

What Right Did Russia Have?
Russian Intervention in Georgia and Moldova in the early 1990s

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Russian, Eurasian, and East European Studies.

Chapel Hill
2006

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ABSTRACT

VIRGINIA PAIGE MULLER: What Right Did Russia Have? Russian Intervention in Georgia and Moldova in the early 1990s
(Under the direction of Dr. Graeme Robertson)

In the early 1990s conflict broke out in several former Soviet republics as different regions vied for independence. Abkhazia in Georgia and Transdniestria in Moldova were two such regions. The Russian government initially declared neutrality in both cases but soon changed course, instead supporting Abkhaz and Transdniestrian separatists. Several months later, the Russian government changed course and announced the installment of Russian peacekeeping troops in Georgia and Moldova. The intent of these peacekeeping missions was ostensibly to support the cessation of armed fighting and promote resolution of the disputes, but Russia's involvement in both cases was never as neutral or conflict-resolution based as peacekeeping missions should be. This thesis will look at Russia's rationale for intervening in the Abkhaz/Georgia and Transdniestrian/Moldovan conflicts in order to better understand Russia's justification for getting involved.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the early 1990s conflict broke out in several former Soviet republics as different regions vied for independence. Abkhazia in Georgia and Transdniestria in Moldova were two such regions. The Russian government initially declared neutrality in both cases but soon changed course, instead supporting Abkhaz and Transdniestrian separatists. Several months later, the Russian government changed course again and announced the installment of Russian peacekeeping troops in Georgia and Moldova. The intent of these peacekeeping missions was ostensibly to support the cessation of armed fighting and promote resolution of the disputes, but Russia's involvement in both cases was never as neutral or conflict-resolution based as peacekeeping missions should be. This thesis will look at Russia's rationale for intervening in the Abkhaz/Georgian and Transdniestrian/Moldovan conflicts in order to better understand Russia's justification for getting involved.

Understanding Moscow's rationale is important because the West is quick to ascribe Russian intervention in the former Soviet Union to a Russian tendency toward empire building and power mongering. This thesis neither attempts to prove these theories wrong nor defend the Russian government's actions. Instead, it aims to more fully explain Russia's justifications for delving into what could be considered internal political matters in both Georgia and Moldova. Understanding whether or not Russia's actions constituted peacekeeping or intervention is another important aspect of this thesis. Categorizing Russian actions is crucial to a better comprehension of Russia's involvement in each conflict, because while Russia called its intervention peacekeeping, others saw it as forceful intervention

intended to influence the outcome in Russia's favor. Based on theoretical and situational information, I conclude that Russian involvement in Georgia/Abkhazia and Transdnistria/Moldova was neither solely forceful intervention nor peacekeeping, but rather a combination of the two.

The body of this thesis consists of five chapters that deal primarily with Russia's involvement in the early stages of each conflict—roughly from 1992-1994. Chapter 2 traces the development of the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia. Although the most recent conflict erupted out of the changing political landscape of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the region's secessionist goals have a long history. The Soviet government's promises of autonomy, later rescinded, fed into Abkhaz aspirations for self-determination. When fighting broke out in early 1992, the Russian government exacerbated the conflict by taking a pro-Abkhaz stance early on, offering such support to the Abkhaz that the Georgian government, on the brink of defeat, was forced to concede to several Russian demands. After Georgia agreed to join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Russia changed its approach towards the conflict and instituted its peacekeeping troops. This chapter also discusses the rather minimal international attention given to this conflict. Although Russian support for the Abkhaz has allegedly stopped, Russian-Georgian relations remain shaky today as a result of the Russian government's initial sponsorship of Abkhaz separatism.

Chapter 3 tracks the progression of the conflict between Moldova and Transdnistria. This conflict developed in a similar fashion to that in Abkhazia/Georgia, historical differences notwithstanding. The connection between Transdnistria and Russia dates to the late 18th century, and this long history has allowed a large Russian population to establish itself in Moldova. When fighting broke out between Moldovan and Transdnistrians,

Russia's close ethnic ties to Transdniestria equaled stronger Russian support for the Transdnistrians than the Moldavians. In fact, it has been argued that Transdniestria would not have been able to support itself for so long after declaring independence from Moldova without the Russian government's support. After Moldova conceded some of its sovereignty to Russia by allowing Russian troops a semi-permanent Moldovan base and the institution of a Russian peacekeeping contingent in Moldova, Russian support for the Transdnestrian cause continued. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) did play a role in Transdnestria/Moldova at this point, although Russia remained the major outside power.

Chapter 4 provides basic information about peacekeeping and intervention theory in an attempt to establish the true nature of Russia's involvement in Georgia and Moldova. When Russian troops first engaged in each conflict, their support for separatist forces challenged Georgian and Moldovan sovereignty. Such activities gave the indication that Russia intended for its involvement to change the makeup of its near abroad and create alliances with governments that would be friendly—and acquiescent—to Russian policy. After this initial support, however, Russia changed tactics and initiated peacekeeping operations in both Georgia and Moldova. These operations began in response to Georgian and Moldovan concessions to Russian policy goals, the purpose of which was to allow Russia to retain substantial influence in its near abroad while simultaneously engaging in a type of intervention that would be more favorably received in the rest of the world.

Chapter 5 addresses the central questions of this thesis: Russia's rationale for involvement in these conflicts, the nature of that involvement, and its evolution. Sending Russian troops and support—initially for Abkhazian and Transdnestrian separatists and then

as “peacekeeping” forces that pledged to help find a solution to each conflict—allowed Russia to stay involved in a region the Kremlin felt should remain in its sphere of influence. Russia’s activities also enabled the Russian government to implement its own foreign policy goals, including Georgian membership in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the placement of a semi-permanent military force in Moldova. The achievement of these objectives insured Russia’s influence in the near abroad for the foreseeable future. Russian involvement in these conflicts provided a mechanism by which Russia could protect its own borders and other geographically and strategically important interests while trying to prove that, even though the Soviet Union had collapsed, Russia remained an important power in the world system. This chapter also discusses how Russia’s involvement in both of these conflicts—especially its deviating nature—was a result of the changing status of internal Russian politics. As the government attempted to redefine and establish itself after the Soviet Union collapsed, different groups within the Russian government fought each other for power and influence. These scuffles, centered on the Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs, were largely responsible for Russia’s fickle policies in the early days of each conflict.

Chapter 6 looks at the continuing impact of Russian involvement in these conflicts on Russo-Georgian and Russo-Moldovan relations. While Russian troops are still stationed in both countries, new governments with different alliances, building tensions, and lack of funding endanger Russia’s prospects for furthering the long term, influential relationships it hoped to foster with Georgia and Moldova. In addition, this chapter looks at whether or not Russia’s activities in Georgia and Moldova have accomplished the goals Russia hoped they would, or if the Kremlin’s policy towards these two conflicts was misguided and therefore

ineffective. Could Russia have retained power and influence in the region without sending troops to Georgia and Moldova? This chapter concludes that Russia could have engendered as much influence among former Soviet republics had it never interceded militarily in the Georgian and Moldovan conflicts. This is true because Russia, which claims to be the best suited for intervention in either conflict because of its knowledge and understanding of the region, could have used its expertise as an advisor for outside parties that are working to resolve the ongoing conflicts, or as an independent negotiator working on its own to resolve the strife in either country.

A few clarifications are necessary before continuing. First, the word “Russia” as it is used throughout this thesis refers to the Russian government unless otherwise specified. One could look to many parts of Russian society for rationale for Russia’s involvement in Georgia and Moldova. This thesis focuses on the Russian government’s explanations and rationale because the government is primarily responsible for Russia’s policy towards other governments. Second, there were several regional conflicts that erupted in the wake of the Soviet Union’s collapse. Regions of Georgia and Tajikistan declared independence, and conflict sprung up between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the Nagorno-Karabakh region. This thesis focuses on just two of these regional conflicts because of space constraints and the similarities that exist between both the development of fighting in the separatist regions and the relations between the Georgian/Moldovan governments and Russia.

It is important to note the contribution this thesis makes to the existing body of literature. Existing studies discuss Russia’s intervention in the conflicts in Georgia and Moldova. Most of these studies, however, look at Russian involvement from the perspective of Russia’s use of peacekeeping in its near abroad, or the way Russia has tailored the use of

peacekeeping operations to fit particular foreign policy goals. The main intent of this thesis, on the other hand, is to study the Russian government's justification for its actions in the conflicts in Georgia and Moldova and to see how those decisions have affected Russia's relations with both countries. Russia's use of forceful intervention and peacekeeping is a factor in the discussion; rather than being the main focus, however, the nature of Russian intervention in these conflicts is just one component of the argument.

This thesis centers on the conflicts in Abkhazia/Georgia and Transdnistria/Moldova. However, the policy route Russia chose in its involvement in both countries, as well as conclusions about those policy decisions that are drawn in this thesis, are not unique to the situations in described herein. The study and evaluation of Russian intervention in these two cases provides a useful framework from which to view Russia's foreign policy after the collapse of the Soviet Union and today as well. Looking at Russia's response to the conflicts in Georgia and Moldova reveal that in the early 1990s the Russian government was driven by internally-competing players who were trying to simultaneously develop policy; gain Yeltsin's favor; and redefine Russia, both internally and externally. In addition, the study of Russia's justification for its involvement in Georgia and Moldova highlights the foundation of Russia's foreign policy goals in the early 1990s and today: the desire to retain power and influence in Russia's near abroad and the rest of the world; the necessity to protect Russia's borders from physical and strategic dangers (i.e. the potential influx of unfriendly forces and the continuing encroachment of the West); and the protection of Russians and Russian interests, regardless of the fact that they may lie outside Russia's defined borders. Russia's response to the conflicts that erupted in Georgia and Moldova in the early 1990s, then, is a

microcosm for the development and execution of at least a portion of Russian foreign policy since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Chapter 2: The Conflict in Abkhazia

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1990, the republics that were part of the U.S.S.R. suddenly could declare the independence that many of them had been craving. This did not mean that the former Soviet Republics moved forward without problems. Indeed, the first chance in decades that disparate nationalities had for sovereignty made some conflicts almost inevitable—especially in republics in which tension had existed during the Soviet era.

The Republic of Georgia was no exception. When the ultra-nationalist Round Table-Free Georgia Party handily won in the 1990 election, ethnic Abkhazians nationals living in Georgia became increasingly concerned that their culture, language, and way of life would be subordinate to that of the Georgians in power. As a result, the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet declared independence for the republic in July 1992.¹ Georgia, not wanting to lose a part of its territory—especially one in which 45% of the citizens were Georgians, while only 17.8% were Abkhaz²—engaged its military in Abkhazia in an attempt to retain Abkhazia. This section of the paper will document historical incentives for Abkhazia's secession and a look at Russia's role in the early years of the conflict.

Abkhazia's Historical Incentives

Georgia's newfound independence provided Abkhazia with the opportunity to secede, if only because the former Soviet region as a whole was rife with change in the early 1990s.

¹ Catherine Dale, "The Case of Abkhazia (Georgia)." In Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia, ed. by Lena Johnson and Clive Archer, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996: 122.

² Lynch, Russian Peacekeeping Strategies, 128.

Abkhazia's history as a part of Georgia and the Soviet Union, as well as Abkhaz leaders' close relationship with the collapsing Soviet Communist Party, also provided justification for the Abkhaz leaders' actions.

