armenia, Russia will be the first involved. In April 2016, violence flared in Nagorno-Karabakh and immediately Russia entered the conversation due to its presence and support for Armenia.<sup>88</sup> This is Russia's great power status and regional power broker abilities coming into play during a crisis. This situation demonstrated Russia's position and role in the region.

Military bases are one of the most important components of Russian regional foreign policy in the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean and it is unsurprising to find that they have been at the center of the Russian military conflicts of the last eight years. The bases secured in

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<sup>87</sup> Emil Danielyan, "Why Armenia's Military Alliance with Russia is not at Risk," Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, November 7, 2015, (accessed April 10, 2016) <http://www.rferl.org/content/caucasus-report-armenian-russia-military-alliance/27351046.html>

<sup>88</sup> Denis Dyomkin and Christian Lowe, "Russia Styles Itself Lead Mediator in Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," Reuters, April 7, 2015, (Accessed April 10, 2016), <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-nagorno-karabakh-idUSKCN0X41Y6>.

Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria all serve as strategic tools for Russia to advance its policy of military dominance and expansion of influence. They have aided in cementing the de facto independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, secured the Russian Black Sea presence at Sevastopol, and provided the springboard for intervention in Syria and a spreading of influence into the Middle East. These bases cement Russian influence and control in Russia's "backyard" of post-Soviet states and have facilitated the expansion of Russian material and political influence into more regions. Policy makers cannot overlook these bases and the implications of their importance if Russia is sought as a partner in conflict resolution. When resolving conflicts in this region and in these cases Russian strategic interests must be considered.

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