Abkhazia see-sawed between autonomy and subjection to the Georgian rule that began when the Soviet Union formed. Abkhazia developed stronger ties with Russia and the Communist Party throughout the Soviet period. In 1921 Abkhazia was its own republic within the Soviet Union; in fact, it was the constitution written in 1925 when Abkhazia was an independent republic that formed the basis for its secession from Georgia in 1992. While Abkhazia may have been autonomous in the early 1920s, however, it was soon forced to sustain treaty relations with Georgia. By 1931 Abkhazia was an autonomous republic within Georgia, and Stalin soon forced Abkhazia to become part of Georgia. As relations between Abkhazia and Russia improved, Abkhazia made an attempt in 1978 to become part of the Russian republic instead of remaining within Georgia's borders. While this failed, the central Communist Government in Moscow implemented a policy in Georgia that assured Abkhazians a larger-than-proportional share of power in Georgia's government.³

Dov Lynch states that "state-building projects" in Abkhazia "are based on the position that the current...status represents...the latest phase in a long historical tradition" reaching back over 12 centuries. Lynch quotes the Abkhaz foreign minister as commenting on the fact that "no matter the form, Abkhaz statehood has remained intact." Lynch concludes that "the...rhetoric of the de facto state strengthens [Abkhazia's]...claim to

³ Dale, 121-122.

absolute sovereignty [because] any compromise would be seen as an injustice in the present and a violation of the very movement of history.’’⁴

The Abkhaz nation’s desire to declare independence was based on historical precedent as well as the desire to retain its cultural and linguistic heritage as separate entities in Georgia. In fact, the Abkhaz desire for ethnic autonomy was fed by old Soviet practices as much as their claims to political sovereignty. As the Soviet Union’s government created republics in its early days, it often did so according to ethnic borders and populations, creating regions with strong nationalist tendencies. As more nationally/ethnically-based republics were born, so were conflicts created as nationalities competed with each other for power and influence.⁵ Tension between Abkhaz and Georgian nationals was evident in 1989 as heightened Georgian nationalism manifested itself in a “virulent anti-Abkhaz” press campaign. When Georgia endeavored in July 1989 to build a Tbilisi University campus in Sukhumi, the capital of Abkhazia, the Abkhaz literally took up arms against the project. An anti-Georgian demonstration in Tbilisi, also in 1989, invoked a strong response from the Georgian government as well.⁶

It is clear that the conflict between Abkhazia and Georgia in the early 1990s was hardly a sudden eruption in a republic that had been peaceful up to that point. The Abkhaz craving for independence is a long-standing one, encouraged by promises and opportunities that were honed during the Soviet era. The desire to preserve the Abkhaz cultural and national identity was just as time-honored. A sense of Georgian nationalism, which increased as the Soviet Union crumbled, added undoubtedly a sense of urgency to

⁴ Lynch, “Separatist States and Post-Soviet Conflicts,” *International Affairs* 78, no. 4 (2002): 837.

⁵ Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies*, 129.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 128.

Abkhazia's attempts to protect their heritage and way of life. As will be seen in the next section, Abkhazia's fight for sovereignty was aided, at least for a time, by the newly independent Russian government. This aid undoubtedly made Abkhaz resistance more effective than it would have been had the Abkhaz been fighting the Georgians on their own.

Russia's Role

Abkhazia owes much of its existence as a semi-autonomous republic to assistance from the Russian Federation provided in the early days of the conflict.⁷ Although Russia later changed its support to favor resolution, its role in 1992 favored the Abkhaz separatists. Abkhaz soldiers fought the Georgians with the help of Russian equipment, and Russian citizens. As S Neil MacFarlane points out, "There was no effort to stop [Russian citizens] from entering Abkhazia even though their purpose was known."⁸ The combination of Russian artillery, troops, citizens and the fact that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MOD) was at the helm of Russia's activities in Abkhazia showed that the Russian government had an abiding interest, at least in the beginning, in establishing Abkhazia's survival as an autonomous state in 1992.⁹ Russia's support for the Abkhaz separatists was further underlined when Sergei Leonenko, a lieutenant-colonel in the Russian army, confirmed that "official Russia was providing moral support and training" to Abkhaz troops fighting in the conflict.¹⁰

⁷ Lynch, "Separatist States," 846.

⁸ MacFarlane, 522.

⁹ Lynch, Russian Peacekeeping Strategies, 131.

¹⁰ Dale, 126.

Russia's role in the conflict in Abkhazia would be less confusing if Russia's policy towards had not changed so drastically. After assisting the Abkhaz in fighting Georgian troops in early 1992, the Russian parliament called for a Russian peacekeeping force to be installed in Abkhazia in September 1992.¹¹ As was mentioned previously, one of the core principles of any peacekeeping force is neutrality, as well as an international or regional mandate. When its parliament called for a Russian peacekeeping force in Abkhazia, this force was clearly not neutral, nor did it have a mandate from anyone other than the Russian government.¹² It is at this point, then, that one begins to wonder how the Russian government justified its actions in Georgia as a true peacekeeping mission, when so much of what forces did suggested a more favorable attitude towards the Abkhaz or, in some cases, towards the Russian government's own foreign policy objectives.

In a recent interview, then Georgian Foreign Minister Salome Zurbishvili commented to European Union officials that "[t]oday there's no confidence left in Georgia towards Russia."¹³ This lack of confidence is due, in large part, to Russia's actions in the Abkhaz-Georgian conflict in 1992 and 1993. The Russian government brokered several cease-fires between the Abkhaz and Georgian fighters and soon afterwards, in at least one case, assisted Abkhaz fighters in breaking the ceasefire and winning some military battles.¹⁴ Following its self-declared role as peacekeeper in this conflict, Russian forces proceeded to

¹¹ Andrew Bennett, Condemned to Repetition? The Rise, Fall and Reprise of Soviet-Russian Military Interventionism, 1973-1996. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999:319.

¹² Russia had no mandate until 1994, when the Commonwealth of Independent States "legitimized this deployment as a regional peacekeeping operation based on the consent of the parties" (MacFarlane, 514). Russia's dominant role in the CIS, however, leads one to question the...actual legitimacy that should be accorded to Russia's actions.

¹³ Philip Shishkin, "Georgia Asks EU, US for Help on Ties to Russia," Wall Street Journal, 2 March 2005: A14.

¹⁴ MacFarlane, 514.

deny help to the Georgians because Georgia was not a member of the CIS.¹⁵ Withholding this assistance allowed Moscow to underscore the benefits of CIS membership—in this case, military assistance. This tactic also highlighted what was at stake for Russia in its involvement: continued influence in the near abroad. The fighting between the Georgians and Abkhaz continued until, as Catherine Dale says,

The state [of Georgia] was in danger of total collapse. It was at this stage that Shevardnadze went to Moscow to plead for Russia's help and caved in on several major components of Russia's agenda... Notably, Georgia signed the CIS accord and agreed in principle to a military cooperation agreement that would render more or less permanent the Russian military presence in Georgia, as well as guaranteeing substantial Russian influence in Georgia's military. It was only when these objectives were attained that Russia interposed its peacekeepers and provided the military assistance necessary to quell the rebellion...¹⁶

Although the 27 July 1993 Sochi Agreement—brokered by Russia—outlined plans for a cease-fire and international peacekeeping troops,¹⁷ it wasn't until Georgian President leader, Eduard Shevardnadze acquiesced to Russia's foreign policy goals (as Dale describes above) that Russian activities in Abkhazia changed course. The Russian government promised to stop providing aid to the Abkhaz separatist forces, instead pledging to help the Georgians fight against the Abkhaz.¹⁸ Moscow followed by imposing sanctions on the Abkhaz in an attempt to force an end to the fighting.¹⁹ Despite these actions, however, which appeared to reverse Russia's stance on the Abkhaz conflict (while continuing to play a distinctly non-neutral role), S. Neil MacFarlane highlights the fact that “Russia has not mounted the kind of

¹⁵ Dale, 128.

¹⁶ Dale, 522.

¹⁷ Lynch, Russian Peacekeeping Strategies, 136

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 141

pressure on the insurgent parties necessary to push them towards a compromise...”²⁰ While Russia’s rationale for its involvement in the Abkhaz conflict will be studied more closely in a subsequent section, the point here is that throughout the Abkhaz conflict Russia provided biased help to both parties involved—first the Abkhaz, then the Georgians—while simultaneously calling itself a peacekeeping force.

Russia’s objectives in its peacekeeping mission, which continues today, have not been helped by (and indeed contributed to) both Abkhazia and Georgia’s expectations. The Abkhaz, on the one hand, were relying on the peacekeepers to enable Abkhazia to remain an independent state, while the Georgians intended for the peacekeepers to “ensure the return of Georgian internally displaced persons and to restore Georgia territorial integrity in Abkhazia.”²¹ Russia’s “peacekeeping” force did not embody traditional peacekeeping characteristics; neither, however, does it appear that either Georgia or Abkhazia, in accepting this peacekeeping mission, did so with the expectation that Russia would conduct itself as a neutral party.

At various moments since Russia became involved in the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia, Russia, Georgia, and the international community have demonstrated either a desire to improve the situation or have shown support for Russia’s efforts. For example, Russia declared its involvement in Georgia as a peacekeeping force using troops that had been in Georgia for some time and so had ties to Abkhaz fighters. This obviously made impartiality difficult. As the peacekeeping mission has continued, however, S. Neil MacFarlane writes that “the Russian military...made considerable efforts to train units for such missions...and is now deploying units from outside the region. The level of

²⁰ MacFarlane, 522.

²¹ Lynch, Russian Peacekeeping Strategies, 131-132.

professionalism among Russian forces deployed in the region has thus increased.”²² Despite the questionable nature of its “peacekeeping” mission in Abkhazia, the Russian military has at least attempted to ensure that its soldiers are properly trained for their mission.

It is largely due to Russia’s biased support of the conflict, as well as its hegemonic role in the region, that Georgia has been unhappy with Russian participation. At the same time, though Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze expressed his desire for Russian troops to leave Georgia throughout the early years of the conflict, he also insisted that they not withdraw entirely, as doing so would make it much harder for the Georgian military to rebuild.²³ Scholars such as S Neil MacFarlane have commented on Russia’s willingness to become involved in a conflict that the rest of the world might very well have ignored,²⁴ and Catherine Dale notes that in July 1994 the UN agreed that the United Nations Mission to Georgia (UNOMIG) would not be responsible for commanding “CIS” (Russian) troops on the ground in Georgia. UNOMIG would be monitoring Russian troop activities, however, which made “it clear that these CIS forces are answerable in some way to the international community.”²⁵ These facts do not relieve Russia of responsibility for its actions, but they do show that Georgia and the international community have acknowledged Russia’s involvement in Abkhazia/Georgia and have in some ways legitimized the Russian military’s presence there.

²² MacFarlane, 519.

²³ Lynch, Russian Peacekeeping Strategies, 136.

²⁴ MacFarlane, 520.

²⁵ Dale, 130-131.

Chapter 3—The Conflict in Moldova

The conflict between Moldova and Transdniestria began for reasons similar to those that provoked problems between Abkhazia and Georgia. As the Moldovan government wrestled with decisions including whether or not to cement ties with Romania, to whom Moldova has been historically close, the largely Russian speaking, Soviet-allied population in the Transdniestrian region of Moldova became nervous that it would lose its identity and its support from Russia.²⁶

Just as in Abkhazia, Soviet/Russian support for Transdniestria goes back for centuries, beginning with the 1792 cession of the western bank of the Dniestr River from the Ottoman to Russian Empire. The Dniestr River remained an important Russian border throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, and the Moldovan Republic was created around the Dniestr in 1924—“in part,” Jeff Chinn writes, “symbolizing Soviet claims on the land lost to Romania. Consequently,” he concludes, “the left bank [of the Dniestr] has never known either independence or Romanian control, having been under Russian or Soviet rule for its entire modern history.”²⁷

These strong historical ties to Russia, when combined with the “Romanizing” that was taking place in Moldova in the late 1980s and early 1990s, convinced the Transdniestrians to declare sovereignty in 1989 and to secede from Moldova on 2 September

²⁶ Lynch, “Separatist States,” 839.

²⁷ Jeff Chinn, “The Case of Transdniestria (Moldova),” In Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia, Edited by Lena Johnson and Clive Archer, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996: 104.

1991.²⁸ The Moldovan government has fought to keep Transdniestria under its jurisdiction, because it does not want to lose territory. Equally important, however, is the fact that in 1989, Transdniestria comprised a third of the industrial capabilities of what is otherwise an agriculturally-based economy. This high industrial concentration, combined with Transdniestria's close ties to Russia (and therefore Russia's economic infrastructure, which Moldova was cut off from when it ceased to be a Soviet Republic) added extra worth to Transdniestria in the early 1990s.²⁹ So close were Transdniestria and Russian economic ties, in fact, that "by June [1992], Russia had...effectively imposed an economic blockade on Moldova, ceasing all deliveries of food and fuel."³⁰

Transdniestria's connection to Russia is not solely economic, however. When the Soviet Union collapsed, a large portion of the Soviet 14th Army—both troops and equipment—remained in Transdniestria.³¹ These troops formed the basis of Russia's support for the Transdnistrians during fighting with Moldova after fighting broke out in early 1992. Between March and June 1992 (when, according to Jeff Chinn, the most intense fighting occurred), the 14th Army supplied the Transdnistrians with as many as 20,000 guns,³² not to mention training troops and bolstering Transdnistriian forces with Russian soldiers.³³ Even

²⁸ Ibid., 104, 107.

²⁹ Lynch, Russian Peacekeeping Strategies, 111.

³⁰ Ibid., 117.

³¹ "Moldova: Are the Russian Troops Really Leaving?" Washington DC: Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 25 September 2001: 2.

³² Chinn, 108.

³³ Lynch, Russian Peacekeeping Strategies, 116.

before March 1992, however, the Soviet/Russian government used the 14th Army to bolster the Transdnistrian forces so that they could repel Moldovan attacks.³⁴

Russian support for the Transdnistrians in the early stages of this conflict could not have been much greater. However, just as occurred in the fracas in Georgia/Abkhazia, when the Moldovan government made a few concessions, Russia at least verbally promised to switch allegiances. The Moldovan government did not, as the Georgian government did, have to agree to join the CIS to win Russia's approval. When then-Moldovan president Snegur realized that his troops could never win as long as the Transdnistrians had Russia's help, he conceded to some of Russia's demands.³⁵ One major concession allowed the Russian military to place a permanent contingent of Russian soldiers on the western bank of the Dniestr River.³⁶ Following this agreement, Russian, Moldovan, and Transdnistrian "peacekeeping" troops, dubbed the "Joint Control Commission," were distributed throughout the conflicted region.³⁷ Moldova secured additional aid from Russia when it joined the CIS in April 1993.³⁸

Russia's deployment of peacekeeping troops and its agreements with the Moldovan government did not, however, end Russian support for Transdnistria. Dov Lynch highlights some of the "state-building" aid the Russians provided by quoting Russian President Boris Yeltsin: "We provide help to [the Transdnistrians] as much as we can. Bread, glass, many things in general. We are helping them directly." Lynch goes on to elaborate that

³⁴ Ibid., 112-113.

³⁵ Chinn, 109.

³⁶ Lynch, Russian Peacekeeping Strategies, 182.

³⁷ Ibid., 117.

³⁸ Ibid., 110.

within the ‘peacekeeping’ buffer zone, the Dnestr leadership established a banking system, postal services and border controls, and the Russian government extended technical credit to support Dnestr industry. The Russian Central Bank extended substantial credits to [Transdnistria] in early 1993 to buy grain and flour.³⁹

This aid continued even after the Russian government established a “peacekeeping” mission in Moldova. The Transdnistrian Army sustained confidence in Russian help as well, as evidenced in an April 16, 1992 interview with Transdnistrian Army Commander Stephanye Kitsake in the Russian newspaper *Krasnaia Zvezda*. “I am convinced,” Kitsake says, “that without Russia...this conflict will not be solved.”⁴⁰ Kitsake does not say that Russia’s presence ensures that the conflict will be resolved in Transdnistria’s favor, but given the bent of Russia’s aid up to this point, one has to wonder if this thought isn’t underlying Kitsake’s vote of confidence in Russia’s abilities.

Russian involvement in this conflict mirrors its actions in Abkhazia/Georgia in the way that, since Russian “peacekeeping” troops have deployed to Transdnistria, Russia has made efforts to ally itself more closely with the Moldovan government. Russian “peacekeeping” troops have, as Jeff Chinn notes, “kept...hostilities [between Transdnistria and Moldova] from escalating out of control,”⁴¹ and the Russian government helped iron out a cease-fire agreement in July 1992. None of the parties involved were satisfied with this peace agreement, however. The Transdnistrians were not even present when the cease-fire was drafted; Russian conservatives were angry that their government was pledging to end

³⁹ Ibid., 119.

⁴⁰ S. Dyshev, “Dva Berega Dnestra—Dve Pozitsii,” *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 16 April 1992, East View Database, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 20 January 2006.

⁴¹ Chinn, 116-117.

support for this Russian-speaking population, and the Moldovan government was convinced that force was still the best way to bring Transdniestria back under Moldovan control.⁴²

The ineffective, unpopular cease-fire Russia helped broker was weakened when, in November 1994, Russia recalled half of its peacekeeping troops.⁴³ This withdrawal, which Russia justified by saying that it could no longer afford to keep so many troops in Moldova, was hugely unpopular with both the Moldavians and the Transdnistrians.⁴⁴ Just as both the Abkhaz and Georgian forces felt that Russia had an integral role in securing what each side wanted, so too had the Moldavians and Transdnistrians come to rely on the Russian government. Ironically, both sides needed Russia for similar reasons. Russia's financial, military, and moral support for the Transdnistrians was explained earlier. Moldova, partially through its entry into the CIS and the economic ties that accompanied that union, has become reliant on Russia for many commodities; in addition, Moldova felt that without Russian assistance, Transdnistria would never rejoin Moldova.⁴⁵

The international community has been present in Moldova since shortly after the conflict with Transdnistria began. A group of OSCE negotiators went to Moldova in 1993 and provided support for Moldova's territorial claims to Transdnistria—although the OSCE mission also encouraged the Moldovan government to accord Transdnistria “special status” as a part of Moldova. The fact that the OSCE expressed support for the Moldovan side early on in its involvement made both the Russians and Transdnistrians wary of overt support for

⁴² Lynch, Russian Peacekeeping Strategies, 114, 115.

⁴³ As of 25 September 2001, about 2,500 Russian troops remained in Transdnistria/Moldova. (“Moldova: Are the Russian Troops”).

⁴⁴ Chinn, 111.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 116.

OSCE peacekeeping/cease-fire monitoring efforts.⁴⁶ Since the OSCE arrived in Moldova, it has been “allowed to gather military information...investigate violent incidents and generally maintain a visible presence.”⁴⁷ Unlike the UN mission in Georgia which was allowed to monitor the activities of the peacekeeping force there, however, the OSCE has no official involvement with Russian “peacekeeping” troops stationed in Transnistria or Moldova.

Russia’s actions in this conflict do not look any more like traditional peacekeeping missions than its activities in Abkhazia/Georgia. However, the Russian government did at least attempt, initially, to stay detached from the fray. For example, in April 1992, just after armed conflict erupted in Transnistria, Russian President Boris Yeltsin declared the 14th Army (still stationed in Transnistria) a Russian military unit. This was an effort by “Russian Defense Minister Paul Grachev and CIS Commander in Chief Yevgeni Shaposnikov...to maintain the neutrality of the 14th Army [as well as] prevent the Trans-Dniestrian militia from seizing [the 14th Army’s] large weapons stockpiles.”⁴⁸ Besides helping secure a large quantity of Soviet artillery for the Russian army, Yeltsin’s attempt to retain some semblance of neutrality at the beginning of the conflict showed Russia’s initial post-Communist desire to mind its own business.

Elaine Holobof points out that “Moldova appealed reportedly for UN or CSCE troops, but when this failed had little recourse but to accept ‘peace-keeping’ forces on Russia’s terms.”⁴⁹ The Russian government’s willingness to send troops to Moldova, while going against its earlier declarations of neutrality, filled a void left by the international

⁴⁶ Chinn, 112, 113.

⁴⁷ Jonson, 33.

⁴⁸ Bennett, 313.

⁴⁹ Elaine M. Holobof “Russia’s Views on Military Intervention: Benevolent Peace-Keeping, Monroe Doctrine, or Neo-Imperialism?” In Military Intervention in European Conflicts, ed. by Lawrence Freedman, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994: 163.

community. Russian troops were not neutral as UN or OSCE troops might have been, but it seems fair to say that the international community's failure to provide an alternative leaves less room for criticism of Russia's actions. It is logical in this situation to ask if Russia's biased support has been better for the conflict than if no third party had gotten involved. Different people would most likely answer this question in different ways. It seems evident, however, that Russia's involvement in the conflict in Transdnistria has at least drawn attention to the conflict and has greater efforts to solve the clashes between the Moldavians and Transdnistrians.

Chapter 4: Peacekeeping vs. Intervention

As the preceding two chapters show, Russia's initial activities in the conflicts in Georgia and Moldova supported Abkhaz and Transdniestrian separatists against the Georgian and Moldovan governments. This involvement constituted a type of forceful military intervention, as armed Russian forces aided Abkhaz and Transdniestrian soldiers in their fight against the Georgian and Moldovan governments. When the Russian government changed tactics, however, it declared that Russian forces present in both countries constituted peacekeeping forces. Such a proclamation is troubling, however, because Russian forces did not adhere to basic characteristics attributed to peacekeeping operations. The gap between their intentions and actions created a paradox that leads to questions about Russia's real intentions in Moldova and Georgia. If Russia wanted to be a peacekeeping presence in the region, why did it initially support separatist parties in each conflict? More basically, did Russia really want to bring peace to Georgia and Moldova, or was it just using "peacekeeping" as a guise to hide behind while it continued to influence the outcome of each conflict in its favor? Answering either of these questions requires a basic understanding of peacekeeping theory.

While there is no universally accepted definition of peacekeeping, scholars do agree on crucial attributes and conditions that should be present in any peacekeeping mission. Peacekeeping normally falls under the jurisdiction of the United Nations, which first used the term in 1965.⁵⁰ Most scholars acknowledge that although the UN is the most common sponsor for peacekeeping activities, any state or group of states can champion peacekeeping.

⁵⁰ Indarjit Rikhye, The Theory and Practice of Peacekeeping, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984: 1.

Paul F. Diehl, author of International Peacekeeping, says that “*peacekeeping* is used to refer to any international effort involving an operational component to promote the termination of armed conflict on the resolution of longstanding disputes.”⁵¹ Such efforts, Diehl continues, can involve “military action to punish an aggressor...as well as multilateral efforts at negotiation.”⁵²

Military involvement in peacekeeping missions is one result of the development of peacekeeping. Peacekeeping missions originally took place after a conflict ended, as states attempted to resolve remaining issues and transition back to peaceful, pre-conflict conditions. During this early stage, it was important for peacekeeping forces to “embrace...the three fundamental principles of consent, neutrality, and the use of force only in self-defense.”⁵³ When the Cold War ended and greater UN Security Council collaboration ensued, peacekeeping evolved to address issues involved with wars and conflicts erupting in newly independent states. Even more recently, the UN has restricted peacekeeping operations to conflicts in which parties have “demonstrated their consent to end the fighting by meeting specific obligations for a comprehensive peace program.”⁵⁴ In other words, in the 1990s the United Nations became less willing to try to force warring parties to keep peace; instead, the UN dedicated itself to protecting or enforcing a peace that had already been at least established by the conflicting factions.

The International Peace Academy provides the most oft-cited definition of peacekeeping operations. It says that peacekeeping is “the prevention, containment,

⁵¹ Paul Diehl, International Peacekeeping, 4.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵³ Ben Lovelock, “Securing a Viable Peace” in Jack Covey, Michael J. Dziedzic, and Leonard R. Hawley, eds., The Quest for Viable Peace, Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2005, 127.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 128.

moderation, and termination of hostilities between or within states, through the medium of a peaceful third party intervention, organized and directed internationally, using multinational forces of soldiers, police and civilians to restore and maintain peace.”⁵⁵ By adding the important qualification that peacekeeping forces remain neutral, this definition encapsulates those characteristics that are crucial to the success and international acceptance of any peacekeeping operation.⁵⁶

Russia’s peacekeeping operations were ill perceived largely because of their lack of neutrality. Neutrality is so central to successful peacekeeping missions that Paul Diehl itemizes it in his “two informal rules” of peacekeeping. “The first [rule],” Diehl says, “is to never allow forces from a state involved in the conflict to participate in the action. A second rule is to bar troop contribution from major power nations or their allies.” These rules, Diehl explains, allow the “conflicting parties [to] regard the peacekeeping force as unbiased and disinterested.”⁵⁷ When Russia initiated its peacekeeping operations in Georgia and Moldova, it had already violated both of these rules. Russia’s previous involvement, both historically and in the ongoing conflicts, broke the first rule, and the fact that Russia had so recently been one of the world’s two superpowers violated the second. Based on Diehl’s guidelines, then, Russia’s peacekeeping operations in Georgia and Moldova were bound to encounter problems from their inception. These problems were compounded by Russia’s initial support for secessionist forces in both Abkhazia and Transdnistria.

⁵⁵ Indarjit Rikhye, Michael Harbottle and Bjorn Egge. The Thin Blue Line: International Peacekeeping and its Future, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974: 487.

⁵⁶ Diehl, International Peacekeeping 13

⁵⁷ Diehl, “Peacekeeping Operations and the Quest for Peace,” 498.

The other distinguishing quality of peacekeeping operations is that they have “clear and detailed mandate[s].” This is important because “a vague mandate creates problems when different actors have varying expectations about [a peacekeeping operation’s] scope and implementation.” Lack of clarity surrounding the purpose may “lead a peacekeeping operation to exceed some of the basic principles of neutrality or self defense that are the cornerstones of peacekeeping strategy.”⁵⁸ When Russia established its peacekeeping operations in Georgia and Moldova, it had no clear mandate from outside its own government. This fueled doubt as to Russia’s true intentions, because the motives behind Russia’s unilaterally declared peacekeeping missions were unknown outside the Russian government.

Russia’s involvement in Georgia and Moldova as a peacekeeping force was questionable, then, because of Russia’s initial, biased involvement in both Georgia and Moldova. After supporting the Abkhaz and Transdniestrian separatists, it was difficult for the Russian government to convince anyone that it could be a neutral, conflict-resolution seeking participant. Lack of mandate for the peacekeeping operation from anyone outside the Russian Federation made Russia’s true intentions susceptible as people wondered if Russia was using peacekeeping as a front to continue pursuing previous policies.

If Russia’s activities in Georgia and Moldova were not true peacekeeping operations, one has to wonder how to categorize them. Dmitri Trenin cites the widespread belief that “[d]espite Moscow’s earlier internationalist pronouncements, it has...long been argued that unilateral and forcible intervention...disguised as ‘peacemaking,’ was in fact an instrument

⁵⁸ Diehl, International Peacekeeping, 74.

of imperial restoration...”⁵⁹ The issue of whether or not Russia was engaging in “imperial restoration” in its involvement in these two conflicts will be discussed later; the important issue at this point is the “unilateral and forcible intervention” Trenin attributes to Moscow’s activities.

Intervention is most simply defined as “interference in the affairs of others, e.g. by one state in the affairs of another”⁶⁰ This gives the term a wide range of applicability; indeed, even peacekeeping is a type of intervention. As an interventionary tactic, however, peacekeeping is at the opposite end of the spectrum from the militarily driven, forcible involvement employed by Russia at the beginning of the conflicts in Georgia and Moldova. Russia’s actions in Georgia and Moldova during the early years of this conflict were unquestionably interventionary. The problem occurs when one attempts to place these actions on the spectrum between peacekeeping and forceful military intervention. The ways in which Russia’s involvement in these two conflicts deviated from conventional peacekeeping have already been outlined. In order to decide the extent to which Russia’s actions constituted forceful military intervention, it is necessary to understand a bit of conventional intervention theory.

In a 1968 issue of the Journal of International Affairs, James N. Rosenau presented one of the first detailed studies of intervention. In his article, “The Concept of Intervention,” Rosenau claimed that for an action to be considered interventionary, it must contain two characteristics. First, it should be “convention-breaking”; second, it should be “authority

⁵⁹ Dmitri Trenin, “Russian and Western Interest in Preventing, Managing, and Settling Conflicts in the Former Soviet Union,” in Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia, ed. by Lena Johnson and Clive Archer, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996: 171.

⁶⁰ The New Lexicon Webster’s Dictionary of the English Language, 1989 ed., s.v. “intervention.”

oriented.” Rosenau says that intervention occurs “whenever the form of [one international actor towards another] constitutes a sharp break with then-existing forms and whenever it is directed at changing or preserving the structure of political authority in the target society.”⁶¹ While Rosenau’s characteristics refer only to “intervention”, without any specification as to whether or not that intervention is militarily based, it seems clear that the type of intervention to which Rosenau refers is that which challenges the sovereignty of another party. Such intervention, then, is different from interventionary peacekeeping, which does not challenge the sovereignty of any party, but rather attempts to restore it in a peaceful manner.

Russia’s role in Abkhazia and Transdniestria could appear to be based on military intervention. Russian troops and government assistance at the beginning of each conflict provided the Abkhazians and Transdniestrians with the physical, financial, and military wherewithal to defeat Georgian and Moldovan troops and, in doing so, to win the independence that the Abkhaz and Transdniestrian people sought. In this way, Russia’s involvement followed conventional intervention because it affected the political—and physical—structure of each “target state.” The fact that armed Russian troops were involved made Russia’s activities coercive as well. Russia’s deeds in these two conflicts were convention-breaking because, when Russia sent its troops to Georgia and Moldova, Russia was infringing on the internationally recognized sovereignty of both states.

Based on this evidence, it would be appropriate to call early Russian involvement in each conflict—when Russian troops supported the separatists—military intervention. As the disputes continued, however, Russia’s involvement changed from a conflict-exacerbating force to one that was actively trying to help the warring parties come to some kind of cease-fire agreement. Russia called its new role “peacekeeping,” but its continued use of military

⁶¹ James N. Rosenau, “The Concept of Intervention,” Journal of International Affairs 22 (1968): 167.

force, partiality, and the lack of international (and even regional, in the beginning) mandate leaves one hard pressed to define Russia's activities in Abkhazia and Transdniestria as anything approaching conventional peacekeeping.

The true nature of Russia's involvement in these conflicts is obviously rather murky because of the Russian government's changing intentions and, quite simply, its statements and actions on the ground. Lena Johnson describes the paradox of Russian activity thus:

Russia was not able to fulfill the role of an active and impartial third party. It was seen as having a hidden agenda and an interest in maintaining a situation of 'no peace, no war.' After being accused initially of encouraging turmoil with the purpose of weakening the governments of Georgia [and] Moldova...Russia was later accused of supporting the status quo in order to legitimate the continued presence of Russian troops in these regions.⁶²

Regardless of Russian attempts to change course in the middle of these conflicts, then, the Russian government's lack of neutrality and armed interference in what could have been perceived as internal Georgian and Moldovan affairs created a permanent bias towards Russia's involvement in to these conflicts.

Aggressive military intervention was not the sole component of Russia's activities in Transdniestria and Abkhazia in the early 1990s. Neither, on the other hand, did Russian actions estimate anything resembling conventional peacekeeping activities. The difference between forceful military intervention and peacekeeping is underlined in Intervention in World Politics by Hedley Bull. In his book, Bull notes that intervention is "the dictatorial or coercive interference...in the sphere of jurisdiction of a sovereign state..."⁶³ The targets of

⁶² Lena Jonson, "Keeping the Peace in the CIS: The Evolution of Russian Policy," Discussion Paper 81, London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1999:12-13.

⁶³ Hedley Bull, ed. Intervention in World Politics, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 1.

such intervention could be “a state’s jurisdiction over its own territory, its citizens, its right to determine its internal affairs or to conduct its external relations.”⁶⁴

As a concept in international law, intervention is even more sharply defined as a negative action, as Andrew M. Dorman and Thomas G. Otte describe in Military Intervention: from Gunboat Diplomacy to Humanitarian Intervention. They note that intervention is an attempt to make one state do the bidding of another state and so is “an encroachment” on the target state’s “independence and political authority.”⁶⁵ In his dissertation “The Strategic Dynamics of Military Intervention,” Stephen Gent quotes a similar international law definition of intervention as, “the *dictatorial* interference by one state in the affairs of another state for the purpose of either maintaining or changing the existing order of things.”⁶⁶ These scholars’ statements emphasize the fact that “intervention” is most commonly understood to be forceful, military action whose intent is opposite that of peacekeeping.

While peacekeeping may be a type of intervention in theory, in practice these two terms have different connotations and so are utilized in different ways. In an article entitled “Collective Intervention,” Evan Luard points out that because intervention is seen as an incursion into another’s territory, states do not like to refer to a course of action they are taking as “interventionary.” This term, Luard notes, is more easily applied to another state’s deeds.⁶⁷ Peacekeeping, on the other hand, is perceived to be positive involvement because it

⁶⁴ Ibid., 1.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 3-4

⁶⁶ Gerhard von Glahn, Law Among the Nations, 6th ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 171, quoted in Stephen Gent, “The Strategic Dynamics of Military Intervention”, PhD diss., University of Rochester, 2005, 30-31.

⁶⁷ Evan Luard, *Collective Intervention*, ed. Hedley Bull (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984): 157.

attempts to improve a conflicted situation. Russia's declaration of "peacekeeping" operations in Georgia and Moldova could, on a basic semantic level, have been an attempt to engender a positive reception for its activities in these two conflicts. Given Russia's initial support for Abkhaz and Transdniestrian separatist forces, however, changing the name of its involvement did not alter the Russian forces' negative reputation.

The unpopularity of Russian activities in these conflicts was not a unique situation, however. Patrick Regan and Evan Luard note that the consequences of interventionary actions often provoke negative responses. "...[i]nterventions that exacerbate an existing conflict are bad for" just about everyone, Regan claims. He continues that "even an intervention undertaken with the most humane of intentions can create a rapidly deteriorating situation when the policy is either ill-conceived or poorly implemented."⁶⁸ Luard, on the other hand, isolates single-party intervention as the type that should not be tolerated, largely for its self-centeredness. The intervening power will benefit, which is the reason that this outside state decided to intrude on another state's sovereignty in the first place. Luard suggests that the recipient government of the interventionary action is most likely not happy about what is taking place; moreover, it is probable that the intervening power was not welcome in the first place.⁶⁹

Luard and Regan's comments are general; their applicability to explaining Russia's position in both Abkhazia/Georgia and Transdniestria/Moldova, however, is quite specific. As will be explained in more detail at a later point, Russia's policy towards these conflicts was "ill-conceived" *and* "poorly implemented" due to the internal domestic situation in

⁶⁸ Patrick M. Regan, Civil Wars and Foreign Powers, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000: 2-3.

⁶⁹ Luard, 157.

Russia. In addition, Russia's intervention was single-party. The Commonwealth of Independent States—of which Russia remains the most powerful member—pledged to send a peacekeeping force to Georgia and Moldova, but the Russian Federation was the sole supplier of troops. The OSCE and UN also sent missions to Moldova and Georgia, respectively, in response to appeals from the Moldovan and Georgian governments. Neither international organization sent enough assistance to displace the Russian forces or the Russians' central role in each conflict. As Margo Light points out, Russian "peacekeeping" forces were able to maintain a prominent position in both Georgia and Moldova because "...there were no alternative peacekeepers, since the UN was unlikely to intervene in any part of the former USSR, and the...OSCE, while active in mediating conflicts, does not have peacekeeping troops at its disposal."⁷⁰

While the international community became involved to some extent, Russia remained the main power on the ground—especially because, although the UN and OSCE had observer missions in Georgia and Moldova, they had no jurisdiction over the Russian forces. Dov Lynch highlights the fact that "the presence of the UN and the OSCE in the conflict zones... [did] not constrain Russian policy. In fact, this presence can be seen as...*de facto* justifying Russia's operations..."⁷¹ Still, when the Russian government realized its activities would be further legitimized by a direct mandate from a regional or international organization, so it made a concerted effort to have the CIS recognized as a regional organization capable of providing such a mandate.⁷² The UN did, in fact, pass Resolution 937 in July 1994 to

⁷⁰ Margot Light, "Foreign Policy," in Developments in Russian Politics 6, ed. by Stephen White, Zvi Gitelman, and Richard Savwa, Durham: Duke University Press, 2005: 233.

⁷¹ Dov Lynch, Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000:13.

⁷² Johnson, "Keeping the Peace", 29.

officially validate the Commonwealth of Independent States Peacekeeping Force in Abkhazia, but this is the only direct authentication Russia's actions received from an international body.

Based solely on Luard's and Regan's comments, then, Russian intervention in Georgia and Moldova embodied the worst possible characteristics an interventionary action could have.

The preceding analysis delineates portions of Russia's involvement in Georgia and Moldova that could be considered both forceful intervention and peacekeeping. The mixture of characteristics leaves one wondering how to classify Russian activities in these two conflicts. In his analysis of the conflicts, Dov Lynch "maintains that the Russian government has pursued a *strategy of armed suasion*... [which] consists of the limited use of force and other tools of pressure...against a target state...in order to influence the [target's] actions/perceptions...in a direction desired by the external state..."⁷³ Lynch's focus on Russia's actions for the purpose of influencing Georgia and Moldova's policies is necessary to understand why the Russian government responded to these conflicts the way it did. Lynch's explanation, however, is not sufficient to complete comprehension of Russia's involvement.

The Russian government offered its help to the Georgian and Moldovan governments only *after* these governments conceded to several of Russia's key foreign policy goals: Georgia joined the CIS and Moldova permitted Russian troops to be deployed on Moldovan soil. By agreeing to Russia's demands, the Georgian and Moldovan governments effectively provided Russia with a greater foothold in each country's internal politics, which was a critical aspect in Russia retaining influence in the former Soviet sphere. *Before* these

⁷³ Lynch, Russian Peacekeeping Strategies, 4.

concessions, however, Russia was very involved in supporting the Transdnistrians and Abkhazians for several reasons that, as will be outlined later, had very little to do with getting Georgia and Moldova to capitulate Russian demands. These additional reasons suggest that there is a more apt definition for Russia's involvement than pure military intervention, traditional peacekeeping and even Lynch's "strategy of armed suasion."

Given Russia's status, at the time, of being the main third party in both clashes; its lack of neutrality throughout its involvement; Ministry of Defense support for an armed "peacekeeping" force that engaged members of the warring parties; and clear political motivations that stretched from domestic to the former Soviet states to other countries' perceptions of Russia and its power, Russia's involvement in the conflicts in Abkhazia and Transdnistria defies classification. The inability to categorize Russia's activities is important because attempting to classify either operation as either peacekeeping *or* forceful intervention results in misleading assumptions about Russia's intent. In addition, if the way Russia executed its policies in Abkhazia and Transdnistria could be pigeonholed into an existing political science theory, this discussion would be reduced to studying Russia's operations, their actions and effectiveness, in relation to past peacekeeping missions.

Russia did, indeed, intervene in the conflicts in Abkhazia and Transdnistria—this cannot be argued. Any third party interjecting itself into the middle of a clash between two groups of people would be intervening, though, regardless of that third party's intent. Russia's intervention was different from traditional military intervention because the Russian government was determined that its involvement in Georgia and Moldova was "peacekeeping." Its desire to interject a "peacekeeping" force into these two conflicts meant that the Russian government attempted at several points to undo the harm inflicted on itself

by outwardly supporting the separatists in the beginning. In a speech to Georgian and Abkhaz authorities on 28 August 1992, Russian President Boris Yeltsin emphasized that

Russia does not support separatist and warring appeals, no matter where they have originated from. Our country will undertake every necessary action to put a stop to the infiltration of Georgian territory by armed detachments...At the same time, we are convinced of the necessity of immediate conclusion of fighting and the cessation of all war-like actions [in order to] secure the human rights...of the Abkhaz and other people of Georgia.⁷⁴

These remarks paint the Russian government as the ultimate peacekeeping force, standing up for national sovereignty and protecting every individual's rights to safety and security. Some people might argue that Yeltsin merely said these things to win support for Russian military activities, and these people would not be wholly wrong. Yet the fact remains that after the Russian government announced the formation of peacekeeping forces in Georgia and Moldova, it initiated cease-fires in both countries that were subsequently broken by the Transdnistrians and Abkhazians, not by Russian, Georgian, or Moldovan forces. Russian "peacekeeping" forces were nowhere near as impartial as they should have been to truly be considered peacekeeping troops, and, as Dov Lynch points out, these forces "froze the conflicts at the point where Russia's wider security concerns had been secured (Georgia), or at least at that point that was most advantageous to Russia's interests (Moldova)."⁷⁵

However, Russian troops in these regions appeared to at least attempt to stop the fighting, even when the rest of the international community had little to do with either situation.⁷⁶

These points are not made to defend Russia's activities, but rather to underscore the difficulty

⁷⁴ Boris Yeltsin, "Address of the President of Russia to the Governments of Georgia and Abkhazia" (Obrasheniye Prezidenta Rossii k Rukovodstvu Gruzii i Abkazi), *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 28 August 1992, from East View Database, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (24 January 2006).

⁷⁵ Lynch, *Russian Peacekeeping Strategies*, 12.

⁷⁶ S. Neil MacFarlane, "On the Front Lines of the Near Abroad: The CIS and the OSCE in Georgia's Civil Wars," *Third World Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1997): 528.

of categorizing Russia's involvement in Georgia and Moldova. In the end, the Russian government contributed to the conflicts *and* to solving them for domestic and foreign policy reasons.

Russian intervention in the conflicts in Georgia and Moldova involved forceful military actions and concentrated peacekeeping efforts. Forceful military actions attempted to reinforce Russia's interests and influence in the former Soviet sphere by strengthening the ties between Russia, the Transdnistrians and the Abkhaz. Support for the separatists also put pressure on the Georgian and Moldovan governments, which finally capitulated to certain demands that gave Russia a stronger foothold in each country. At this point Russia changed tactics and instigated peacekeeping operations. Through peacekeeping the Russian government could extend greater support to Georgia and Moldova, with which it wanted to strengthen ties. At the same time, Russia could attempt to mitigate some of the harmful effects its earlier actions in these conflicts had on its ability to continue to influence each situation.

Chapter 5: Russia's Method: Rationale, Policies, and Practices for Peacekeeping Missions in Georgia and Moldova

Preceding sections of this thesis outline historical factors leading to the outbreak of fighting in Abkhazia and Transdnistria; Russia's direct role in these conflicts and how this role changed as Russia's foreign policy goals were met or morphed; and a look at both intervention theory and peacekeeping theory, with the intent of categorizing Russia's actions as forceful intervention, peacekeeping, or something in between. With such background information established, this section of the thesis addresses several important questions. How have Russia's actions precluded, replaced, or accompanied the international community's response to these conflicts? Finally, and perhaps most importantly, what rationale has the Russia government provided for its actions in these two conflicts? Rationale will be provided for Russia's early activities in each conflict, when the Russian government supported the separatists, and for Russia's actions after it instituted "peacekeeping" forces in Georgia and Moldova.

Why, Exactly? Russia's Rationale, Part 1

Reiterating the disarray into which Russia's identity as a state and nation was thrown following the collapse of the Soviet Union is hardly necessary. While Russia found itself the main benefactor of the U.S.S.R.'s institutions and infrastructure, the Russian government and population received no assistance in deciding how, exactly, to restructure or, more appropriately, to recreate its identity and standing in the world community. Russia went from being at the center of a huge empire to a country that was struggling to define itself, and

this struggle affected the Russian government's activities at every level. Margot Light comments that "[a]ttempts to redefine Russia's identity [following the end of the Soviet Union] affected the coherence of foreign policy..."⁷⁷ She continues that "[m]ost Russians found it difficult to accept that some areas of the USSR were no longer part of Russia. It was not just...nostalgia for past greatness... The loss of empire led to confusion about Russia's role in the world."⁷⁸

The Russian government, then, was left with the monumental task of completely recalibrating its internal politics in addition to its foreign policy. As Light's comments demonstrate, this task was made more complicated by the fact that the Russian government and its citizens were being forced to answer a more basic question about Russia's identity and its status since it was no longer one of the world's superpowers.

As the Kremlin worked to redefine its policies in the early 1990s, a few overarching themes quickly became apparent. First, the Russian government realized that its "hands-off" policy towards other former Soviet republics was ineffective if Russia wanted to gain/retain "great power" status in the international community.⁷⁹ The desire to be the foreign presence in these former republics intensified as Russia realized that if it did not get involved, some other country or international organization would. The last thing the Russian government wanted was to lose even more control over its near abroad, which had traditionally been its power base in interactions with Europe and the United States.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Light, 221.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 225.

⁷⁹ Lynch, "Separatist States," 845.

⁸⁰ MacFarlane, 511.

Russia's expanding concern for its sphere of influence as rationale for its involvement in Abkhazia and Transdniestria is reminiscent of Dmitri Trenin's comment, quoted earlier, about "imperial restoration." It seems that rather than trying to restore its empire physically, what the Russian government really wanted was the power, prestige, and resources that accompanied its status as the center of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union. S. Neil MacFarlane highlights what Russia stood to gain through increased influence in the former Soviet Union when he references "the fate of the Russian Diaspora, the lack of developed defenses among the borders of the Russian Federation...concern over Islam, and discomfort with the spill-over effects of instability in other regions."⁸¹

The determination to protect Russians everywhere went beyond the fear, for example, that conflicts flaring up in countries bordering on Russia could spread to Russia itself. As was mentioned in the section on the conflict in Moldova, the Soviet Union's collapse left large groups of troops, weapons, and ammunition scattered throughout the ex-Soviet republics. Russia, as the beneficiary of the Soviet military institution, knew that if it did not act fast to defend its newly acquired military installations, its military's firepower and troop numbers would be greatly diminished as independent republics laid claim to Soviet military arsenals.⁸² Not wanting to lose what had been one of the Soviet Union's most advanced and well-developed attributes, the Russian government moved to protect its interests. In this case, that meant getting involved in conflicts in former Soviet republics.

It is also important to note that, when it decided to get involved in Abkhazia and Moldova, the Russian government itself was internally divided. Schisms formed between the

⁸¹ MacFarlane, 521.

⁸² Pavel K. Baev, "The Influence of the Balkan Crisis on Russia's Peacekeeping in Its 'Near Abroad,'" in Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia, Ed. By Lena Johnson and Clive Archer, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996: 74

old guard, hard-line Communists who wanted to return to the Soviet system; the reformists who wanted Russia to become democratic and integrated in the international community; and the rest of the politicians, who fell somewhere in the middle. As it became clear that Russia needed to protect investments in former Soviet Republics, however, members of the Russian government that disagreed on everything else rallied around the conviction that these interests had to be protected.⁸³

Internal divisions were not the only challenge to developing Russia's policy towards the former Soviet republics, however. The collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent upheaval of its structures meant that Russia's domestic political situation needed to be redeveloped. This redevelopment was touted as the chance for Russia to emerge as a fully democratic state. It encountered problems, however, when it became apparent that rather than forming a government based on effective laws, divisions within the Russian government were basing decisions on whether or not they would curry favor with President Boris Yeltsin.

Yeltsin's power and popularity were cemented after his prominent role in ending the August 1991 coup attempt. "Yeltsin emerged from the [August 1991] putsch with the status of a demigod...he was widely regarded in his own society as a doer of extraordinary deeds, a holder of distinctive powers, and a liberator from a widely despised...way of life," writes M. Steven Fish.⁸⁴ Unfortunately, however, the strengthening of Yeltsin's personal popularity did not result in better defined political powers. In fact, Fish notes that while Russia in the early 1990s could be considered a democracy because it held elections on a regular basis, the formation of government institutions based on Yeltsin's popularity created a case of

⁸³ Holobof, 161.

⁸⁴ M. Steven Fish, "When More is Less: Superexecutive Power and Political Underdevelopment in Russia," in Russia in the New Century: Stability or Disorder? ed. Victoria E. Bonnell and George W. Breslauer, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2001:16.

superpresidentialism that harmed Russia more than it helped. Specifically, Fish writes that “[s]uperpresidentialism... contributed to the legitimacy crisis in Russia by identifying the regime with a single individual in the popular imagination...”⁸⁵ “Identifying the regime” with a personality like Yeltsin became even more harmful for the government’s legitimacy both domestically and internationally as Yeltsin’s less positive character traits emerged.

Domestic politics in Russia were detrimentally influenced, then, by the fact that Yeltsin’s personality was central to the government’s functioning. The focus on Yeltsin’s personality manifested itself in a system of government in which power was focused almost exclusively in the executive branch, which meant that there were few checks on Yeltsin’s initiatives.⁸⁶ In what George W. Breslauer describes as a personalistic system, “the key to political longevity and influence was to capture the attention and ear of the patriarch [Yeltsin].”⁸⁷ Such competition led government officials to focus on competing for Yeltsin’s esteem rather than formulating sound policies that would help Russia develop as a democratic society. Yeltsin favored this self-aggrandizing approach to politics, choosing “to manipulate diversity in ways that played factions off against each other and thereby maintained or enhanced his image as the ‘ultimate arbiter.’”⁸⁸

Yeltsin’s management techniques further endangered Russia’s legitimacy and ability to function effectively. Such practices, including the creation of parallel government agencies; constant hiring and firing of government employees, and regular restructuring of

⁸⁵ Ibid., 16 and 19.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 24.

⁸⁷ George W. Breslauer, “Personalism Versus Proceduralism: Boris Yeltsin and the Institutional Fragility of the Russia System,” in Russia in the New Century: Stability or Disorder? ed. Victoria E. Bonnell and George W. Breslauer, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2001: 40.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 50.

existing organizations left the government in a constant state of flux.⁸⁹ President Yeltsin's abuse of his personal power and popularity, then, harmed Russia's fledgling government as officials were so focused on competing with each other to gain the President's favor and protect their jobs that they did not focus on creating sound domestic or foreign policy.

Competition for Yeltsin's favor escalated to the point that it caused radical changes in Russia's foreign policy. Whereas directly after the Soviet Union collapsed the Russian government was focused on cementing its ties with the West, the "struggle for political power in Moscow and the politicization of foreign policy" pushed Russian foreign policy to converge on the "near abroad" instead.⁹⁰ This competition, combined with the fact that throughout his presidency Yeltsin relied heavily on the military's backing, meant that Russian policies towards the CIS were largely formulated by the Ministry of Defense (MoD) rather than the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).⁹¹ The MoD's control over such Russia's CIS policies explains why many of these policies were based on hard, military based power, rather than soft, diplomatic power sources.

Internal disputes over control of Russia's "near abroad" policy spread even further than the MoD and MFA. Russian Border Service and the CIS High Command joined the fray, and these four bodies disagreed on everything from general policy to, more specifically, commencing peacekeeping operations in the near abroad. "Differences between these institutions...ranged from viewing 'peacekeeping' as a tool of coercive diplomacy to interpreting it as a form of combat activity at the lower end of the spectrum of conflict," says

⁸⁹ Ibid., 50.

⁹⁰ Lynch, Russian Peacekeeping Strategies, 6.

⁹¹ Ibid., 10.

Dov Lynch.⁹² The inability of different divisions of the Russian government to agree, not just on policy options, but on how different practices should be carried out, shows the degree to which Russia's domestic political squabbles affected its ability to enact concrete, legitimate foreign policy. The competition between government institutions, uncertainty about job security, and the desire to garner Yeltsin's favor, in combination with Yeltsin's own dependence on the military's support undoubtedly influenced Russia's policy towards former Soviet republics in the early 1990s.

A second piece of rationale for Russia's involvement in the former Soviet Republics was Russia's conviction that it knew more about the area, and was therefore more capable of providing assistance where and when it was needed.⁹³ Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, in an April 1992 television interview said as much when he noted that "[w]e understand the psychology, we have all come from one 'zone' so to speak and so we understand each other very well. Nobody understands these post-Soviet problems as well as the Soviet people themselves."⁹⁴ This argument relates to Russia's constant and continuous claims that the former Soviet space did then—and to this day—belong in Russia's sphere of influence. Russia's Foreign Policy Concept spoke, in the early 1990s, of Russia's responsibility to develop positive relations among the newly independent states, as well as its role as "the guarantor of the stability of these relations."⁹⁵

Pavel Baev puts forward another hypothesis to explain Russian involvement in these conflicts. He contends that the various conflicts in the Balkans "allow[ed] Russia to claim

⁹² Ibid., 32.

⁹³ Ibid., 8-9.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 92.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 52.

legitimacy for its own intervention: first, no one else was able or willing to shoulder the burden,”⁹⁶ just as various members of the international community shied away from stepping forward to address the burgeoning crisis in Yugoslavia. “[S]econd,” Baev continues,

Russia [insisted that it] was not violating any international norms. Supporting secessions made the second argument weak, but Russia...could point to the precedents created by UN peacekeeping operations in Croatia, where the ‘blue helmets’ were securing Serbian control of Krajina, as well as in Bosnia, where partitions as a principle have been accepted.⁹⁷

In short, Russia felt justified in using the international community’s response to the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia as validation for Russian decisions to respond to fighting in Abkhazia and Transdnestria. If members of the United Nations, NATO, the OSCE purportedly followed the “rules” of peacekeeping in their activities in Yugoslavia and had such difficulty getting things accomplished, what right did these same organizations and countries have to balk at Russia’s less conventional involvement in Georgia and Moldova?

Thirdly, members of the recently formed Russian government wanted to live up to the expectations of governments from the developed democratic world. These governments were carefully watching Russia and promising a great deal of assistance—monetary and otherwise—in an effort to help Russia become a bastion of democracy in the former Communist sphere. Gennady Burbulis, a high-ranking official in Russian President Boris Yeltsin’s cabinet, underlined Russia’s desire to reform its image in the near and far abroad when, in comments made in early 1992, he said that “Russia had ‘to prove to the world...and ourselves that we are acquiring fundamentally new values and are able to...stop intimidating the world community with the Great Russian Superpower.’” He joined with then Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev in insisting that the Russian government needed to “expunge

⁹⁶ Baev, 72.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 72.

‘imperial thinking’” from its policies. Kozyrev went on to insist that although Russia had “geostrategic interests in the former Soviet Union, Russian relations with these states had to be established on the basis of equality and good will.”⁹⁸

Both Burbulis and Kozyrev acknowledged that Russia was using its size, power, and policies to evoke concessions from its neighbors; at the same time, however, both government officials seemed to recognize that if they wanted to gain real respect in the world community, they had to stop pushing other countries around simply because they could. While such concessions could be mere political posturing, comments such as those quoted above give some insight into reasons that the Russian government decided to change course in the middle of its operations in Georgia and Moldova. By admitting to its use of intimidation and declaring a desire to establish relations based on “equality and good will,” the Russian government was justifying its endeavors in former Soviet Republics as positive and solution-oriented.

The final and perhaps most intuitive rationale for scholars familiar with many of Russia’s post-Soviet foreign policy decisions was Russia’s desire to maintain some semblance of the power that it had enjoyed as a central component of the Soviet Union. This explanation hints at the other side of the “hegemony” explanation that was presented earlier. It is true that Russia’s desire to protect its citizens and other Russophones led Russia to take a decisive role in the conflicts in Abkhazia and Transdnistria. At the same time, however, one of the biggest problems facing Russia was the loss of its Superpower status. Elaine M. Holobof explains the connection between this loss of status and Russia’s actions in the near abroad when she writes that “...one of the driving forces [behind Russia’s military intervention was] the need to maintain the belief that Russia is still a great power, despite the

⁹⁸ Lynch, Russian Peacekeeping Strategies, 46.

failure of ideology, the loss of empire, humiliating economic conditions, and frequently absurd domestic policies.”⁹⁹ Indeed, Russia’s willingness to take on the conflicts in Abkhazia and Georgia mirrored a desire that remains prevalent to this day on all levels of Russian society: the desire to be taken seriously, and to be shown the respect accorded a great world power—a respect that the government and people feel they never should have lost.

All of the above rationales are intended to be general, rather than reasons specifically tailored towards the conflicts in either Abkhazia or Transdnistria. In researching and subsequently analyzing the reasons provided, a couple of common denominators stand out. The first is that in its involvement in the former Soviet republics, Russia expressed a great desire to *protect*. The Russian government ensconced itself in these countries and the conflicts that sprang up because it had an innate desire to protect its people, borders, and the institutions Russia inherited from the Soviet Union. The second commonality was the Russian government’s desire to *promote*. As Russia strove to recreate itself in the early 1990s, involvement in the near abroad enabled Russia to promote itself as a country that was still capable of functioning as a regional hegemon; as a power that deserved attention and respect from the rest of the world for its ability to bring conflicting parties together; and as a government that, despite its new formation and villainized past (for the West), was able to act decisively and effectively when it saw the need to do so.

Russia’s desire to protect and promote its interests in the early 1990s may sound like rhetoric, and, in many cases, the government was likely espousing policies to assuage political fallout from some of its actions. The point, however, is not to analyze how well the Russian government’s actions matched its statements. The focus of this thesis is to look at

⁹⁹ Holobof, 154.

why Russia thought it was justified in acting and reacting to conflicts in Abkhazia and Moldova in a particular way. For this reason, it is most important to consider the Russian government's explanations, rather than how it actually implemented (or failed to implement, in some cases) the policies that it championed.

Why, Exactly? Russia's Rationale, Part 2

Everything mentioned in the section on Russia's general rationale for involvement in the former Soviet bloc applies to the situations in Abkhazia and Transdniestria. Russia also had specific justifications for its activities in both Georgia and Moldova. The purpose of this section is to document these specific reasons, and in doing so, attempt to understand the Russian government's justifications for its actions in the early 1990s.

Georgia

One of the Russian government's explanations for its continued presence in ex-Soviet countries was to protect Russia and Russian interests. When Abkhazia declared its independence from Georgia, the Russian government realized that any fighting in this region could endanger the Russian Federation for a number of reasons. Catherine Dale explains how Georgia, as part of the Caucasus region

has long served as a critical buffer zone against potential threats from Iran or Turkey. Any instability leaves a stretch of Russia's underbelly exposed. War in Georgia in particular cuts off the flow of transportation and resources to Armenia, with which Russia has also tried to maintain particularly close ties...Most importantly, conflict in the Transcaucasus not only brings profound instability right to Russia's back door, but also carries the danger that fighting will spill over into the Russian Federation.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Dale, 124.

Fighting between Georgian and Abkhaz troops, then, presented another problem for the Russian government, which was already handling a bevy of political, social, and economic problems when the conflict erupted. The Russian government's decision to play an active role in the conflict in Abkhazia might seem counterintuitive to outsiders; after all, Russia had plenty to manage without entering a war in a foreign country. On the other hand, as Ms. Dale's quote highlights, instability in Georgia could lead to greater instability in the Caucasus region as a whole. An unstable Georgia or other Caucasus country could, in turn, endanger the Russian Federation. It made more sense for Russia to wade into the Abkhaz-Georgian clash than face the unknown consequences of an unstable, volatile border.

If Russia wanted stability, why did it begin its foray into Georgian politics by supporting Abkhaz separatists—a move that would more likely contribute to *destabilization*? One explanation could involve Russia's historically close ties to Abkhazia. Another possibility, though, is that Russia thought that by assisting the separatists, it could secure a faster victory—victory that would allow both the Georgians and the Abkhaz to establish their newly formed territories more quickly than would a long, drawn-out military campaign.

If this was Russia's goal, however, it soon backfired. The Abkhaz were either so strengthened by Russia's military assistance, or the Georgians were so weakened by the collapse of the Soviet Union and flight of military goods and capital, that as fighting continued, Georgia teetered on the brink of destruction.¹⁰¹ It was at this point, that the Georgian government agreed to join the CIS in return for the cessation of Russia's assistance to the Abkhaz. Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze's concessions to Russian demands lead to another conclusion: the possibility that, if the Russians applied the right amount of

¹⁰¹ Lynch, Russian Peacekeeping Strategies, 138.

pressure on the Georgians, they could achieve particular foreign policy goals.¹⁰² Such goals insured Russia's role as a (if not the) major power in the region, or at least guaranteed Russia an influential place in Georgian politics. Official Russian Government statements do not admit to using military force to induce a specific response from the Georgian government. Instead, speeches like the one Yeltsin delivered to a group of citizens from the North Caucasus suggest just the opposite. Yeltsin reaffirmed Russia's devotion to a unified Georgia in which every citizen is accorded the "all around security of human rights and the harmonious combination of interests of all the Georgian people."¹⁰³ This speech capitalized on positive public diplomacy—the kind that would build support for Russia's activities in Georgia.

Russia's desire to retain its influence in the region made Georgia's geographic position an even more important explanation for Russian involvement. First, Georgia shares a border with Chechnya, a separatist region with which Russia has struggled, most recently, since about the time fighting broke out between the Abkhaz and Georgians.¹⁰⁴ Maintaining a physical presence and political influence in Georgia could provide Russia a foothold in an area that might otherwise prove increasingly unstable and unfriendly towards Russia. The Russian government's desire to retain Georgia as an ally, or at the very least not to push Georgia away helps to explain the Russian government's about-face in its approach to the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia. After supporting the separatists' cause for several months in 1992, the Russian Ministries of Foreign Affairs Defense "rejected the creation of

¹⁰² Ibid., 137.

¹⁰³ Boris Yeltsin, "Obrashenie Prezidenta Rossii k Narodam Severnovo Kavkazii, vsemu Naseleniy Yuga Rossii", *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 8 August 1992, from East View Database, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (24 January 2006).

¹⁰⁴ Seth Mydans, "Georgia and Its two Big Brothers," *New York Times*, 28 November 2003, A18.

an independent Abkhazia, which might encourage separation in [other states] in the North Caucasus.”¹⁰⁵ The Russian government saw that its support for Abkhaz independence actually threatened the stability of the Caucasus region by unintentionally encouraging other separatist groups to fight for independence. Russia also realized that if one region of Georgia succeeded in securing independence, other regions of other countries—including parts of Russia—might follow suit. This led the Russian government to throw its support behind a “peacekeeping” mission in Georgia, in the hopes that a solution could be found to preserve Georgia as a unified, peaceful Russian ally.

Georgia’s other strategically important characteristic is its Black Sea ports.¹⁰⁶ These ports provide Russia’s oil industry with access to crucial export markets. The loss of these ports would seriously damage Russia’s economy. In addition to stability in the region and security for Russians and Russophones, then, ensuring continued access to Georgia by instigating a “peacekeeping” mission during the Abkhaz/Georgian conflict made economic sense for Russia as well.

Another reason, that might provide the most acceptable/conventional explanation for Russia’s initial military response was the attack on Russian troops stationed in Abkhazia as the conflict was breaking out. There is no conclusive proof implicating Georgian troops in these attacks. The fact that a Russian helicopter was destroyed by a “missile fired from Georgian controlled territory” in December 1992, and that shortly thereafter both an attack

¹⁰⁵ Lynch, Russian Peacekeeping Strategies, 135.

¹⁰⁶ Dale, 127.

on a Russian helicopter and an invasion of a Russian Supply Base in Tbilisi transpired, however, lead directly to Russian assistance for the Abkhaz.¹⁰⁷

In sum, Russia's rationale for getting involved in the Georgian/Abkhaz conflict was based on several factors. From a geographically strategic standpoint, Georgia was (and remains) an important "buffer zone" between Russia and some of its volatile mid-Eastern neighbors. In addition, Georgia's position in the North Caucasus—an area that has proven troublesome for post-Soviet Russia—makes Russia's presence in Georgia, as well as Georgia's stability, more important. Georgia also provides Russia with crucial access to Black Sea ports. On the political strategy side, Russia's active response to the conflict in Georgia extracted important political concessions from the Georgian government. It also provided an arena for Russia to continue asserting its influence in the former Soviet Union. Finally, Russian troops were directly attacked in a presumably unprovoked act of aggression while they remained stationed in Georgia in late 1992.

Moldova

The logic behind Russia's active participation in the Transdnistria/Moldova conflict shares a few similarities with those given for Abkhazia/Georgia: that of geographically strategic importance and increased influence in the former Soviet Union. Georgia's strategic geographic significance provides Russia with a buffer zone between it and other more volatile areas and connections to Black Sea ports. Moldova, on the other hand, with its proximity to Western Europe, provides Russia a buffer zone between itself and NATO

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 124.

member states.¹⁰⁸ Many former Soviet republics expressed interest in joining NATO shortly after they gained independence, which caused concern in Moscow. Although NATO's founding purpose was basically eradicated by the collapse of communism in Europe, Russia remained worried about NATO's encroachment on countries that should remain part of Russia's sphere of influence. Just as Georgia could provide Russia a stable ally in the North Caucasus, then, so too did Russia want Moldova to remain a stable supporter of Russia in an area increasingly influenced by Europe and the United States.

Russia's initial support for Abkhaz separatists persuaded Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze to join the CIS; in the same way, Russia's backing the Transdnistrians pushed Moldovan President Snegur to eventually accept Russia's help in resolving the conflict—including allowing a semi-permanent contingent of Russian troops to be based in Moldova. Russia's actions in Transdnistria, especially early on in the conflict cemented Russia's influence in Moldova for the foreseeable future.

The other main explanation stems from Russia's desire to protect native Russians and other Russophones living in Transdnistria. As mentioned previously, as the U.S.S.R. was disintegrating there was a strong movement within Moldova to strengthen ties with Romania. Besides lessening, or obliterating altogether, Russian influence in Moldova, the Russian government was also very concerned about the fate of "ethnic Russians and other Slav secessionists who make up more than two-thirds of the population of [Transdnistria]."¹⁰⁹ Russia saw closer ties between Moldova and Romania as a threat to this population—a threat that required direct intercession on its part.

¹⁰⁸ "Stalemate Across the Dniester".

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

Russia's active defense of the Transdnistrians, which led to increasing involvement in Transdnistria/Moldova as a whole, was furthered by the Moldovan government's actions. While this conflict crystallized in 1992, Russian President Boris Yeltsin declared Russia's desire to remain uninvolved. However, as Andrew Bennett notes, "[w]ithin a few days, seemingly in response to Yeltsin's non-interventionist stance, Moldovan forces went on the offensive and besieged Bendery [in Transdnistria]."¹¹⁰ Bennett goes on to quote Alexander Pikayev, a Russian scholar at the Carnegie Institute for International Peace's Moscow Center: "for the first time since World War II, weapons were used against a Russian speaking population...Russia's response was swift and dramatic...in part because the date of the Moldovan offensive marked the anniversary of Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941."¹¹¹ While Moldovan troops did not attack Russian troops, as allegedly happened between Georgian and Russian troops in Georgia, Moldova's aggressive action in the face of Russia's attempts at neutrality (or at least disengagement) were interpreted by the Russians as a provocation that required a direct response.

Russia's desire to protect Russophones from what it considered contentious actions by the Moldovan government provided Russia more validation for its activities in Transdnistria: humanitarian assistance. In an April 1992 interview on Russian television, Russian Vice President Alexander Rutskoi explained that "While following the cause of non-interference in the affairs of another state, Russia must at the same time defend Russian and other citizens."¹¹² Initial Russian justification, therefore, centered on Russian claims of the

¹¹⁰ Bennett, 327.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 327.

¹¹² Lynch, Russian Peacekeeping Strategies, 115.

necessity to provide humanitarian assistance and protection to people under its national umbrella.

The position of the Russian military vis-à-vis this conflict supported the government's contentions that it was involved to protect people. In an interview in the Russian newspaper *Krasnaia Zvezda*, Russian Lt. Colonel S. Popov asserted that "The [Russian] Army is not fighting, but protecting itself and its people." He continued by voicing what he considered to be the government's orders for the mission in Transdnistria/Moldova: "protect the Russia people, but don't get mixed up in the conflict; if they shoot at you—answer, but don't call [gunfire] upon yourselves."¹¹³ These remarks could be solely for political consumption; on the other hand, they also reflect the deeply-ingrained belief that Russia had a duty to protect Transdnistrians, and that in this case doing so entailed military involvement.

When it became clear that retaining Moldova's support would be more beneficial than just protecting Russophones in Transdnistria on a political and strategic level, Russia's emphasis shifted to "peacekeeping" activities. Its role as "peacekeeper" in the conflict ensured Russia continued access to Moldova as a geographic stronghold against the incursion of NATO, as well as another post-Soviet arena in which Russia could continue to wield its influence.

Russia's rationale for its involvement in the conflicts in Georgia and Moldova was not too different, overall, from its general explanation for its foreign policy in former Soviet states in general. Russia wanted to guarantee a continued degree of influence in both Georgia and Moldova; it wanted to protect itself from volatile states and the uncertainty of

¹¹³ S. Popov, "Shtrixhi k Portrety Armii, Okazavshesiya v Fokyse Dramaticheskix Sobitii," *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 26 June 1992, East View Database, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (20 January 2006).

changing alliances that surrounded Russian territory; and, especially in the case of Moldova, Russia felt an intrinsic need to protect ethnic Russians and other Russophones living abroad. There may be other reasons that Russia felt justified in engaging in these two conflicts. This section has presented the most prominent explanations for Russia's foray—first as a biased party, and then as a self-declared “peacekeeping” force—into what could be considered solely internal conflicts.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

While the bulk of Russian military action took place in the early 1990s, Russian troops are still stationed in both Moldova and Georgia—much to the consternation of Moldova’s and Georgia’s governments. Both countries have changed governments at least once since fighting erupted in the two countries, and the close ties that these new governments have developed with countries other than Russia have strained relations with Moscow. As a result, the Russian government’s influence in each of these former Soviet republics has been greatly reduced. Georgia and Moldova are also members of GUUAM (along with Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan), a group formed in 1996 “as a political, economic and strategic alliance designed to strengthen the independence and sovereignty of these former Soviet Union Republics.”¹¹⁴ This increased strength in GUUAM’s “independence and sovereignty” translates into a challenge to Russia’s domination, both in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the former Soviet Union as a whole.¹¹⁵

The Russian government is also under increasing pressure from Moldova, Georgia, and much of the international community to withdraw Russian troops from Moldova and Georgia. The Russian government pledged to do this at the 1999 OSCE meeting in Turkey, but as of today has yet to initiate the withdrawal.¹¹⁶ The first part of this chapter will take a

¹¹⁴ “The GUUAM Group: History and Principles,” November 2000, <<http://www.guam.org/general/browse.html>> (19 February 2006).

¹¹⁵ Alex Pravda, “Foreign Policy,” in *Developments in Russian Politics 5*, ed. by Stephen White, Alex Pravda and Zvi Gitelman, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2001: 217.

¹¹⁶ Roland Eggleston, “OSCE: Final Text Nixed After Dispute on Russian Troops in Moldova,” *Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty*, 6 December 2005,

brief look at changes that have occurred in the relationships between the Russian, Georgian and Moldovan governments, as well as the effect these changes have had on Russia's involvement in the conflict in each country. This section will provide a less than comprehensive account of the problems that plague the association between Russia and each of these countries. The examples provided, though, should contribute to a basic understanding of the increasing challenges Russia faces in implementing its foreign policy in Georgia and Moldova.

Georgia

When Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze relinquished his position in the wake of the peaceful "Rose Revolution" in 2003, he also waived much of the Russia's ability to influence Georgian politics. Shevardnadze, who was a politician in the Soviet Union's Communist government as well, was replaced through democratic elections by Mikhail Saakashvili in 2004. The onset of Saakashvili's government instigated greater efforts to abandon Georgia's Soviet ties and forge stronger connections to the West—especially with the United States. This, obviously, has not made Russia very happy, and relations between Georgia and Russia have steadily deteriorated.

The relationship between the Russian and Georgian governments has been plagued by the continued presence of Russian troops in Georgia; the large number of Georgian refugees who were displaced by the conflict in Abkhazia and have yet to return to their homes; and Russia's allegations that Georgia has provided Chechen terrorists refuge in its Pankisi Gorge

<http://www.rferl.org/features/features_Article.aspx?m=12&y=2005&id=0AACE2D9-9FFD-4384-BB4A-54788321404B> (19 February 2006).

region.¹¹⁷ These grievances constitute a large part of the problem in relations between the Georgian and Russian governments, as other problems that arise often refer to the above issues. A recent situation provides a good example. In January 2006, several natural gas pipelines in Georgia exploded—coincidentally, during one of the coldest Georgian winters in recent memory. The official explanation wavers between accident and sabotage, but Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili has publicly accused Russia of purposely causing the explosions in an attempt to increase its influence on Georgia’s energy industry.¹¹⁸ Russia denied this allegation, which engendered an angrier response, in which Saakashvili promised to demand that Russian peacekeeping troops “leave the country immediately...or...the Russian forces will formally become occupation forces.”¹¹⁹

President Saakashvili’s comments might simply be a show of strength for a population that is cold and tired of energy dependence on its resource-rich northern neighbor. However, his promise to “demand” that Russian troops leave, when accompanied by the threat of calling Russian troops an “occupation” force demonstrates how far apart the two governments have grown from one another. Russia may have induced Georgian acquiescence to Russian military presence and closer ties as co-members of the Commonwealth of Independent states in the 1990s. However, Georgia’s new, westward-leaning government wants to emerge from Russia’s shadow and be its own entity, separate from its Soviet history and its more recent ties to the Russian Federation.

¹¹⁷ Light, 234.

¹¹⁸ “Georgia Blames Russia for Pipeline Explosions,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 22 January 2006, <<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/01/cc53db85-72f3-4bb4-87b0-ba07746226c3.html>> (19 February 2006).

¹¹⁹ Sheets, Lawrence, “Freezing Georgia Tussles with Russia,” National Public Radio, 2 February 2006.

Moldova

Moldova's government has also changed since conflict erupted. In 2001 Communist Party candidate Vladimir Voronin was elected Moldova's President "on a pro-Russian, anti-European programme" and was subsequently re-elected in 2005 "on a pro-EU, anti Russian platform."¹²⁰ That the same candidate was elected twice with diametrically opposed foreign policy campaigns gives some indication of the shaky state of relations between Moldova and Russia.

The rocky state of its relationship has encouraged the Russian government to resolve the continuing strife between Transdnistria and Moldova. The Kozak Memorandum, which Russia issued in 2003, outlined a detailed plan that, when fully implemented in 2020, would result in the "neutral, demilitarized state" of Moldova.¹²¹ Russia negotiated this memorandum in secret so that when it was released the OSCE, which has been working towards its own settlement plan, was completely surprised. Even more surprising was the second "secret" Kozak Memorandum, released a few days after the original. This "secret" agreement promised President Smirnov that a sizeable contingent of Russian troops would remain in Transdnistria for the next two decades. This pledge went directly against Russia's 1999 agreement to remove all of its troops from Moldova by December 2002, yet Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin approved this version of the Kozak memorandum anyway.¹²²

¹²⁰ Marius Vahl, "The Europeanisation of the Transnistrian Conflict," Center for European Policy Studies Policy Brief, 73 (May 2005): 1.

¹²¹ "Memorandum Ob osnovnikh printsipakh gosudarstvennogo ustroistva ob"edinennogo gosudarstva," Art. 3.1, quoted in John Löwenhardt, "The OSCE, Moldova, and Russian Diplomacy in 2003," Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics, 20 (no. 4), December 2004: 109.

¹²² John Löwenhardt, "The OSCE, Moldova, and Russian Diplomacy in 2003," Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics, 20 (no. 4), December 2004: 109.

Voronin's support for Russia's Kozak Memorandum was short-lived, however. Pressure from the OSCE, United States, and Moldovan citizens convinced Voronin, at the last minute, to reject Russia's plans.¹²³ Voronin's rebuff scarred the relationship between Moldova and Russia; it also indicated that organizations like the OSCE and some Western governments were usurping Russia's influential position in Moldova.

The OSCE has been monitoring the situation in Moldova for more than a decade and remains one of the most consistent and persistent third parties demanding the withdrawal of Russian troops. The OSCE has been both a major source of information about Russia's lack of withdrawal activity, and one of the forces pushing for this troop withdrawal to take place. In a September 2001 meeting with US government representatives in Washington DC, Ambassador William Hill, head of the OSCE mission to Moldova, made comments about the deteriorating condition of Russia's mission in Moldova and reasons that Russian troops are still there. According to Ambassador Hill, problems with Russia's troop presence and the Russian government extend beyond Russian-Moldovan government tension to the Transdniestrian government as well. Despite this apparent friction, however, the Transdniestrian authorities are not in any hurry to see Russian troops leave. While in Washington, Ambassador Hill remarked that

“...the basic aim of [Transdniestrian] resistance is to keep a Russian presence [in Transdnistria]...they know the Russians won't leave...arms unattended. Therefore, if [Transdniestrian troops] can keep the arms...they'll keep the Russians, and that serves as a de facto shield against possible attacks from the outside...”¹²⁴

¹²³ Löwenhardt, 7.

¹²⁴ “Moldova: Are the Russian Troops Really Leaving? ,” 22.

While the Transdniestrian and Russian governments may be at odds, then, the Transdniestrian Government realizes that Russian troops provide Transdniestria with more substantial protection than it could provide for itself.

Ambassador Hill also made a comment that reveals that some Russians still cling to their government's historical right to be involved in this conflict. Ambassador Hill refers to Russian nationalists "who remember that...the city of Tiraspol was founded...in the time of Catherine the Great...[and so]...consider that they should not have to leave."¹²⁵ The combination of the Transdniestrian government's faith in Russian troops' protection and the historical ties cast yet another shadow over Russia's insistence that its involvement in the conflict between Transdniestria/Moldova has been of a "peacekeeping" nature.

Most recently, the December 2005 OSCE meeting failed to produce its customary final document after Russia refused to agree to a statement stating that "[t]he foreign ministers of the OSCE note the lack of movement in 2005 on the withdrawal of Russian forces from Moldova...[and] reaffirmed their shared determination to promote the fulfillment of that commitment as soon as possible."¹²⁶ The OSCE foreign ministers' desire to include this point, as well as the Russian government's refusal to accept the text because its inclusion shows that, regardless of previous pledges to do so, getting the Russian government to actually remove its troops from Transdniestria/Moldova will be a big task.

The OSCE is not the only outside party pushing for Russian troop withdrawals from Transdniestria/Moldova. Since Victor Yushchenko came to power in Ukraine early last year, he has made great efforts to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Moldova. In fact, in April 2005 the Ukrainian government unveiled a "settlement proposal" for Moldova, since

¹²⁵ Ibid., 30.

¹²⁶ Eggleston.

referred to as the “Yushchenko Plan.” The “Yushchenko Plan” has been approved by many of the parties involved in both the conflict and its resolution—although this approval comes, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit, largely as a result of the agreement’s “intentional vagueness.” The agreement “centered on the unobjectionable notion of encouraging democratization in Transdnier and avoided contentious issues such as the withdrawal of Russia’s military presence.”¹²⁷ In other words, while the Ukraine-brokered “settlement proposal” portends to have found an acceptable path towards resolution, in reality this plan brushes aside the most contentious issues in favor of garnering everyone’s approval.

It is obvious from changes in both Georgia and Moldova that Russia’s influence in each country has diminished. Closer relationships with Western governments (or with countries that are moving towards Western governments, such as Ukraine) and continued pressure on Russia from international organizations mean that Russian dominance in former Soviet countries is being replaced, just as Russia feared. All the same, it appears that for the time being Russia is holding its ground (literally and figuratively) in both Georgia and Moldova and will continue to do so until it becomes politically advantageous for Russian troops to withdraw.

Power Retention or Resented Aggression?

Russia’s decision to involve itself in the Georgian and Moldovan conflicts stirred speculation of a return to the imperialistic tendencies of Russia’s past as an empire and as the center of the Soviet Union. Russian troops went to Transdnier and Abkhazia to protect

¹²⁷ Stuart Hensel, ed., “Country Report: Moldova,” The Economist Intelligence Unit, London: The Economist Intelligence Unit, October 2005: 15-16.

vital interests on its borders and Russophone/Russia-friendly populations. This response was greeted by the Georgian, Moldovan, and other governments around the world as an infringement on Georgian and Moldovan sovereignty. Russia was one of the few countries—indeed, the only country, at first—to provide assistance to the Georgian and Moldovan governments when they petitioned for help in countering secessionist forces in Abkhazia and Transdniestria. However, the biased nature of Russian support has made its intentions suspect from the beginning.

Regardless of the suspicions other countries have had about Russia's intentions, the Russian government had a purpose for, and rationale behind, its intervention. More than ten years after its initial involvement in both Abkhazia/Georgia and Transdniestria/Moldova, however, one has to question whether or not Russia's military activities and political maneuvering accomplished everything the Russian government hoped it would, or if Russia could have retained just as much power and influence in the former Soviet Union without sending troops to Georgia and Moldova.

In a paper written for the European Policy Centre entitled "Russian Foreign Policy with Special Reference to its Western Neighbors," authors Fraser Cameron and Jarek M. Domański comment that Russian foreign policy concepts since the fall of the Soviet Union have been dominated by the desire to develop "strategic partnerships and good relations with CIS neighbors, on a bilateral and multilateral basis..."¹²⁸ Cameron and Domański also observe that "Russia wants to play the role of an independent, economically viable player on the international stage—to be an 'autonomous factor' as its representatives often say—and is

¹²⁸ Fraser Cameron and Jarek M. Domański, "Russian Foreign Policy with Special Reference to its Western Neighbors," European Policy Centre Issue Paper No. 37, 13 July 2005: 5.

determined not to be dominated by any superpower or ‘global policeman.’”¹²⁹ While these statements refer to foreign policy goals outlined long after Russia’s involvement in Georgia and Moldova began, they describe, rather succinctly, Russia’s rationale for its actions in the two conflicts.

Russian troops sent to Abkhazia/Georgia and Transdnistria/Moldova, in addition to securing an influential role in each conflict and the opportunity to flex Russian “peacekeeping” muscles, were intended to demonstrate that Russia’s government and military were capable of dealing with any task that might arise in Russia’s “sphere of influence.” In some cases Russian troops did create a physical barrier between the warring parties and in other cases these troops were responding to attacks against the Russian army itself.

However, several reasons explain why Georgia and Moldova were insufficient avenues in which to prove that Russia was still a viable, powerful force in its own right. First, at the same time that news about Russia’s military engagement in Georgia and Moldova was spreading, news about the poor state of Russia’s post-Soviet military condition was beginning to filter out as well. As the world became aware of decaying munitions, underpaid (or unpaid) and poorly trained soldiers, and the general disorganization that reigned in much of Russia’s armed forces, it would have taken more than a show of muscle in a couple of regional conflicts in former Soviet states to convince the world that Russia remained a great power.

Nowhere has the above decrepitude of the Russian military been more on display than in ongoing battles between Russia and Chechnya, its own breakaway region. Russian and Chechen soldiers have been fighting almost continuously since the collapse of the Soviet

¹²⁹ Ibid., 5.

Union, and the Russian army has been accused of numerous human rights atrocities. The Chechen situation plagues Russia's lofty power goals from the standpoint of its military. More generally, Russia has continued to try to forcibly retain Chechnya while backing separatists in Georgia and Moldova and attempting to secure these regions' independence. The realization of this rather hypocritical stance, as well as the consequences that victorious separatist groups in Abkhazia and Transdniestria could have on Russia's own fight with the Chechens was credited, at least partially, with Russia's transition from separatist support to peacekeeping.¹³⁰ Even Russia's attempts to rectify this contradictory policy have not stopped its military involvement in all three conflicts—Georgia, Moldova, and Chechnya—from undermining its efforts to re-exert itself as an influential regional and world power.

Finally, Russian military engagement in Georgia and Moldova did little to increase the influence of what many consider to be Russia's sole remaining trump card in the power game: its large nuclear weapons stockpile. While some of these weapons (and other Russian military equipment) remained scattered throughout former Soviet republics, sending additional Russian troops to Georgia and Moldova to fight on the side of the separatists did little to change the status of the munitions that were in these countries. As it was, Russia supplied both Abkhaz and Transdniestrian separatists with some of these weapons when fighting broke out, and nuclear weapons—and Russia's general nuclear power capabilities—continue to be a source of power on which Russian politicians can draw when the need arises.

If Russia hoped to increase its influence and viability on the world stage, then, it does not appear that its military activities in Georgia and Moldova were very effective. Not only have Russia's actions failed to bring any kind of conclusion to either conflict, but its

¹³⁰ Lynch, Russian Peacekeeping Strategies, 142, and Trenin, "Russian and Western Interests," 185.

continued involvement in both Georgia and Moldova is increasingly interpreted as unnecessary and meddlesome. Russia's military presence in both of these countries has continually done more to harm Russia's image abroad than to help it as Russia fails to live up to internationally-broadcast commitments to withdraw its military from Georgia and Moldova.

When the fledgling Russian government decided to intervene in the conflicts in Georgia and Moldova, it was acting in its own best interests, as all governments do. The relative ineffectiveness of Russian intervention, however, leads one to question whether or not the Kremlin's decision was the best possible response. The respect and trust the Kremlin could have garnered by choosing a different method of engagement would have done more to benefit Russia's image than its military activities did. As has been shown in this thesis, however, Russia's policy-making capabilities were skewed by a number of factors: poorly organized, competition-ridden, personality-driven domestic politics; the need to define Russia's post-Soviet position in the world; and the Kremlin's desire to continue asserting its dominance in the near abroad, where Russia had been the central power for so long.

As the Russian government struggled to surmount these difficulties, conflicts in Georgia and Moldova provided a seemingly perfect arena in which to reinforce the desired image of undiminished strength and influence. Russia saw that successful involvement in Georgia and Moldova would provide several benefits regardless of whether its initial support for the separatists or later for the Georgians/Moldavians succeeded. Separatist victories in Abkhazia or Transdniestria would have provided outposts of Russian support against an ever-expanding NATO and the drift of former Soviet republics towards the European Union. On the other hand, Georgian and Moldovan efforts that triumphed with Moscow's help would

foster greater Russian influence in both of these countries. Once again, Russia would succeed in strengthening its influence in the former Soviet sphere.

In reality neither outcome transpired. Russian support for Abkhaz and Transdnestrian separatists faltered when it became apparent that Russia could acquire more influence in the near abroad by helping Georgia and Moldova. Over the last decade, however, Russian influence has diminished rather than increased due to the installation of new governments in Georgia and Moldova and international pressure the withdrawal of Russian troops. Russian intervention in each conflict, developed by a domestic political situation that was conducive to coherent, well thought out policies, was based on a set of assumptions. The failure of these assumptions and consequent failure of Russian policy was the consequence of a set of policy options that was skewed from the outset.

It has been mentioned at several previous points that Russia's installation of "peacekeeping" forces in Moldova and Georgia was, initially, the only response to Georgian and Moldovan pleas for help. When the international community failed to respond at first, Russia attempted to fill the gap; today, however, organizations like the OSCE and specific member countries are willing and able to take over the management of peacekeeping in both Abkhazia/Georgia and Transdnestria/Moldova. This is not what the Russian government wants. The continued expansion of the European Union and NATO, along with new westward-leaning governments in former Soviet states has done enough damage to Russia's ability to influence countries that have traditionally been in its sphere of influence. Yielding its central role in either the Abkhaz/Georgian or Transdnestria/Moldovan conflicts would be like simultaneously accepting defeat for its policies in these two countries *and*

acknowledging that the foothold of Russian power is shrinking further than the government ever wanted it to.

If Russia really wants to maintain some semblance of its former authority in Georgia, Moldova, and the rest of the post-Soviet bloc, it has a couple of non-military options. The Russian government could throw its weight into ensuring that programs suggested by the OSCE or negotiated by participating parties are fulfilled. Acting as advisors for multinational conflict-resolving or peacekeeping forces would demonstrate the Russian government's ability to work with Western governments to find solutions to problems, even when those problems are in Russia's traditional sphere of influence. Such collaboration could also prove useful in that it might provide Western governments with the incentive to cooperate with Russia on other issues that are important to Russian policy makers.

One of Russia's major justifications has been that it knows more about this region than any outside power ever could; Russia must capitalize on this expertise and use it to take a leading role in helping to develop a settlement to these conflicts that really *works*. The Russian government's desire to retain power and esteem in the region and in the larger international community could be slaked if Russia acted independently to find a peaceful solution to the conflicts in Georgia and Moldova. Independent, genuine attempts to reach an agreement with all sides would show that the Russian government has retained the ability and clout needed to be a major regional and international player. Such a shift in Russian policy will be difficult to achieve, especially given that Russia's actions in its near abroad have, up until this point, been focused on retaining or creating allies rather than overall stability. More broadly, expecting the Russian government to engage in these drastic policy recalibrations might be unrealistic in a world political system that still relies heavily on a

country's ability to show, usually militarily, how strong it is. Engaging in activities that contribute to existing endeavors to resolve the conflicts in Georgia and Moldova, or in pursuing resolutions independent of the international community would raise Russia's standing, however, by showing that even though the Soviet Union no longer exists, Russia is still able to act competently and capably in addressing its own needs and those of its neighbors. By drawing on its wealth of knowledge and experience in the near abroad, then, the Russian government could provide for itself some of what it has sought since the Soviet Union collapsed: an influential position in its region and power and esteem in the eyes of the rest of the world.

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